

**THE ORIGINS OF THE CONVENT HIGH SCHOOL IN EUROPE  
AND ITS IMPLANTATION AND EVOLUTION IN THE ANTIPODES –  
ST RITA’S COLLEGE, BRISBANE,  
AS A CASE STUDY (1926-2008)**

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## STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required).

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17 November, 2011

## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the origins of convent high school education in Australia. In particular it presents a case study of St Rita's College at Clayfield, Queensland, a Catholic girls' secondary college that has evolved within the long history of women's education. St Rita's College was established by the Presentation Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1926. The background study in Part II (chapters two to four) is an essential element of the thesis as it situates such Catholic women's educational institutions in their historical context. The case study in Part III (chapters five to ten) concerns the history of St Rita's College and the impact of historical, religious and social forces from its foundation in 1926 through to 2008 when the last Presentation Sister to serve as college principal completed her term of office.

This thesis focuses particularly on the empowerment and transformation traditions of convent high school education. Such a continuing thread can be traced through both the prehistory and history of St Rita's up to the present point where the college is facing a major challenge of its existence: transition from sponsorship and administration by its founding religious congregation to a new form of governance. A central question answered by this thesis is: How has St Rita's history reflected the empowerment and transformation traditions of the convent high school?

This thesis establishes and demonstrates that modern Catholic girls' secondary colleges do not stand on their own but instead share one distinctive tradition of convent high school education. The background study locates the origins of Australian convent high school education in early modern Europe rather than in 18<sup>th</sup> century England, as has been proposed elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> The background study identifies, assesses and presents similarities in the syllabi of most private and church schools for young women in 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia, as evidence of a common European origin. This thesis demonstrates that the Continental convent school model derived from the Paris Ursuline education system underwent modification in Australia, especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and particularly through the influence of changing concepts of public education. This thesis overall shows that female agency was central to the creation and development of convent secondary schools which dedicated themselves to the education and empowerment of young women.

The case study illuminates the aims and practices of St Rita's Colleges, as well as the experience of students, teachers, school leaders and parents, all within a broader contextual history. It demonstrates that St Rita's made numerous adaptations to the European convent

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<sup>1</sup> As has been suggested in Marjorie Theobald, *Knowing Women: Origins of Women's Education in Nineteenth-century Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 15 & 94.

school model in response to changing social and educational pressures. Such adaptations included making the transition from convent high school to modern secondary college; eliminating primary classes in order to become a solely secondary school; curricular changes mandated by Queensland Government reviews of secondary education that included the Watkin (1961) and Radford Reports (1970); modification of convent models of economic management and resource planning; and in the 1970s, removing boarding school provision.

The data gathering for the case study consisted in extensive archival and newspaper research, a survey and a cycle of interviews and observations. Data collected was assessed in the light of a comprehensive review of both Australian and international literature on Catholic women religious, their educational work, and on other relevant topics. The methodology employed was chronological and recognised key elements of the history of Catholic women's education that led to the establishment of St Rita's College in 1926. The overall study has employed conceptual frameworks offered by feminist history and thematic contextualism. It has sought high levels of authenticity in interpretation of sources by maintaining awareness of the limitations of historical hermeneutics.

It is hoped that this thesis will be a seminal source for historians of education as it identifies and compiles the origins of Catholic girls' secondary schooling, which hitherto have not been rigorously examined. It also canvasses the accompanying traditions of empowerment and transformation that have advanced Australian women through education and which histories of Australian education have not to date fully recognised. This thesis also redresses the virtual absence of contextual school histories in Queensland by presenting the needed historical context out of which Catholic women's educational institutions developed. This thesis is timely because policy makers are currently grappling with the future of congregational girls' schools, now that few religious sisters are involved in school governance. It is hoped that this thesis will provide meaning for such institutions that are in transition and knowledge to enable the determining of future directions and the recovery of a shared education tradition. This thesis therefore aims to make a substantial contribution to the knowledge of women's education in general and of Catholic women's education in Australia in particular.

The main conclusions drawn from the research are two-fold. Firstly, that the convent high school existed to serve and advance women through a broad and holistic education that was empowering and transformational in both aspiration and outcome. Secondly, that St Rita's College has reflected the empowerment and transformation traditions of the convent high school in its aims and practices in the period under consideration.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ACP	Australian Catholic Directory
AGPS	Australian Government Printing Service
AMEB	Australian Music Examinations Board
Associated Board	Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music
ATCL	Associate of the Trinity College of Music
BCAA	Brisbane Catholic Archdiocesan Archives
BSSS	Board of Secondary School Studies
ca.	circa
CCA	Clayfield Convent Annals
CEO	Catholic Education Office
Fr	Father
FTCL	Fellowship Diploma of the Trinity College of Music
LAB	Licentiate of the Associated Board of the Royal Academy of Music, London
LTCL	Licentiate of the Trinity College of Music
M	Mother
Msgr	Monsignor
n.d.	No date
NSW	New South Wales
PBVM	Presentation Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary
QGPS	Queensland Government Printing Service
QLD	Queensland
QPA	Queensland Presentation Archives
SA	South Australia
Sr	Religious Sister
SRC	St Rita's College, Clayfield
SRCA	St Rita's College Archives
VIC	Victoria
WA	Western Australia
WWPA	Wagga Wagga Presentation Archives
YCS	Young Christian Students Movement

### *Interviews*

PP = past pupil; PT = past teacher; PPT = past parent; DP = deputy principal

The production and storage of transcripts and audio recordings of interviews of participants in this study complied with the requirements of the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee. All transcripts and recordings are in the author's possession.

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***PART ONE***

***THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR STUDY***

## CHAPTER ONE

### RATIONALE, RESEARCH FRAMEWORK, METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE

#### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the rationale for, and the research framework and methodology of, the study are explained. This chapter also outlines the main trends in the literature on Catholic institutes of women religious and on Catholic women's education. Moreover, this chapter ensures and highlights the contribution of this thesis to an international literature on women's overall intellectual and educational history and to the history of Australian Catholic education.

#### 1.1 RATIONALE

This study commenced with the primary aim of producing a comprehensive history of St Rita's College. As a history project, it was instigated by St Rita's College Board in conjunction with the Australian Catholic University. Initially it involved the publication in 2006 of a book *Acorn to Oak* based on the research for this thesis. The objective of the thesis, however, has been to produce a contextual, analytical history of a Catholic girls' secondary school that would expand the as yet under-developed literature on women's education in Australia in general, and literature on the education of Catholic, Queensland women in particular.

There has long been a need to study the historical background to the convent high schools that first appeared in Australia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Recent histories suggest that the prototype for this particular style of education could have developed at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in England;<sup>1</sup> however, the present thesis will show that this English model was well predated by models developed by the Catholic female teaching orders in Europe in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Hence, this study provides the more comprehensive historical research needed to establish the prehistory of convent education in Australia. The Australian elements of this prehistory have largely remained submerged beneath the wider, more accessible histories of both government schooling and of Catholic parochial schooling in Australia. In similar vein, there are very few studies that examine the French convent school model that was subsequently adopted in the

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<sup>1</sup> For example, as proposed in Marjorie Theobald, *Knowing Women: Origins of Women's Education in Nineteenth-century Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 15 and 94.

<sup>2</sup> Emeritus Professor Bruce Mansfield in 2005 noted that the research for the present thesis makes an important contribution to historical scholarship. He stated: "We may require looking again at the picture existing sources provide without the frame set by previous interpretations. I was struck by Anna Barbaro's article drawing out, against received views, the European origins of convent education in Australia." See Bruce Mansfield, "Writing Religious History in Australia" (keynote address delivered at the Australian Catholic Historical Society Conference, September 3, 2005) in *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 27 (2006), 14.

19<sup>th</sup> century by women religious outside of France especially in the colonies, in English-speaking countries such as North America, and in the antipodes. Evidence of a French model for girls' education to date appears in only scattered references in the literature. This thesis is specifically concerned with the French model for girls' schooling brought to Australia from Ireland by the Catholic teaching sisters. Accordingly, this thesis aims to make a significant contribution to an international literature on women's overall intellectual and educational history.

This thesis seeks to add to the knowledge of Australian women's education by situating Catholic girls' secondary colleges in an historical context with an accent on the social and cultural dimensions. The thesis is not a sociological study; but as a contextual historical study the thesis examines social class in relation to the highly classified European society out of which the convent day and boarding school emerged in 17<sup>th</sup> century France. It demonstrates that such schools contributed to the creation of the *bourgeoisie* or middle-class. It canvasses how the teaching sisters responded to the diversity of women's educational needs through educational practices adapted over time and in different geographical contexts. The thesis identifies and investigates the empowerment and transformation traditions of the convent high school that have been an operative thread running through the history of St Rita's, Clayfield. In uncovering the entirety of this thread, the thesis carefully considers the agency of religiously inspired women in early modern Europe, who acted on their *habitus* (their understanding of the world around them) to pioneer the Jesuit-inspired convent high school as an enabler of women, and as a means of regenerating both the Church and wider society.

Furthermore, this study contests the stereotypical view that 19<sup>th</sup> century convent education in Australia was overly concerned with training young girls in the accomplishments and social graces to the detriment of a more balanced and academic curriculum. It therefore challenges the assumption that Catholic teaching sisters in Australia uniformly conveyed a single image of womanhood. It demonstrates that convent-schooled girls were not trained simply to be good wives and mothers. This thesis proposes that teaching sisters like the Presentations perceived themselves as independent and therefore designed a curriculum that did not confine women's options to narrow societal roles. Moreover, in this study Catholic teaching sisters are seen as not submissive to circumstance, but rather as self-reliant and pragmatic educators who worked within the constraints of their times to establish independent women's colleges that were empowering and transformational in both aspiration and outcome.



A broader aim of this thesis is to contribute to the history of education in Australia by identifying and portraying those Catholic institutes of women who have been at the centre of significant educational movements and pedagogical developments. Particular women educators are revealed as important pioneers of significant movements in the history of education in Continental Europe, Ireland and Australia. Despite such prominence in achievement, these women nevertheless remain largely absent from mainstream histories. This thesis aims to grant women in Catholic education a rightfully more significant place in the historical record than has been previously accorded them.

## 1.2 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

### 1.2.1 Writing Women's History

This contextual history of one Catholic girls' secondary school, St Rita's College, Clayfield, in Brisbane, Australia, is shaped by several recent conceptual advances in the field of feminist history and in the social history of religious women. For example, Jill Matthews identifies women's history and feminist history as having distinct purposes:

Women's history is that which seeks to add women to the traditional concerns of historical investigation and writing; feminist history is that which seeks to change the very nature of traditional history by incorporating gender into all historical analysis and understanding. And the purpose of that change is political: to challenge the practices of the historical discipline that have belittled and oppressed women, and to create the practices that allow women an autonomy and space for self-definition.<sup>3</sup>

Alison Mackinnon too has alluded to tensions in the writing of women's history and urged historians not only to return women to the historical record, but to change the record itself: "we ask how a history which excludes one half of humanity can be anything but a partial view."<sup>4</sup> Offen et al. argue that

...writers of women's history...have to choose their own priorities, the development of an autonomous field of research, or the ambitious possibility of rereading not women's worlds or women's past, but the fundamental turning points, and continuities, in human history.<sup>5</sup>

This thesis seeks accordingly to re-orient the overall history of secondary education in Australia to give greater prominence to those women who established Catholic girls' secondary colleges and who to date remain absent from, obscured by or underrepresented in the dominant narrative. The study of Australian women's educational history was advanced

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<sup>3</sup> Jill Matthews, "Feminist History," *Labour History*, no. 50 (1986): 148, quoted in Alison Mackinnon, "Awakening Women: Women, Higher Education and Family Formation in South Australia 1880-1920" (PhD thesis, Adelaide University, 1989), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Mackinnon, "Awakening Women," 6.

<sup>5</sup> Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson and Jane Rendall, eds., *Writing Women's History – International Perspectives* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991), xxxv.

by Marjorie Theobald and Alison Prentice.<sup>6</sup> In her illuminating book, *Knowing Women*, Theobald points out that “the rich ethnographic detail of women’s lives must be retrieved with infinite patience from widely scattered sources.”<sup>7</sup>

The present thesis consciously draws on several feminist theoretical considerations. Postmodern feminist theorist Patti Lather defines feminist research as putting “the social construction of gender at the centre of one’s inquiry.”<sup>8</sup> The term gender is now widely used to refer to “the social and cultural constructions of female and male roles in different times and places.”<sup>9</sup> Sally Kennedy in her trailblazing book, *Faith and Feminism*, argued for the need to “go beyond the seemingly debilitating limitations placed upon women in western societies and uncover the realities of women’s lives.”<sup>10</sup> She wrote:

...it is necessary to ask what women thought of themselves, what their experiences were and what power they had to determine these. Failure to do this not only denies women’s history; it reinforces outmoded images or legitimizes myths about women by leaving them untested.<sup>11</sup>

This thesis accordingly situates religious women at the forefront of significant social, religious and educational movements that have characterized the Catholic Reformation, the Enlightenment’s age of learning, and modern feminism. Furthermore, by examining in detail how women at St Rita’s College conducted education, this thesis seeks to bridge the gap between how women religious in Catholic secondary schools have often been perceived and what they consciously sought to achieve for women.

### 1.2.2 Women’s Educational History - The Convent High School

Only in the last few years have publishing houses, particularly in England and the United States, begun to recognise religious women as a legitimate category of social historical analysis. Examples of such exploration are the groundbreaking studies of social historians Elizabeth Rapley<sup>12</sup> and Barbara Diefendorf.<sup>13</sup> Rapley has argued that social histories must

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<sup>6</sup> Alison Prentice and Marjorie Theobald, eds., *Women Who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Theobald, *Knowing Women*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Patti Lather, *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1991), 71.

<sup>9</sup> Offen, Pierson and Rendall, *Writing Women’s History*, xxxiv.

<sup>10</sup> Sally Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism: Catholic Women’s Struggles for Self-Expression*, Studies in the Christian Movement 9 (Manly, NSW: St Patrick’s College, Blackburn, VIC, 1985), x.

<sup>11</sup> Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, x.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister: Daily Life in the Teaching Monasteries of the Old Regime* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Barbara Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity: Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

supply “the syntheses that treat religious women as members of an identifiable countrywide group, sharing many of the same ideals, objectives, and problems.”<sup>14</sup>

Stephanie Burley’s seminal Master’s thesis on the Catholic teaching sisters in South Australia, “None More Anonymous?” represents the beginning of a new separate field of historical analysis in Australia, namely that of Catholic girls’ education.<sup>15</sup> Burley’s subsequent work has been devoted to rightfully including religious teaching sisters in the history of education in South Australia.<sup>16</sup> Anne McLay’s history of the Mercy Sisters in Western Australia has contributed similarly.<sup>17</sup> For McLay, feminist history contributes “more directly to the raising of consciousness” of the value of women’s lives and to “women’s definition of their place.”<sup>18</sup> She reflects the thought of feminist theologian Anne Carr, who argues that “the goal of equality or mutuality of participation logically includes the defining of women’s place by women themselves.”<sup>19</sup> Sophie McGrath adopted a similar perspective in her history of the Mercy Sisters at Parramatta, Sydney.<sup>20</sup> Jean-Marie Mahoney’s history of All Hallows’ School portrays the Mercy Sisters as having played a unique role in the development of Brisbane itself.<sup>21</sup> There still remains, however, a lack of published analytical histories of Catholic women’s educational institutions in Queensland overall. This thesis is directed to this restoration work, as well as to study of the rich, but relatively uncharted field of the origins and development of Catholic girls’ secondary schools in Australia as a whole.

### 1.2.3 Empowerment and Transformation

This study opposes the feminist social reproduction theory, as embodied in the early work of AnnMarie Wolpe, in which schools are seen as “mechanisms of reproduction” of gender oppression that prepare girls to accept roles as workers in paid or unpaid work.<sup>22</sup> Instead, this investigation is informed by theories of gender and schooling developed by sociologist of

<sup>14</sup> Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Stephanie Burley, “None More Anonymous? Catholic teaching Nuns, Their Secondary Schools and Students in South Australia 1880-1925” (M Ed thesis, University of Adelaide, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> Stephanie Burley, “Paradoxes in the Lives of Religious Female Teachers, South Australia 1880-1925,” History of Women Religious Conference Papers, Institute of Religious Studies, Strathfield, June 23-24, 1994, 17.

<sup>17</sup> Anne McLay, *Women Out of Their Sphere: Sisters of Mercy in Western Australia from 1846* (Northbridge, WA: Vanguard Press, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> Anne McLay, “Writing Mercy Women’s History,” History of Women Religious Workshop Papers, Institute of Religious Studies, Strathfield, April 9-10, 1992, 41.

<sup>19</sup> Anne E. Carr, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women’s Experience* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), 43.

<sup>20</sup> Madeleine Sophie McGrath, *These Women? Women Religious in the History of Australia: The Sisters of Mercy Parramatta, 1888-1988* (Kensington, NSW: New South Wales University Press [hereafter UNSWP], 1989).

<sup>21</sup> Jean-Marie Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir: The Story of All Hallows’ School, Brisbane, 1861-1981* (Brisbane: Boolarong, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> Annette Kuhn and AnnMarie Wolpe, *Feminism and Materialism* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 313.

education Madeleine Arnot and critical theorist Kathleen Weiler. Weiler has criticised feminist reproduction theory as failing to deal with the question of resistance to oppression and thus “leaves little room for human agency” and for the “contradictions and disjunctions evident in schools.”<sup>23</sup> Arnot has likewise argued that the reproduction theory ignores

...the active nature of the learning process, the existence of dialectical relations, power struggles and points of conflict, the range of alternative practices which may exist inside, or exist outside and be brought into the school.<sup>24</sup>

This thesis takes account of human agency, the factor that enables individuals to create “their own realities within the constraints of the social world.”<sup>25</sup> It gives examples of the agency of women in Catholic girls’ colleges like St Rita’s, Clayfield, in making decisions about their identities, aspirations and vocations; in rejecting ideologies that lower the place of higher education in women’s lives; and in producing not one but a variety of models of Catholic womanhood, some of which have been at odds with models promoted by their Church and society.

The theoretical insights of Rebecca Rogers of the current wave of “revisionist” gender historians have also been helpful to this thesis. Rogers argues that:

...if we position women within a particular set of cultural configurations – as family members, students, teachers, and individuals – it becomes more apparent how female educational experiences helped forge... cultural identities.<sup>26</sup>

Her view echoes Kathleen Weiler’s assertion that theorists need “to take into account all forces of identity formation acting upon women in relation to educational institutions.”<sup>27</sup>

Also bearing on the material of the thesis is the view taken by Offen, Pierson and Rendall who reject the singular perception of women as victims of male patriarchy:

An approach to women’s history that stressed simply subjection and common oppression by men, a simplistic appropriation of the term ‘patriarchy’, is unhelpful and ahistorical unless placed in a specific context.<sup>28</sup>

The present study synthesises existing research to show, for example, that the Presentation Sisters in Ireland in the early 1800s embraced convent enclosure for a variety of personal, social, spiritual and pragmatic reasons, though against the wishes of male clergy. The thesis

<sup>23</sup> Kathleen Weiler, *Women Teaching For Change: Gender, Class and Power* (New York: Bergin and Garvey, 1988), 32.

<sup>24</sup> Madeleine Arnot, “Male Hegemony, Social Class and Women’s Education,” *Journal of Education* 164, no. 1 (1982): 66, quoted in Weiler, *Women Teaching*, 38.

<sup>25</sup> Grace Sikes Scering, “Themes of Critical/Feminist Pedagogy: Teacher Education for Democracy,” *Journal of Teacher Education* 48, no. 1 (1997): 63.

<sup>26</sup> Rebecca Rogers, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom: Educating Bourgeois Girls in Nineteenth Century France* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 6.

<sup>27</sup> Weiler, *Women Teaching*, 213.

<sup>28</sup> Offen, Pierson and Rendall, *Writing Women’s History*, xxxi.

investigation is aided by the recent landmark studies of Rapley and Diefendorf who challenge the stereotypical view that enclosure was uniformly imposed by the Church hierarchy upon reluctant women. Their work is significant in that it recovers a perspective that views the cloister as a more permeable boundary than had been assumed.

Furthermore, recent conceptual advances suggest a line of inquiry that identifies and highlights the transforming influence of women on their societies. Alison Mackinnon points out that in historical studies, women should be considered as potential agents of change and not simply as victims of circumstance:

It is important that women are viewed not only as objects of historical change but also as agents, as active shapers of the social world in which they move, as people who make choices, but who do so, in Marx's famous terms, in circumstances not of their own choosing.<sup>29</sup>

In following this line of research, this thesis focuses on the empowerment and transformation traditions of the convent day and boarding school that thread significantly through the history of St Rita's College in particular. It draws on current overseas studies that view religiously inspired women not as submissive participants in history but as leading figures, and in the vanguard of social and religious reform movements. Mary Peckham Magray's insights on "the transforming power" of the Catholic sisterhoods on segments of the population in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland have strongly informed this investigation.<sup>30</sup> This thesis accordingly draws attention to the Presentation Sisters' evolving culture of self-reliance and their proven capacity to adapt to change, to stay abreast of and, in recent times, to be at the forefront of educational developments. It cites examples of women at St Rita's working within and often transcending the social constraints of their times and achieving outstanding educational outcomes that exemplify these empowerment traditions.

Australian feminist theologian and Loreto sister, Veronica Brady, views the experience of women in the Church as a story of change, of women moving across frontiers and working in solidarity for "a revolution of values."<sup>31</sup> The present study is informed by this perspective too and it thereby identifies the Catholic teaching sisters as influential advocates for women and for the democratisation of education in Australia. It demonstrates that such advocacy also spanned the many decades before governments entered the fields of compulsory education and secondary schooling for girls.

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<sup>29</sup> Mackinnon, "Awakening Women," 10.

<sup>30</sup> Mary Peckham Magray, *The Transforming Power of the Nuns: Women, Religion and Cultural Change in Ireland, 1750-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> Veronica Brady, "The Shape of Stillness," in *Changing Women, Changing Church*, ed. Marie Louise Uhr (Sydney: Millennium, 1992), 19, 26.

Against this theoretical background, this thesis examines the empowerment and transformation traditions of convent education hermeneutically. It demonstrates that women religious in convent high schools exercised agency within and beyond their self-regulated establishments and enabled young women to advance through an education that was empowering and transformational in both aspiration and outcome.<sup>32</sup>

### 1.3 DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 1.3.1 School Histories

Many school histories tend to be ‘in-house’ accounts that are mainly for present and past pupils, are intentionally nostalgic and celebratory in tone and without pretension to scholarship. For example, in 2004, Brigidine College at Indooroopilly in Brisbane produced a history, *Celebrating 75 years: 1929 - 2004*, that was researched by several teachers on the school’s staff.<sup>33</sup> It was not offered as a critically documented study since it was a relatively short, pictorial book written mainly for present and past pupils. In 1998, Villanova College at Coorparoo, also in Brisbane, celebrated its fifty year story with the publication of its first school history *One Mind, One Heart*. The authors were either current or past members of the teaching staff. The book’s editor acknowledged that “this is not an attempt at professional history. This is neither Pliny nor Manning Clark...this story would be researched and told by Villanovans.”<sup>34</sup>

Most school histories indeed show the characteristics of a ‘family history’ where the writer is an ‘insider’, that is, a member of the school family who has love for and loyalty towards the school. Consequently, there are few school histories that are documented, analytical or contextual. A constraint may be the prohibitive cost of commissioning a professional historian to produce a scholarly work. In the past there has also been reluctance by religious institutes to open archives or allow unfavourable details of school life to be brought to light, especially by an outsider.

Edmund Campion labelled school histories in Australia that currently dominate the genre as “marshmallow celebrations” of schools.<sup>35</sup> Marjorie Theobald lamented that most school histories remain a “blight upon the landscape of historical research”, providing “little interest

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<sup>32</sup> On education and the theology of transformation, see Brian Kilty, “Catholic Education: Historical Context,” in *The Catholic School: Paradoxes and Challenges*, ed. Denis McLaughlin (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> Brigidine College, *Celebrating 75 Years: 1929 – 2004* (Brisbane: Brigidine College, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> Kevin Ryan, ed., *One Mind, One Heart, Villanova: Its Story and Traditions* (Brisbane: Augustinian Historical Commission, 1998).

<sup>35</sup> Edmund Campion, foreword to *A Dynamic of Hope: Institutes of Women Religious in Australia* by M. R. MacGinley (Sydney: Crossing Press, 2002), vii.

beyond their nostalgic appeal to ex-students.”<sup>36</sup> Bruce Mansfield remarks of such projects that “triumphalism is their besetting sin,” and suggests correction with a contextual historical approach.<sup>37</sup> Feminist historian Christine Trimingham Jack has argued that “writers of school histories have yet to employ methodologies offered within the scope of post-structuralist theory, partly because there is a continued investment by schools in presenting their history within the boundaries of their aspirations.”<sup>38</sup> She suggests that a heavy dependence on written documents focuses on the public life of an institution rather than on the “diverse experience of individuals” that “may challenge the conclusions such histories draw.”<sup>39</sup>

In this thesis, by contrast, the historical process does not limit itself to either written or oral material but draws on a variety of data sources in order to meaningfully support inductive argument. Thus, archival documents such as annual reports, together with oral evidence of the lived experience of individuals, have proved invaluable in assessing the shared aspirations of St Rita’s school community. Likewise, written records of public examination results and student achievements shed light on individual as well as collective outcomes in relation to those aspirations. Relying on such inclusions concurs with Bruce Mansfield’s view that in school histories “the public face and private ideals are likely to be close” and therefore “reports and addresses should not be underestimated.”<sup>40</sup>

To address the question of how the convent school traditions of transformation and empowerment have been reflected in the aspirations of St Rita’s community, this thesis, as noted previously, uses a contextual approach. According to Rebecca Rogers:

Schools cannot be understood without considering the broader context that determined how they functioned and what they sought to achieve.<sup>41</sup>

Jean-Marie Mahoney’s history of All Hallows’ School, written in 1985, though celebratory in tone, was methodologically ahead of its time. Mahoney thoughtfully situated the development of All Hallows’ in the broader contexts of Australian history and Catholic women’s education in Queensland.<sup>42</sup> With regard to contextual histories of Catholic boys’ colleges, Greg Denning’s *Xavier: A Centenary Portrait* in 1978 became an early exemplar of the contextual

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<sup>36</sup> Marjorie Theobald, “Problems in Writing School Histories,” *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society* 6, no. 1 (1977): 22.

<sup>37</sup> Bruce Mansfield, “An Independent School,” in Local History Coordination Project University of New South Wales, *Locating Australia’s Past*, (Kensington, NSW: UNSWP, 1988), 151.

<sup>38</sup> Christine Trimingham Jack, “School History: Reconstructing the Lived Experience,” *History of Education Review* 26 (1997): 44.

<sup>39</sup> Jack, “School History,” 44.

<sup>40</sup> Mansfield, “An Independent School,” 152.

<sup>41</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 6.

<sup>42</sup> Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*.

genre in Victoria.<sup>43</sup> As also in Brisbane in 1991, Tom Boland's *Nudgee* was a comprehensive telling of the personalities and events that shaped and influenced Nudgee College in its first one hundred years against the broader backdrop of educational and social change.<sup>44</sup>

As for histories of Catholic primary schools, Paul Hansen's history of *St Joseph's School, Clermont* drew on a combination of oral data, anecdotal sources, letters and documents to produce a succinct yet contextual history.<sup>45</sup> Hansen adduced numerous past pupil recollections to highlight the significant contribution of the Sisters of St Joseph to Catholic primary education in regional Queensland. Among the few notable examples of scholarly histories of other-than-Catholic secondary colleges in Australia are Marjorie Theobald's *Ruyton Remembers*, and Bruce Mansfield's *Knox: A History of Knox Grammar School 1924-1974*.<sup>46</sup>

Anne McLay has interpreted the recent proliferation of congregational histories commissioned by religious institutes in terms of the need for organisations on the threshold of change to record their founding and identity stories. Her analysis, informed by organisational theory, identifies this trend as a "longing" by the institutes "to clarify their meaning and identity for today", the goal being "not so much information as transformation."<sup>47</sup> Her thoughts echo E. H. Carr's observation that "great history is written precisely when the historian's vision of the past is illuminated by insights into the problems of the present."<sup>48</sup> For the Presentation Sisters and St Rita's community, the problem of finding suitable pathways into the future has involved a deeper probing of the past. The thesis, although initiated by St Rita's College, is not a commissioned history. The author has enjoyed complete independence in the writing and research of the case study, with freedom from editorial interference by either the principal of the college or by the congregation. Inevitably, there have emerged in the research unpalatable details about the teaching and discipline practices of certain teachers, as well as a recent experience of fracture in the school community due to industrial conflict. These unfavourable images of the college have nevertheless been included and explored in the case study without obstruction.

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<sup>43</sup> Greg Denning, *Xavier: A Centenary Portrait* (Melbourne: Old Xaverian Association, 1978).

<sup>44</sup> T. P. Boland, *Nudgee 1891-1991: St Joseph's College, Nudgee* (Brisbane: Boolarong, 1991).

<sup>45</sup> Paul Hansen, *St Joseph's School Clermont: One hundred years of Catholic education in Central Queensland* (Rockhampton: Diocesan Printing Service, 2000).

<sup>46</sup> Marjorie Theobald, *Ruyton Remembers: 1878-1978* (Melbourne: Hawthorn Press, 1978); Bruce Mansfield, *Knox: A History of Knox Grammar School 1924-1974* (Sydney: John Sands, 1974).

<sup>47</sup> Anne McLay, "Writing Women's History: One Feminist Approach," in *Long Patient Struggle: Studies in the Role of Women in Australian Christianity*, eds. Mark Hutchinson and Edmund Campion (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1994), 2.

<sup>48</sup> E. H. Carr, *What is History* (Great Britain: Penguin, 1975), 37.



### 1.3.2 Mixed Method: Qualitative and Quantitative Research

Qualitative historical research uses an inductive approach in which hypotheses are developed and tested against data and evidence from a range of sources. The inductive approach relies on a variety of research methods that include fieldwork and the conducting of interviews for data collection and subsequent analysis. An interactive dynamic often exists between the qualitative researcher and the subject or data, which means that a combination of written documents and information derived by empirical methods is alone insufficient. This is because qualitative research particularly concerns itself with experience as it is “lived” or “felt.”<sup>49</sup> Sharan Merriam notes that while quantitative research “takes apart a phenomenon to examine component parts, qualitative research can reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole.”<sup>50</sup> The research for this thesis therefore involved a variety of qualitative research methods that included the thorough analysis of numerous documents, public records and archival materials as well as twenty-two written memoirs and oral data collected in twenty taped interviews and twelve informal discussions.

#### 1.3.2.1 Qualitative Methods and Feminist Research

The term ‘feminist research’ usually denotes studies in which the researcher is a woman, the focus is on women’s experiences, there is interaction between the researcher and the subject, and the work is central to and affirmative of efforts to bring about social change.<sup>51</sup> McLay argues that feminist history is a perspective not a research method, uses a variety of research tools and methods, is necessarily interdisciplinary and aims to create social change.<sup>52</sup> Burstyn suggests that the interdisciplinary nature of women’s studies encourages scholars to borrow freely from among a variety of theoretical frameworks.<sup>53</sup>

The process of ‘telling women’s lives’ raises the issue of the value of narrative in the writing of history. Historians have tended to choose definitively between a narrative and a theoretical approach; however, the use of narrative is strongly defended by feminist historians. In her significant book *Knowing Women*, Marjorie Theobald argues “that women especially experienced their lives as narrative and to abandon story for the theory does violence to their experience in the past.”<sup>54</sup> Theobald asserts that the feminist historian can use a narrative style

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<sup>49</sup> Sharan Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

<sup>50</sup> Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 6.

<sup>51</sup> Seibold, “Feminist Qualitative Research,” 8.

<sup>52</sup> McLay, “Writing Women's History.” See also Shulamit Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>53</sup> Joan N. Burstyn, “Narrative Versus Theoretical Approaches: A Dilemma for Historians of Women,” *History of Education Review* 19, no. 2 (1990): 3.

<sup>54</sup> Theobald, *Knowing Women*, 179.

without lapsing into traditional narrative history. She advises “paying close attention to glimpses of lives being lived” and suggests that “narrative vignettes” are often “all we can retrieve of women’s lives, lived as they were in obscurity.”<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, the methodology in this study uses both narrative and theory based approaches since both are essential to the writing of women’s history.

Some quantitative data was also included in this study such as that derived from a past pupils survey, and a table which charted patterns in examination results over time. Generally, however, the methodology was guided by Patton, Sherman and Webb’s understanding of qualitative research as a way to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context, and in terms of what they meant to the participants in that setting.<sup>56</sup> In such a perspective, an interdisciplinary approach was adopted, permitting this thesis to examine in context aspects of experience influenced by religion, gender, social class, Catholic education and educational theory.

Contextual methodology is helpfully described by the theologian Bernard Lonergan who pointed out that history may be generally classified as basic, special and general:

Basic history tells where (places and territories) and when (dates and periods) who (persons, people) did what (public life, external acts) to enjoy what success, suffer what reverses, exert what influence. It makes as specific and precise as possible the more easily recognised and acknowledged features of human activities in their geographical distribution and temporal succession.

Special histories tell of movements whether cultural (language, art, literature, religion), institutional (family, mores, society, education, state, law, church, sect, economy, technology), or doctrinal (mathematics, natural science, human science, philosophy, history, theology.)

Lonergan perceives general history as “basic history illuminated and complemented by the special histories.” He sees such history as an ideal that is always striven towards. Indeed, intrinsic to the nature of scholarly history is the fact that it stands always in need of revision as new material comes to light fresh insights occur and different times lead to new questions of the past. This thesis then will be not “the” history of St Rita’s, Clayfield, but “a” history.<sup>57</sup>

### **1.3.3 Epistemological Limits of History**

Basically the ethical historian is constantly seeking to get as close as possible to human reality, in effect is seeking “the truth”, while remaining aware that reaching “absolute truth” through historical research is beyond the powers of persons. Such an approach is taken by the

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<sup>55</sup> Theobald, *Knowing Women*, 180.

<sup>56</sup> Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 6.

<sup>57</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 128 and 197-204.

author of this thesis. Her understanding of the historical process has been significantly influenced by the theoretical and critical insights of post-structuralism, as represented in the work of Jacques Derrida,<sup>58</sup> and Michel Foucault.<sup>59</sup> Applied to history, the post-structural conceptual framework insists that there is no absolute knowledge and no objective historical truth. Instead history is defined as a discourse in which historians interpret the past through lenses of particular perspective. Discourse itself is described by sociolinguist Roger Fowler as a standpoint that emphasizes the context in which a story is exchanged.<sup>60</sup> With this in mind, the author of this thesis harkened to Beverley Southgate's call to remain aware of the "bases upon which we are constructing" our histories, given that "it is impossible to write any history without some philosophical or ideological standpoint."<sup>61</sup> Therefore, this thesis seeks to produce a history as close as possible to reality through an awareness of the complexities of subjectivity, interpretation and context. This thesis is informed by Fowler's warning:

Absolute truth does not exist, all historians are positioned, culturally and ideologically, and thus cannot remain objective or detached...there is a multiplicity of discourses about the past or a multiplicity of histories...<sup>62</sup>

Katharine Massam has noted that Australian historians are "more open to multiple readings of the past and to acknowledging new voices in discussion", since post-structuralism has "disrupted any easy sense of a dominant narrative in Australia."<sup>63</sup> As indicated, this thesis has employed a range of research methods and has drawn extensively on archival and oral sources in producing an original reading of Australian women's educational history. The author agrees with Massam that such research requires painstaking archival work along with the responsibility to do such research carefully.<sup>64</sup> Hence, the transformational aspirations, practices and educational directions of St Rita's College community over time have been assessed in the context of their local settings and within appropriate conceptual frameworks and perspectives.

### 1.3.4 Researcher as Outsider or Insider

The author locates herself as an outsider in writing this history and will explore the significance of her position in relation to the epistemological debate on insider/outsider research. In the main, historians who research their own organisation from 'the inside' face

<sup>58</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976). *De la grammatologie* was originally published in France in 1967.

<sup>59</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

<sup>60</sup> Roger Fowler, *Linguistics and the Novel* (London: Methuen, 1977), 52.

<sup>61</sup> Beverley Southgate, *History: What and Why? Ancient, Modern and Postmodern Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1996), 9.

<sup>62</sup> Fowler, *Linguistics and the Novel*, 52.

<sup>63</sup> Katherine Massam, "Thoughts on Telling the Stories of Catholic Australia," *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 27 (2006): 53.

<sup>64</sup> Massam, "Thoughts on Telling," 53.

issues of credibility and validity due to subjectivity and inevitable bias. Smyth and Holian, however, claim that insider research can be legitimate and worthwhile when the inherent limitations are recognised and addressed at all stages of the research.<sup>65</sup> The insider/outsider debate is about the researcher's relation to the people being studied. An insider is someone who has tacit knowledge of the organisation being researched either through familiarity with or membership of the group. An outsider by contrast does not have prior or intimate knowledge of the group. The outsider thesis claims advantage in the perspective of the 'stranger' or 'observer' while the insider thesis argues that knowledge is linked to experience.<sup>66</sup>

As the author of this thesis has had no previous connection with St Rita's College or with the Presentation congregation, she may be as such regarded as an outsider. A level of detachment has therefore enabled her to observe and analyse what could be taken for granted by an insider. However, in terms of the author's biography, her situated knowledge, namely as a woman and mother of young children, and as a former teacher at Catholic secondary colleges in Brisbane, has invariably shaped the questions that inform the research and the knowledge accordingly gained and synthesised. As Alison Griffith explains, "the researcher is always located somewhere."<sup>67</sup> In fact social researchers have become increasingly aware, as Seibold points out, "of how the researcher's self is actually part of the research process."<sup>68</sup>

### 1.3.5 The Case Study

This thesis has employed a case study approach. A case may be defined as a bounded system or a single entity around which there are boundaries.<sup>69</sup> In this thesis, the case is St Rita's College. Scholars agree that the approach most suited to case study research is qualitative rather than quantitative.<sup>70</sup> Cohen and Manion's *Research Methods in Education* is considered a reference guide to the range of methods used in educational research and states that the purpose of a case study is:

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<sup>65</sup> Anne Smyth and Rosalie Holian, "The Credibility of the Researcher Who Does Research in their Own Organisation" (paper presented at the Association of Qualitative Research Conference: 'Issue of Rigour in Qualitative Research,' Melbourne, July 6-10, 1999).

<sup>66</sup> Alison Griffith, "Insider/Outsider: Epistemological Privilege and Mothering Work," *Human Studies* 21 (1998): 361-376.

<sup>67</sup> Griffith, "Insider/Outsider," 374.

<sup>68</sup> Carmel Seibold, "Feminist Qualitative Research in the Postmodern Era: Integrating Theoretical Approaches" (paper presented at the International Association for Qualitative Research Conference, Melbourne, July 6-10, 1999).

<sup>69</sup> Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 27.

<sup>70</sup> Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 181.

...to portray, analyse and interpret the uniqueness of real individuals and situations through accessible accounts; to catch the complexity and situatedness of behaviour; and to present and represent reality.<sup>71</sup>

The case study approach has enabled this researcher to draw upon the recollections of participants in the study to portray what it was like to be a member of St Rita's school community. The case study has facilitated analysis of the factors that have influenced the school's development, and established the reasons for certain decisions and developments at St Rita's in the light of the broader context of a school situation.

An historical case study must be supported by evidence from both primary and secondary source material.<sup>72</sup> Robert Yin notes that the case study's unique strength is its ability to use a "full variety of evidence - documents, artefacts, interviews, and observations - beyond what might be available in the conventional history study."<sup>73</sup> As with other research methods, the case study has to demonstrate reliability and validity. A key issue is therefore the selection of information. Cohen and Manion caution against several case study pitfalls: journalistic writing, which selects only striking accounts distortive of the full account; selective reporting that supports only a particular conclusion; anecdotal writing styles that enlarge details to the detriment of a whole picture; and, blandness caused by unquestioned acceptance of the participants' views or of those that are in agreement.<sup>74</sup>

### 1.3.6 Oral History as a Research Tool

Christine Trimingham Jack explains that there is a predominance of school histories that largely rely on written documents from public records, while oral data is "used merely to support general conclusions, which arise from a focus on the public structure of the school."<sup>75</sup> She argues that this dependence on institutional documents "results in histories with a bias towards 'public life', with an emphasis on events, rather than 'private' experience."

Only recently have historians explored the importance and potential of oral history as an appropriate research tool. Debates about oral history and memory, its reliability, representativeness and accuracy, have raged in university halls since the growth of 'method' oriented oral history.<sup>76</sup> Eileen Clark defines oral narratives as the "reminiscences of people

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<sup>71</sup> Cohen, Manion and Morrison, *Research Methods*, 79.

<sup>72</sup> Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 35.

<sup>73</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2009), 8.

<sup>74</sup> Cohen, Manion and Morrison, *Research Methods*, 182.

<sup>75</sup> Jack, "School History," 44.

<sup>76</sup> Mark Hutchinson, "Nineteenth Century Australian Historians: Traps for the Unwary" in *Locating Australia's Past*, Local History Coordination Project University of New South Wales (Sydney: UNSWP, 1988), 19-28.

who were involved in particular events or experiences.”<sup>77</sup> Information is obtained in spoken form through interviews and with the use of recording equipment. The narratives thus derived take a variety of forms that include life history, interviews and testimonies.

Oral history, which lies within the general field of qualitative research, has attracted the criticism that it is uncontrolled and lacks rigorous procedures. Valerie Yow conversely argues that qualitative methodology has its own body of strict procedures. She stresses that deliberate omissions, distortions, false or misleading information are as likely to occur in written documents, statistics, letters and public records as they are in oral testimony. Indeed the present study ensures that through oral history, “the dimensions of life within a community are illuminated”,<sup>78</sup> and thus strengthen all other data.

Kristina Minister promotes the use of group interviews which she claims resemble natural language situations that “support the topics women value.”<sup>79</sup> For the St Rita’s case study, the twenty interviews conducted were mainly of individual participants; however, a group interview was also conducted with eight past pupils of the 1960s. The format of that group interview encouraged a lively, intelligent and informative discussion sustained by the women themselves than by the author as interviewer. The group situation assisted the women to recall both their positive and negative experiences of school life. However, the interview was not recorded electronically for several reasons. Firstly, recording was inappropriate given the café environment and, secondly, the use of a recording instrument may have inhibited the women’s talk. Instead, a written survey of the participants was followed by a telephone call to each that helped confirm the findings of the interview session. In addition, the author had informal discussions with twelve other participants, mostly past pupils and teachers, whose recollections contributed to this history.

Yow describes the interaction between interviewer and narrator as a special characteristic of oral history research, which she classes as shared work.<sup>80</sup> According to Minister, “in women talk, reflexivity is not only legitimate it is inseparable from the process.”<sup>81</sup> Trevor Lummis has suggested of interviews:

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<sup>77</sup> Eileen Clark, “The Pursuit of Truth in Oral History” (paper presented at the International Association for Qualitative Research Conference, Melbourne, July 6-10, 1999).

<sup>78</sup> Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 2005), 14.

<sup>79</sup> Kristina Minister, “A Feminist Frame for the Oral History Interview,” in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, eds. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1991), 27-43.

<sup>80</sup> Yow, *Recording Oral History*, 24.

<sup>81</sup> Minister, “A Feminist Frame,” 38.

One precise advantage of oral evidence is that it is interactive and one is not left alone, as with documentary evidence, to divine its significance; the 'source' can reflect upon the content and offer interpretation as well as facts.<sup>82</sup>

The literature does not point to one appropriate methodology for researchers to follow. What is appropriate is that the oral historian develops a framework of procedures for collecting, selecting, storing, synthesising and using the data according to the unique needs of the study at hand, and to be self-critical when examining his/her practices. One must be aware however, that subjectivity is inevitably involved.

When this research project was begun, it was not surprising that very few written records or archival material documenting the first fifty years of St Rita's College were found. Data collected from in-depth interviews has therefore been invaluable for that period of the history, adding much to the material gathered from other primary and secondary sources. The stories and perceptions of interviewees have yielded incidental details about the life and history of the college, that, once pieced together, have been examined in terms of the ambiguities and complexities that inevitably exist in women's studies. Moreover, in the stories derived from interviews, particularly those of the Presentation Sisters, a common faith dimension is also revealed. Faith and spirituality are integral factors both in the sisters' personal relationships and in their professional lives as teachers and administrators. It is therefore necessary to include private faith experience as an historical consideration, which as Hutchinson notes, "Australian historiography all too often has seen excluded."<sup>83</sup>

### **1.3.7 Ethical Considerations**

A number of ethical issues have been considered in relation to the research for this study. Respect for interviewees was paramount. Each participant gave informed and written consent to being interviewed on a tape recorder.<sup>84</sup> Where naming of interviewees was desired for both the history book and thesis, the author spoke to each person concerned, read out quotations to be published, made available a copy of the transcript and obtained permission to the interviewee's name. Each participant was given the opportunity to review quotations from the transcript of their interview, and to comment on the author's interpretations. The researcher

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<sup>82</sup> Trevor Lummis, *Listening to History: The Authenticity of Oral Evidence* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 43.

<sup>83</sup> Mark Hutchinson and Edmund Campion, eds., *Long Patient Struggle: Studies in the Role of Women in Australian Christianity* (Sydney: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1994), 7.

<sup>84</sup> The information letter to participants which outlines the nature and purpose of this study is contained in Appendix A, and the consent form is in Appendix B.

received ethical clearance from the Australian Catholic University having complied with all their requirements.<sup>85</sup>

## 1.4 LITERATURE

### 1.4.1 Trends and Gaps in the Literature

The main trends in the literature on women religious and on Catholic women's education are now outlined with reference to recent landmark books in these areas. This chapter demonstrates that little is documented either about the long history of convent education or the teaching sisters who conducted convent high schools in Australia since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. In the late 1990s, South Australian researcher, Stephanie Burley, affirmed that the literature made little reference to order-owned Catholic girls' secondary colleges.<sup>86</sup>

In 1996, Marjorie Theobald's ground-breaking history, *Knowing Women: Origins of Women's Education in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Australia*, addressed the vacuum in historical studies of girls' schooling in Australia. Her study focused on private ladies' colleges of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as Brisbane Girls' Grammar School, and on the women who conducted them. Theobald's book was seminal for writers of women's history. Still, no equivalent history has been written on the origins of convent education in Australia.<sup>87</sup> Nor have historians explored in any depth the transition from convent high school to modern girls' secondary schooling that the Catholic teaching sisters almost uniformly achieved by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Scholarship which would detail the transfer and spread of the French convent school model to English-speaking countries of the 'new world' such as Australia, the United States of America, Canada, and New Zealand is also lacking.<sup>88</sup> This present thesis contributes to the filling of these gaps in the literature by examining the common European heritage of Catholic girls' secondary colleges in Australia, as elsewhere, and using St Rita's College as an illustrative case study. The broad approach used in this thesis has so far been missing in histories of Australian Catholic schools. Such an approach is essential in tracing the origins of Catholic girls' schooling in Australia, which hitherto have not been rigorously examined.

With regard to the international literature, Rebecca Rogers in her landmark book *From the Salon to the Schoolroom: Educating Bourgeois Girls in Nineteenth Century France* noted in

<sup>85</sup> Appendix C contains the Australian Catholic University *Human Research Ethics Committee Approval Form* indicating that ethics approval was granted for this study.

<sup>86</sup> Stephanie Burley, "Entrenched or Emancipated? Responses to Catholic Girls' Secondary Schooling, South Australia 1880-1930," *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, no. 26 (1998): 76.

<sup>87</sup> See Stephanie Burley, "An Overview of the Historiography of Women Religious in Australia," *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 26 (2005), 43-60. Burley's overview highlights the need for historical research on women religious in Catholic education generally, and on convent education in particular.

<sup>88</sup> Anna Barbaro, "Recovering the Origins of Convent education in Australia," *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 24 (2003): 45.



2005 that “we still know very little about the teaching nuns.”<sup>89</sup> Similarly, historian of French Catholic education Jean de Viguerie remarked that women religious who established convent schools in France remain largely absent from histories of education, and are thus relatively unknown.<sup>90</sup>

While histories of Catholic women’s education in Australia have yet to adequately address the origins of the convent high school, histories of Catholic boys’ colleges in Australia such as T. P. Boland’s *Nudgee* and Greg Denning’s *Xavier* have carefully examined the broader historical and geographical contexts of the Christian Brothers and Jesuit education traditions. Denning’s book, for example, assigns the aims and practices of Xavier to a long and celebrated Jesuit tradition of European origin. Similarly, Stan Arneil’s history of the Augustinians in Australia, while celebratory in tone, situates the Order’s schools in its long established education tradition.<sup>91</sup>

In 2009, Bart Hellinckx et al. reviewed the historiography of the Catholic teaching sisters in Western Europe, Latin and North America, Australia and Asia in the essay, *The Forgotten Contribution of the Teaching Sisters*. The authors noted:

Whereas more in-depth studies are still needed, we would like to urge scholars to write national or regional syntheses on the basis of the histories which have appeared on schools and congregations in their own countries or regions. Only in this way can the richness of these studies gradually be used to develop broader theories and hypotheses.<sup>92</sup>

Congruently, the thesis here presents an original history of the genesis and development of Catholic women’s education in Australia, using both existing research and a significant range of new and unpublished data to develop the broad hypothesis that the convent traditions of empowerment and transformation thread consistently through the history of Catholic women’s education. This running thread is exemplified in the story of St Rita’s College, Clayfield, which forms the case study.

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<sup>89</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 7.

<sup>90</sup> Jean de Viguerie, quoted in Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth Century France* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), 142.

<sup>91</sup> Stan Arneil, *Out Where the Dead Men Lie: The Augustinians in Australia 1838-1992* (Brookvale, NSW: Augustinian Historical Commission, 1992).

<sup>92</sup> Bart Hellinckx, Frank Simon and Marc Depaepe, *The Forgotten Contribution of the Teaching Sisters: A Historiographical Essay on the Educational Work of Catholic Women Religious in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2009), 27.

### 1.4.2 Historiography of Women's Catholic Education

Among the most influential formative studies of medieval monastic education are Jean Leclercq's *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* and Pierre Riché's *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West*.<sup>93</sup> Leclercq was concerned in his study with male religious life and focused on 12<sup>th</sup> century monasticism. Riché however, began to explore the educational role of monastic women in Western Europe from the much earlier period that spanned the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. While a comprehensive history of women's monastic education has yet to be written, Penelope Johnson's *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* began to challenge stereotypes of monastic women and demonstrated that their communal privileges and religious status were actually empowering of them. She argues that these women were neither beneficiaries of an "age of feminist freedom, nor abject victims of a patriarchal system that enslaved them."<sup>94</sup>

An emerging literature in this area includes D. H. Green's *Women Readers in the Middle Ages* that focuses on women who were engaged in reading and literature in Germany, France and England between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. His study shows that girls educated in convents were prepared either for religious life or for a return to the world as literate Christian women. As the latter, they brought reading from the monasteries into their homes, taught children to read and translated Latin into the vernacular.<sup>95</sup> Studies such as this reveal that monastic women played a significant role in the expansion of Europe's written culture. Green's study is more concerned with medieval literacy and the kinds of texts that women read than with women's monastic education as such. It nevertheless offers a wider view of the literary activity of medieval religious women than has been commonly taken.

Another recent publication, *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, edited by Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton is an anthology of essays by medievalists who explore the cultural history of medieval women in relation to literacy, authorship and spiritual leadership.<sup>96</sup> The theme of female agency in regard to preaching unifies this collection. Similarly, essays included in *Medieval Monastic Education*, edited by George Ferzoco and Carolyn Muessig, reveal the high levels of education that had been reached by monastic

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<sup>93</sup> Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982); Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West from the 6<sup>th</sup> through to the 8<sup>th</sup> Century*, trans. J. Contreni (Columbia: South Carolina University Press, 1976).

<sup>94</sup> Penelope D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), 2.

<sup>95</sup> D. H. Green, *Women Readers in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 94-5.

<sup>96</sup> Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, eds., *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2005).

women in Western Europe by the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>97</sup> Among these essays, W. G. East's study of the French convent of the Paraclete attributes the empowerment of cloistered women to elements of monastic education that emphasised practical and intellectual formation.<sup>98</sup> Muessig's essay demonstrates the diversity and quality of the approaches to learning in 12<sup>th</sup> century German convents.<sup>99</sup>

Anne Winston-Allen's book *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing about Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* reflects the current proliferation of scholarship on women writers and on convent libraries of the late medieval period. Her research demonstrates that monastic women who produced literature, kept chronicles and copied large manuscripts represented both a presence and significant influence in medieval society.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, the essays in *The Catholic Church and Unruly Women Writers* edited by Jeana DelRosso, Leigh Eicke and Ana Kothe in 2009 explore particular Catholic women's writing throughout Christian history that inspired readers or generally raised awareness about social injustices.<sup>101</sup> Thus, it is only recently that studies have begun to uncover a women's intellectual heritage that includes the monastic antecedents of the convent high school which are explored in this present thesis.

Hellinckx et al. highlight the need for further historical research on the contribution of the Catholic teaching sisters to the teaching profession.<sup>102</sup> This present thesis attempts to answer such a need by examining the educational ideals and initiatives of women religious teachers, particularly their curriculum and teacher-training models, in a period that spanned the 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries from Western Europe to Australia.

### 1.4.3 Studies of Female Religious Congregations in Europe

Teresa Ledóchowska's scholarly history of her own institute, *Angela Merici and the Company of St Ursula*, was ahead of its time in 1968.<sup>103</sup> Her study relies on primary historical documents and extensive archival research. Ledóchowska shrewdly analyses the life of Angela Merici in relation to the forces that were at work in Italy during the Catholic Reformation. The most authoritative contribution to Merician historiography since

<sup>97</sup> George Ferzoco and Carolyn Muessig, eds., *Medieval Monastic Education* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000).

<sup>98</sup> W. G. East, "Educating Heloise," in Ferzoco and Muessig, *Medieval Monastic Education*, 105-116.

<sup>99</sup> Carolyn Muessig, "Learning and Mentoring in the Twelfth Century: Hildegard of Bingen and Herrad of Landsberg," in Ferzoco and Muessig, *Medieval Monastic Education*, 88-9.

<sup>100</sup> Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing about Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

<sup>101</sup> DelRosso, Eicke and Kothe, eds., *The Catholic Church and Unruly Women Writers: Critical Essays* (New York: Pgrave MacMillan, 2007).

<sup>102</sup> Hellinckx, Simon and Depaepe, *The Forgotten Contribution*, 9.

<sup>103</sup> Teresa Ledóchowska, *Angela Merici and the Company of St Ursula According to the Historical Documents*, trans. M. T. Neylan (Rome: Ancora, 1968), 2: 167.

Ledóchowska's book is the study by Mariani, Tarolli, and Seynaeve, *Angela Merici: Contribution towards a Biography*.<sup>104</sup> This work contains many previously unpublished documents including a manuscript of Angela Merici's Rule dating back to 1546. More recently, Querciolo Mazzonis's *Spirituality, Gender and the Self in Renaissance Italy* examines the life of Angela Merici and focuses on female spirituality and early modern Catholicism within both their social and cultural contexts. Mazzoni considers Merici's religious model a Renaissance construct that allowed women new opportunities for active roles in society.<sup>105</sup> Mazzoni's recent work and the earlier less known studies of Ledóchowska and Mariani provide the needed contextual analysis in this area.

In 1996, Jo Ann McNamara's broad historical study, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns Through Two Millennia*, gave shape to the growing field of writing women's religious history from a feminist perspective.<sup>106</sup> Her study focused on female identity and religious life from the time of Christ to the modern period. Barbara Whitehead in 1999 edited a collection of essays in *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe: A History, 1500-1800* that examines both the definition of education accepted in early modern times and the influence of societal expectations on what children were taught at home and in schools.<sup>107</sup> These essays offer fresh insights into what it meant to be an educated woman in early modern Europe; however, they do not specifically focus on convent high schools that would further educate women. Sharon Strocchia's essay, "Learning the Virtues", assesses the relationship between female culture and female education in one monastic school in 15<sup>th</sup> century Florence. Strocchia focuses on the nuns' mentoring of young women in cloister schools to show that the regulated, morally secure environment of convents provided significant cultural comfort to parents.<sup>108</sup> Given her focus, however, Strocchia does not address the later evolution of the cloister schools into the convent day and boarding schools of the female teaching orders in France in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. The present thesis specifically addresses the significant evolutionary development of this construct, which hitherto has not been rigorously examined.

Francoise Soury-Lavergne's significant doctoral thesis, *A Pathway in Education*, is an authoritative study that explores the foundation of Jeanne de Lestonnac's religious institute,

<sup>104</sup> Luciana Mariani, Elisa Tarolli, and Marie Seynaeve, *Angela Merici: Contribution Towards a Biography*, trans. M. Ignatius Stone (Milan: Ancora, 1986).

<sup>105</sup> Querciolo Mazzonis, *Spirituality, Gender, and the Self in Renaissance Italy: Angela Merici and the Company of St Ursula, 1474-1540* (Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

<sup>106</sup> Jo Ann McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns Through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996).

<sup>107</sup> Barbara Whitehead, ed., *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe: A History, 1500-1800* (London: Routledge, 1999), 9.

<sup>108</sup> Sharon T. Strocchia, "Learning the Virtues: Convent Schools and Female Culture in Renaissance Florence," in Whitehead, *Women's Education*, 9.

the Company of Mary Our Lady, in Bordeaux, France, in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>109</sup> A further study of the Company of Mary Our Lady was produced by Pilar Foz in the form of a short institutional history of the Order's mission to Mexico in 1753.<sup>110</sup> Though not intended a scholarly work, her small publication translated from the Spanish relies on foundational documents and offers an astute analysis of the Order's pedagogical system. The thesis here is concerned with the agency of Catholic Reformation women like Jeanne de Lestonnac, who advocated the widespread provision of girls' education as a service of the Church, but who remain relatively unknown outside of France.<sup>111</sup>

Marie-Andrée Jégou's institutional history of the Ursulines of the Faubourg St Jacques in Paris provides a comprehensive analysis of the origins of the Paris Ursulines.<sup>112</sup> Her work is significant and marks the beginning of an emerging literature on the role of elite lay women who were patrons or founders of French religious institutes during the Catholic Reformation. Among such studies is Barbara Diefendorf's study of religious women and the Catholic Reform movement in Paris.<sup>113</sup> Diefendorf highlights the significant religious and cultural impact on French society of women such as Barbe Acarie who initiated the first Ursuline foundation in Paris, and of Marie de Mercoeur who founded the Capuchin convent that became a prominent centre of religious life in the capital. Furthermore, Laurence Lux-Sterritt's recent comparative study of the French Ursulines and Mary Ward's English Ladies gives an in-depth analysis of the two institutes.<sup>114</sup> Also contributing to this emerging historical field is Silvia Evangelisti's *Nuns: A History of Convent Life* which draws on a secondary literature to show that nuns in the early modern period performed crucial social roles in charitable and teaching organisations. Her convincing study contributes to a greater understanding of the permeable nature of enclosure.<sup>115</sup>

Sarah Curtis and Rebecca Rogers in their separate studies have begun to explore the educational work of women religious in 19<sup>th</sup> century France. Curtis's study, in 2000, of French elementary schooling has shown that the *petites écoles* (small schools) of female religious congregations provided the educational model for the national elementary schools of

<sup>109</sup> Françoise Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway in Education: Jeanne de Lestonnac, 1556-1640*, trans. Maria Eusebio and Rosaleen Wheeler, (Rome: Sisters of the Company of Mary, 1984).

<sup>110</sup> Pilar Foz Y Foz, *Genesis and Historical Evolution of the Pedagogical System of the Company of Mary Our Lady, 1607-1820* (Madrid: Instituto "Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo" y Orden de la Compañía de María Nuestra Señora, 1981).

<sup>111</sup> See Barbaro, "Recovering the Origins of Convent Education," 45-56.

<sup>112</sup> Marie-Andrée Jégou, *Les Ursulines du Faubourg Saint-Jacques à Paris (1607-1662): Origine d'un monastère apostolique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981).

<sup>113</sup> Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*.

<sup>114</sup> Laurence Lux-Sterritt, *Redefining Female Religious Life: French Ursulines and English Ladies in 17<sup>th</sup> Century Catholicism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>115</sup> Silvia Evangelisti, *Nuns: A History of Convent Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

late 18<sup>th</sup> century France, and thus assisted the democratisation of elementary education in that country.<sup>116</sup> In 2005, Rebecca Rogers's book, *From the Salon to the Schoolroom*, broke new ground in documenting 19<sup>th</sup> century female schooling in France. Rogers necessarily restricts her research to the post-revolutionary period and thus neither focuses on 17<sup>th</sup> century sources of the convent high school nor the female teaching orders of that early modern period. Rogers's major study, however, challenges dominant representations of nuns as offering only cursory education and it shows that convents in France promoted serious learning for their members and expanded the range of educational offerings for girls. Significantly, she demonstrates how French nuns spread their influence beyond the 'hexagon' (France) through the concerted civilising mission undertaken at the height of French imperialism.<sup>117</sup> Curtis in 2010, in her book, *Civilising Habits: Women Missionaries and the Revival of French Empire*, endorses Rogers's work and shows that the French sisters exerted a 'civilising' influence in the New World.<sup>118</sup> The present thesis, however, goes beyond Rogers's and Curtis's landmark studies to examine both the origins and transfer of the French model of girls' schooling from Europe to Australia in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The above studies are examples of the critical scholarship that is emerging in this field, much of which is being produced in Western Europe, Canada and the United States. No doubt additional valuable information concerning the history of female religious congregations in Europe will emerge from the Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project at Queen Mary, University of London titled: "Who were the Nuns?, A Prosopographical study of the English Convents in exile 1600-1800." This is a comprehensive study of the membership of the English convents and of Mary Ward's English Institute which was established during the period when Catholic institutions were proscribed in England. The project commenced in 2008 and the principals are now beginning to share the valuable fruits of their research through conference papers and by the provision of data online.<sup>119</sup> Recent books on women in education in 19<sup>th</sup> century England include *Women, Educational Policy Making and Administration in England: Authoritative Women since 1880*, edited by Joyce Goodman and

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<sup>116</sup> Sarah Curtis, *Educating the Faithful: Religion, Schooling, and Society in Nineteenth-Century France* (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000).

<sup>117</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 227-252. Rogers explores French schools in the African colonies and throughout Western Europe, England and the United States.

<sup>118</sup> Sarah Curtis, *Civilising Habits: Women Missionaries and the Revival of French Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). Curtis notes that in the former French colony of Louisiana in the United States the French sisters established upper-class boarding schools and pay-day schools for colonialists, and free schools for the local poor, including slaves and indigenous children.

<sup>119</sup> As of September 2011, this significant project, which involves researchers from Europe, is being led by Professor Michael Questier as principal investigator and Dr Caroline Bowden as research fellow and project manager. View website "Who Were the Nuns?" School of History, Queen Mary, University of London, accessed October, 2011, <http://www.history.qmul.ac.uk/index.html>.

Sylvia Harrop, and also Jane Martin's *Women and the Politics of Schooling in Victorian and Edwardian England*.<sup>120</sup> However, the present thesis is primarily concerned with the particular French education tradition that was brought to Australia from Ireland and Continental Europe.

#### 1.4.4 On Women Religious in English-Speaking Countries

T. J. Walsh's 1959 book, *Nano Nagle and the Presentation Sisters*, remains the most comprehensive biography of Nano Nagle.<sup>121</sup> Additional archival data on Nano Nagle's establishment of the Ursulines in Ireland is provided in Ursula Clarke's institutional history of the Ursulines in Cork City.<sup>122</sup> Catriona Clear in 1987 opened up the field of Catholic Irish women's religious history with her landmark study, *Nuns in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland*.<sup>123</sup> Also in 1987, Anne O'Connor examined the provision of girls' secondary education in Ireland at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the role of the Irish Catholic sisters in founding colleges for the higher education of women.<sup>124</sup> More recently, in 2007, Máire Kealy's book, *Dominican Education in Ireland 1820-1930*, detailed the Dominican Sisters' significant contribution to the development of various types of educational institutions in Ireland.<sup>125</sup> Kealy's study marks the beginning of more focused research on Irish women religious as teachers.

Interestingly, historians have often assumed that women's historically subordinate position in society prevented religious sisters from playing an influential role in Church and society.<sup>126</sup> This standard interpretation of history suggests that the clergy orchestrated the re-emergence of the orders in Ireland and initiated the conventual movement. Contrary to that, Mary Peckham Magray argues that it was well-connected women who initiated and sustained the conventual movement in Ireland and played the crucial roles in reviving older religious orders such as the Dominicans and Poor Clares.<sup>127</sup> In her seminal study, *The Transforming Power of the Nuns*, Magray documented the agency of women religious who contributed to the regeneration of the Catholic Church in post-Reformation Ireland and brought about significant

<sup>120</sup> Joyce Goodman and Sylvia Harrop, eds., *Women, Educational Policy Making and Administration in England: Authoritative Women since 1880* (London: Routledge, 2000); Jane Martin, *Women and the Politics of Schooling in Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Leicester University Press, 1999).

<sup>121</sup> T. J. Walsh, *Nano Nagle and the Presentation Sisters* (Dublin: M. H. Gill, 1959).

<sup>122</sup> Ursula Clarke, *The Ursulines in Cork, 1771-1996* (Cork: Ursuline Convent, Cork, 1996).

<sup>123</sup> Catriona Clear, *Nuns in Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987), 10.

<sup>124</sup> Anne V. O'Connor, "The Revolution in Girls' Secondary Education in Ireland, 1860-1910," in *Girls Don't Do Honours: Irish Women in Education in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, ed. Mary Cullen (Dublin: Argus Press, 1987), 31-54.

<sup>125</sup> Máire Kealy, *Dominican Education in Ireland 1820-1930* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007).

<sup>126</sup> See for example, Maria Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Anthony Fahey, "Female Asceticism in the Catholic Church: A Case Study of Nuns in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Ireland" (PhD Thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1982); Anthony Fahey, Nuns in the Catholic Church in Ireland in the Nineteenth Century," in Cullen, "Girls Don't Do Honours," 26-27.

<sup>127</sup> Magray, *The Transforming Power*, 11-13.

religious and cultural change.<sup>128</sup> Such women also formed new and dynamic congregations, such as the Presentation, Charity and Mercy Sisters, Mary Ward's Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Loreto Sisters) and the Sisters of the Holy Faith. The themes in the present thesis of the empowerment and transformation traditions of the convent high school are confirmed by Magray's study.

The much neglected trans-Atlantic history of Catholic religious sisters was addressed in 1999 by Carol Coburn and Martha Smith in *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920*. The authors demonstrated that the activities of such women were significant in the development of both American Catholic identity and Catholic culture.<sup>129</sup> Additionally, Canadian researcher Elizabeth Smyth has surveyed the recording of women's history by conventual women in English Canada and identified women's roles in all levels of education. In the past decade, Smyth has begun to highlight the absence of women religious from histories of women's involvement in Canadian education.<sup>130</sup> Smyth in 2006 described the Catholic teaching sisters as "a marginalised cohort of educators whose contributions have yet to be explored, especially by secular scholars in English Canada."<sup>131</sup>

#### 1.4.5 On Convent Education in Australia

A similar story exists in Australia where mainstream histories of education have provided little detail of the women religious who established independent and order-owned convent high schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Ronald Fogarty's history of Catholic education in Australia includes an excellent section on Catholic girls' schooling. However, given the scope of his major study, Fogarty, like others, addressed the broader historical dimensions of Catholic education.<sup>132</sup> In fact there exists little focused work on the order-owned convent high school in 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia.

Current histories of Catholic education in Australia, instanced by John Browning's *Always Mindful: A History of Catholic Education in Central Queensland, 1863-1990*, continue to

<sup>128</sup> See Magray, *The Transforming Power*.

<sup>129</sup> Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920* (North Carolina: North Carolina University Press, 1999).

<sup>130</sup> Elizabeth Smyth, "Writing Teaches Us Our Mysteries: Women Religious Recording and Writing History," in *Creating Historical Memory: English Canadian Women and the Work of History*, eds. Beverly Boutilier and Alison Prentice (Vancouver: British Columbia University Press, 1997), 101-128; Elizabeth Smyth, "Professionalisation among the Professed: The Case of Roman Catholic Women Religious," in *Challenging Professions: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Women's Professional Work*, eds. Elizabeth Smyth et al. (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1999), 234-254.

<sup>131</sup> Elizabeth Smyth, "Loretto Academy Niagara (1861-1969): Education under the Rainbow," *Encounters on Education* 7 (2006): 27.

<sup>132</sup> Ronald Fogarty, *Catholic Education in Australia, 1806-1950* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1959).



focus on clerical leadership and on diocesan development. Such histories rely on diocesan documents rather than on convent archives and oral data, and present a traditional history of the bishops that tends to overshadow the story of women religious who founded and expanded Catholic educational institutions across Australia.<sup>133</sup> Although Browning's history rightfully pays tribute to the female congregations who staffed Catholic parish schools in Central Queensland, he does not attend to the pioneering efforts and leadership role of the Sisters of St Joseph in primary education nor of the Mercy and Presentation Sisters in secondary education in that vast region. Thus in Browning's book there is scant mention of the identities and biographies of such women, of their choices, educational ideals and leadership, influence on local communities, or their role in determining the overall character of Catholic education in Queensland country towns. For example, Mother Ursula Kennedy of the Presentation convent in Longreach, who pioneered girls' secondary education in Central Western Queensland where government high schools had not yet been established, is only briefly mentioned in Browning's history. It will be shown in this thesis that M Ursula's story forms a significant strand in the history of education in Queensland and, more specifically, in the story of St Rita's College, Clayfield.

The recent surge in women's religious history, however, has yielded valuable archival data on the secondary schools conducted by the Catholic sisters in Australia. Included among such congregational histories are: Pauline Kneipp's history of the Ursulines in Armidale, Madeleine Sophie McGrath's study of the Mercy Sisters in Parramatta together with Anne McLay's studies of the Mercy congregation in Western Australia and South Australia, Morna Sturrock's Brigidine history, Margaret Walsh's history of the Good Samaritan Sisters, Mary Ryllis Clark's history of the Loreto Sisters in Australia, and M. R. MacGinley's recent work on the Dominicans and Poor Clares.<sup>134</sup>

As has already been noted, only a few studies have specifically focused on Catholic girls' secondary education in Australia. Jean Marie Mahoney's history of All Hallows' School, Brisbane (1985) and Stephanie Burley's seminal thesis on the Catholic teaching sisters in South Australia (1992), as well as school histories such as Christine Trimmingham Jack's study

<sup>133</sup> John Browning, *Always Mindful: A History of Catholic education in Central Queensland, 1863-1990* (Rockhampton: Diocesan Catholic Education Office, 2005).

<sup>134</sup> Pauline Kneipp, *This Land of Promise: The Ursuline Order in Australia, 1882-1982* (Armidale: University of New England, 1982); Madeleine Sophie McGrath, *These Women?*; Anne McLay, *Women Out of their Sphere*; Anne McLay, *Women on the Move, Mercy's Triple Spiral: A History of the Adelaide Sisters of Mercy, Ireland to Argentina 1856-1880 to South Australia 1880* (Adelaide: Sisters of Mercy Adelaide, 1996); Morna Sturrock, *Women of Strength, Women of Gentleness: Brigidine Sisters, Victorian Province* (Melbourne: David Lovell, 1995); Margaret Walsh, *The Good Sams: Sisters of the Good Samaritan, 1857-1969* (Mulgrave: John Garratt, 2001); Mary Ryllis-Clark, *Loreto in Australia* (Sydney: UNSWP, 2009); M. R. MacGinley, *Ancient Tradition, New World: Dominican Sisters in Eastern Australia, 1867-1958* (Sydney: St Pauls, 2009).

of Kerever Park in Bowral, outside Sydney (2003); the author's history of St Rita's College, *Acorn to Oak* (2006), based on the present thesis work; and Janice Garaty's thesis on Holy Cross College Woollahra, Sydney, (2008) are included among such focused studies.<sup>135</sup> Published studies by McLay, McGrath and Burley canvassed the empowerment of Catholic religious teachers and their students, as well as the debates involved in such discussions. The present thesis develops and extends the disparate work available in Australia.<sup>136</sup>

It is important to note that few studies overall acknowledge the collaborative nature of the Catholic sisters' educational work in Australia. In his study of Australian Catholic schools, Maurice Ryan does acknowledge that the laity, clergy and religious congregations worked collaboratively to implement the main vision and objectives of Catholic education throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>137</sup> M. R. MacGinley asserts that collaboration rather than conflict characterised the relationship between the Catholic sisters and the Australian clergy.<sup>138</sup> Ryan contends that the history of Catholic education must include the significant "grassroots activity among local populations that ensured the success of schools."<sup>139</sup> The thesis here examines such collaborative activity in the history of Catholic women's education and reveals that the continuity of institutions like St Rita's College, Clayfield, depended particularly on the support of the families of its students, parish priests and the wider parish community.

The present thesis provides both a descriptive micro-history of St Rita's College and an interpretative macro history of structured girls' schooling in order to determine, as Hellinckx et al. recommend, whether "the subject studied is typical or rather peculiar."<sup>140</sup> Hence, the thesis will evaluate whether the story of St Rita's College is typical of the evolutionary development of Catholic girls' secondary education overall.

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<sup>135</sup> Burley, "None More Anonymous?"; Christine Trimingham-Jack, *Growing Good Catholic Girls: Education and Convent Life in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003); Anna Barbaro, *Acorn to Oak: St Rita's College, Celebrating Eighty Years* (Brisbane: St Rita's College, 2006); Janice Garaty, "Holy Cross College Woollahra 1908-2001: A micro-study of Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Sydney in the Twentieth Century" (PhD Thesis, Australian Catholic University, 2008).

<sup>136</sup> McGrath, *These Women?*; McLay, *Women Out of their Sphere*; McLay, *Women on the Move*; Burley, "Entrenched or Emancipated?"; Stephanie Burley, "Lost Leaders from the Convent and the Classroom 1880-1925," in *Leading the Catholic School*, eds. John McMahon, Helga Neidhart, and Judith Chapman (Richmond, VIC: Spectrum, 1997); Stephanie Burley, "Past Principals: The Public Pervasive Presence of Powerful Women in the Church in South Australia, 1880-1925," *Paedagogica Historica* 5 (1999), 339-352.

<sup>137</sup> Maurice Ryan, ed., *Echo and Silence: Contemporary Issues for Australian Religious Education* (Katoomba: Social Science Press, 2001), 228.

<sup>138</sup> M. R. MacGinley, "Catholic Women's Religious Institutes in Australia, 1830-1940: Some Considerations," in Hutchinson and Campion, *Long Patient Struggle*, 104.

<sup>139</sup> Ryan, *Echo and Silence*, 228.

<sup>140</sup> Hellinckx, Simon and Depaepe, *The Forgotten Contribution*, 26.

#### **1.4.6 On the Academic Aspirations of Convent High Schools in Australia**

Noelene Kyle in her history of women's education in New South Wales described convent high schools prior to 1920 as establishments primarily concerned with "domestic, moral, religious and accomplishment attainment" with only "some interest in academic achievement."<sup>141</sup> Studies of women's education in Australia generally do not focus sufficiently on the convent high school as the locus where women worked for social and religious reform and where the empowerment and transformation traditions of Catholic girls' schooling were consciously adopted. Most commentators suggest that convent schools produced one, singular image of womanhood. This present thesis asserts on the contrary that the tripartite interplay between societal images of womanhood, the church's vision of the Catholic mother (epitomised in Mary, the mother of Jesus) and the sisters' educational ideals, produced not one singular model but a variety of models of womanhood.

#### **CONCLUSION**

This chapter examined the various fields that provided the conceptual frameworks for this thesis. It outlined the aims of the thesis and the methodology best suited to writing women's history within the context of girls' secondary schooling. It also highlighted the disparate work available on women religious teachers and their convent high schools in 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia. More specifically, it demonstrated that the literature on Catholic women's education has yet to adequately address the origins of and continuing dynamic of the convent high school and yet to situate the modern Catholic girls' secondary school within its broader historical context. The coming chapter will address this gap in the literature and provide the broad historical context needed to critically examine the evolution of Catholic girls' secondary colleges like St Rita's, Clayfield.

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<sup>141</sup> This claim was made in Noelene Kyle, *Her Natural Destiny: The Education of Women in New South Wales* (Kensington, NSW: UNSWP, 1986), 73.

***PART TWO***

***THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT***

## CHAPTER TWO

### ORIGINS OF CONVENT EDUCATION IN EUROPE

#### INTRODUCTION

The main object of this chapter is to situate St Rita's College in its broad historical context. To that end the chapter will trace the development of women's formal education in Europe from the monastic schools of the early Middle Ages through to the carefully planned convent day and boarding schools of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century in France. Such background study will demonstrate that the sources of convent education in Australia, as elsewhere, are drawn from early modern Europe. The principal emphasis of this chapter is on the empowerment and transformation traditions of the convent high school. In this regard, it will assess the agency of women who acted on their *habitus* (understanding of their times and society) to create new institutions dedicated to the education of women.

This chapter will also examine how women like Angela Merici, Jeanne de Lestonnac, and the Paris Ursulines, were all agents of change who were committed to creating and adapting previous models of schooling for women of their times. It will therefore challenge the stereotype of religious women as submissive subordinates in the wider Catholic education project. In doing so, it will place female religious at the forefront of transformative educational developments that achieved considerable geographical reach. This chapter will accordingly highlight the traditions of empowerment and transformation in women's educational history in Europe.

#### 2.1 EARLY MONASTICISM AND THE EDUCATION OF GIRLS

The genesis of Catholic girls' education may be traced to the earliest male and female monastic communities that emerged simultaneously in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century in Egypt and then spread rapidly to Western and Northern Europe, firstly taking root in Gaul, then in Italy.<sup>1</sup> Monasteries were the private initiatives of religious individuals and it was not until 451CE that they came under Church legislation at the Council of Chalcedon. From that time, monastic communities could gain legal recognition as corporate bodies in Roman civil law only through the approbation of a local bishop.<sup>2</sup>

In the feudal period, education was understood, as it is today, as encompassing knowledge and values, as well as vocational and social preparation for life relevant to a particular

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning early monasticism see Leclercq, *The Love of Learning*, 90-92.

<sup>2</sup> For an examination of early juridical developments in the Church see MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 6-11.

society.<sup>3</sup> There was no general need for literacy among either the feudal aristocracy of Europe who paid masters to read and write for them, or among the lower classes whose social rank remained unaltered regardless of education. The notion that education could contribute to social mobility was not yet afoot. Education for the general populace was considered a private function conducted within the family as part of the mother's role and later by the father as a function for boys. The nobility prepared their sons for public life. Daughters by contrast were formed for marriage and motherhood, and for future roles as mistresses and hostesses in their households and in the courts, whether royal or regional, or as members of religious communities.

New educational needs emerged throughout Western Europe in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries when many spheres of life experienced growth, and society transitioned from feudalism to an economic order governed by expanding trade in goods. The growth of intercity and international commerce led to mobility beyond the traditional village, fostering the creation of a wealthy burgher class. Persons other than feudal lords now came into prominence, including scholars, jurists, physicians, artists, money brokers and financial operators. The concept of labour was thus extended to include the work of the intellectual and the professional, and of those in business and trade.<sup>4</sup> Higher standards of literacy were required by the nobility and merchant class for business transactions in the emerging world of commerce, and also for operating in the more sophisticated structure of national politics as the centralised nation states of modern Europe began to emerge. Against this social background, from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards, monasteries accepted children for general and religious education in addition to the child oblates offered for religious life.

The characteristics of monastic education that were to be incorporated and modified in the later convent high school model will now be outlined in sub-sections 2.1.1 to 2.1.4.

### **2.1.1 Upper-class educational provision**

The few girls who benefited from medieval monastic education belonged to noble families and were placed in monasteries for lengthy periods, and there received social and religious training from an appointed mistress. This type of 'fosterage' paralleled the practice among elites of placing children into noble households that offered quality scholastic tuition and other social advantages. From the early medieval period, nuns began to be perceived as

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<sup>3</sup> Alan Barcan, *Sociological Theory and Educational Reality – Education and Society in Australia Since 1949* (Kensington, NSW: UNSWP, 1993), 7.

<sup>4</sup> Manlio Bellomo, *The Common Legal Past of Europe, 1000-1800*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, *Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Canon Law* 4 (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 57.

suitable teachers of literacy and higher education for the small numbers of particular girls who were often related to the nuns of a convent and who were admitted to the monastery for a privileged upbringing. Education as such was understood not as formal schooling but as preparation for a child's future societal role.<sup>5</sup> The boarding girls lived with the nuns, or, more accurately, choir nuns,<sup>6</sup> and largely followed their way of life and pattern of daily prayer, except for the night office. This custom of boarders adopting the religious lifestyle of the nuns was to be retained, although slightly modified, in the convent boarding schools that appeared in France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### 2.1.2 The Distinctive Quality of Female Monastic Education

Several studies demonstrate that medieval monastic women often acquired levels of education comparable to those attained in the male monasteries.<sup>7</sup> Although convents of women were not established as educational institutions *per se*, monastic women acquired basic literacy there, a requirement for daily spiritual reading and prayers. The high-born choir nuns themselves were well-read. Notable abbesses wrote extensively, transmitting and expanding written culture. Large convent libraries such as that of Syon Abbey comprised books brought by the families of novices on their profession.<sup>8</sup> Thus unlike lay women of the lower classes, the nuns and upper-class girls were not educationally marginalised. Philippe de Novare in the 13<sup>th</sup> century opposed allowing women to read “except in the case of nuns.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed for women, monasticism provided an almost exclusive means of receiving a formal education.<sup>10</sup>

Recent studies have analysed the methods of instruction developed by medieval educators of women. Carolyn Muessig asserts that the formation of young girls in medieval convents was based on Benedictine, then later, Cistercian ideas on education.<sup>11</sup> The methods used by Hildegard of Bingen, foundress of the Benedictine convent of Rupertsberg in 1151, were based on the magisterial style of learning then common in male and female religious houses where a *magister*, a charismatic master or teacher, imparted knowledge.<sup>12</sup> The high level of education attained by Herrad, abbess of the Augustinian convent of Hohenberg in the Vosges, France, is evident in her compilation of the *Hortus deliciarum* (1195), an encyclopaedia on

<sup>5</sup> Whitehead, *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe*, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Choir nuns recited the Divine Office, the official prayer of the Church, in choir. Their vows were solemn and legally binding in both civil and canon law. MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 323-4.

<sup>7</sup> Such studies include Ferzoco and Muessig, *Medieval Monastic Education*; see also Green, *Women Readers*.

<sup>8</sup> Annals of Syon Abbey, cited in Green, *Women Readers*, 83.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Green, *Women Readers*, 85.

<sup>10</sup> The role of monastic women in developing the intellectual life of the early Middle Ages is evidenced in part by the outstanding devotional and literary work produced in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries by female mystics, such as Hildegard of Bingen, by the scholar-nuns of the abbey of Helfta, and by Herrad, Abbess of Hohenberg. This important strand in women's intellectual history is being recovered in several current studies, as has been noted.

<sup>11</sup> Green, *Women Readers*, 87-104.

<sup>12</sup> Muessig, “Learning and Mentoring,” 88-9.

salvation and morality written for the edification of her canonesses. Such education, the forerunner to convent schooling, was essentially holistic in that it was concerned with the social, religious and intellectual formation of women.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.1.3 Education for Personal Empowerment

The story of Heloise, the 12<sup>th</sup> century abbess at the French convent of the Paraclete, exemplifies the frequent, broad aspiration of providing a high level of education leading to the empowerment of monastic women. Heloise received an education in letters initially from her uncle, Fulbert, a canon, and then religious and social training at the convent at Argenteuil.<sup>14</sup> The nuns of the Paraclete used the hymnary written for them by renowned educator, and Heloise's former tutor, Abelard, as an educational and devotional text. A recent study by W. G. East has named this text "one of the glories of medieval Latin literature."<sup>15</sup> East shows that Abelard:

...seeks not only to educate her, in the sense of informing her intellect, but to edify her, in the sense of building her up, raising her spirits and her self-esteem, opening her mind to appreciate her own dignity and that of her sex.<sup>16</sup>

Clearly, women's education at the Paraclete was concerned not only with formation of the intellect but most significantly with personal empowerment.<sup>17</sup>

While abbesses acknowledged the role of the bishop as administrator of a diocese, they did not concede subordination to bishops or to male orders and thus remained relatively autonomous. It is clear that the cultural authority and autonomy enjoyed by leading monastic women was based in an empowering educational environment.

### 2.1.4 The Permeable Cloister

The enclosure rule for female religious orders evolved from a monastic rule for women that encouraged *clausura* or enclosure, dating to the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup> *Clausura* was originally intended to assure the prayerfulness and solitude prescribed in the ascetic tradition of *fuga*

<sup>13</sup> The *Hortus* contains Herrad's own poems as well as the writings of Aristotle, Plato, Socrates and Cicero. Muessig, "Learning and Mentoring," 95-7.

<sup>14</sup> East, "Educating Heloise," 105-116.

<sup>15</sup> East, "Educating Heloise," 109.

<sup>16</sup> East notes that the hymnary of the Paraclete forms "a corpus of the first importance in the history of monastic education and of women's education," in "Educating Heloise," 105-116.

<sup>17</sup> Muessig asserts that monastic culture accorded certain women an intellectual and ecclesiastical status equal to men. Fahey adds that monastic women in pre- and early medieval Europe fully participated in the strengthening of abbatial powers, in the production of devotional literature and in the pursuit of the intellectual life. Muessig, "Learning and Mentoring"; Fahey, "Female Asceticism," 18.

<sup>18</sup> Enclosure is mentioned in the rule for women composed by Caesarius of Arles (ca. 470-542) whereas Augustine's earlier identical rule for women and men (written around 395) does not mention *clausura*. See Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, *The Rule of Saint Augustine: Masculine and Feminine Versions*, intro. Tarsicius J. Van Bavel, trans. Raymond Canning (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984), 74.



*mundi* (flight from the world), and to protect female religious from an often-dangerous exterior world.<sup>19</sup> *Clausura* virtually replicated the lifestyle of upper-class women who lived within household enclosures and were protected by male relatives. Roberta Gilchrist has demonstrated that high-ranking women constructed convents “which were akin to their own architectural milieu.”<sup>20</sup>

Both social and monastic enclosure reflected the abiding need in violent times for physical protection, most evident in the architecture of the manor house wall and moat. The cloistered lifestyle, however, did not produce absolute seclusion from the world. While convents provided closed spaces, they were at the same time dynamic centres of devotional, cultural and political life, as revealed in the recent studies of Elizabeth Rapley<sup>21</sup> and Silvia Evangelisti.<sup>22</sup> This reality encourages consideration of female agency within the cloister walls. By the early modern period, convent parlours built to replicate the home parlours of upper-class women provided a familiar social space for high ranking nuns to be in direct contact with visitors, including men. Such openness to the outside world undoubtedly allowed cloistered women to share in contemporary intellectual movements.<sup>23</sup>

## 2.2 EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES OF RELIGIOUS WOMEN

### 2.2.1 The Beguines

Throughout medieval Europe, formal education remained the prerogative of the monasteries that served the educational needs of the nobility. From around the 12<sup>th</sup> century, however, certain uncloistered female religious communities began to assume responsibility for teaching children literacy. These communities were part of the new spiritual movements of the period that emphasised contemplation as well as charitable activity, and these women in effect pioneered free elementary education. Accordingly, education came to be understood as a needed social service, akin to the provision of hospices and infirmaries in which religiously motivated women had long been involved through charitable work. The most widespread of these medieval communities were the Beguines, a movement of pious Christian women originating around 1175 in Liège, in present-day Belgium.<sup>24</sup> The Beguines were mainly altruistic middle-class women who adopted a non-cloistered, celibate and religious life-style

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<sup>19</sup> On Caesarius of Arles, see MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Woman* (London: Routledge, 1997), 127.

<sup>21</sup> Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 6-7.

<sup>22</sup> Evangelisti, *Nuns*, 41-42.

<sup>23</sup> See Muessig, “Learning and Mentoring,” 87-104.

<sup>24</sup> On Beguine education, see Penelope Galloway, “Life, Learning and Wisdom: the Forms and Functions of Beguine Education,” in Ferzoco and Muessig, *Medieval Monastic Education*, 153-67.

either within their own homes or in small self-regulated communes.<sup>25</sup> Importantly, while uncloistered female communities like the Beguines provided elementary instruction for the general populace, enclosed female monasteries continued to form Europe's leading women in their more aristocratic milieu.

### **2.2.2 Female Agency and the Business of Defining Women's Religious State**

The many new religious institutes founded in Europe in the 12<sup>th</sup> century that observed the 'mixed life' of both contemplation and charitable activity, were given ecclesiastical direction by Pope Innocent III in the reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).<sup>26</sup> The Council decreed that no new orders were to be established. Existing and newly founded monasteries were to adopt one of the approved rules of religious life, understood to be those of Benedict, Basil and Augustine (Franciscan and Carmelite were added later). While this Lateran decree impacted on the numerous female teaching congregations that would emerge in centuries successive to the 13<sup>th</sup>, women in such congregations asserted their agency by adopting a rule best suited to their apostolic mission and objectives. For example, the Rule of St Benedict was mainly chosen by contemplative communities. St Augustine's Rule supported a more active ministry and was therefore adopted by the many female teaching congregations that appeared in France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, notable among them the Ursulines.<sup>27</sup>

A second decree resulting from interpretations of the Council impacted on women religious teachers by requiring that congregations seeking approbation as religious orders were to take solemn vows. These were public vows of a legal nature modelled on solemn feudal oaths and on the vows of marriage. Alternatively, religious groups could take private vows without legal status such as a vow to lead a celibate life dedicated to charitable work. Among the simple-vow institutes were the many Beguines, Hospitaller Brothers and Sisters, and Third Order associations or tertiaries.<sup>28</sup>

A later decree, *Periculoso*, issued by Pope Boniface VIII in 1298, was to have further and more lasting implications for the future of girls' education in Western Europe.<sup>29</sup> This decree formalised in canon law the already established custom of enclosure for monastic women. Thus from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, female institutes seeking approbation as a religious order were

<sup>25</sup> Mazzonis, *Spirituality, Gender, and the Self*, 38.

<sup>26</sup> This period saw civil and canon law develop simultaneously, and the legal machinery of the Church expand. For an authoritative history of the Western legal tradition that evolved from the fusion of Roman, canon and feudal law, see Bellomo, *The Common Legal Past of Europe*.

<sup>27</sup> On the Rules of various orders, see MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*.

<sup>28</sup> Lay associations linked to orders such as the Dominicans and Franciscans came to be defined as Third Orders, while Second Orders described female religious of these orders where the male members constituted the First Order. MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 215.

<sup>29</sup> MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 18.

required under canon law to accept enclosure. Henceforth, only enclosed women with solemn vows were classed canonically as *moniales* (nuns), whereas religious women with simple vows could remain uncloistered and retain the title, *sorores* (sisters).

The extent to which enclosure was imposed on women at that time, socially as well as in monastic legislation, remains unclear. Prior to *Periculoso*, many female religious communities that formed after the Fourth Lateran Council, such as the Poor Clare (1212) and Dominican (1206) Sisters, had already adopted monastic enclosure in legal terms in their constitutions, pre-empting, if not influencing, the *Periculoso* decree.<sup>30</sup> Monastic women were largely self-directed and thus capable of adopting a religious lifestyle and instituting structures that met with their social and religious objectives. It will be seen in this thesis that a culture of self-determination was fostered in female monasteries and would be an enduring and empowering element in future convent education.

### 2.2.3 Angela Merici (1472-1540) and the Company of St Ursula (1535)

A turning point in the history of girls' education in Western Europe occurs with the novel initiative of Angela Merici in Brescia, northern Italy, in 1535. Merici's story is particularly relevant to the case study of St Rita's College, in that the Presentation Constitutions were based on those of the Paris Ursulines whose education tradition stemmed from Angela Merici. Merici's charitable organization, the Company of St Ursula,<sup>31</sup> was unique in that its members were deeply religious women who lived outside the cloister, and pursued active yet consecrated lives dedicated to spiritual living and good works.<sup>32</sup> In this historical first, members initially lived in their own homes, were not bound by solemn-vowed enclosure, wore secular dress, and observed the evangelical counsels of obedience, virginity and poverty.<sup>33</sup> Merici's was a strictly female initiative and had no male counterpart. It promoted a fully active apostolate that aimed at permeating Brescian society with Christian faith and values. The Company was approved in a Papal Bull in 1546 not as a religious order, but as a praiseworthy lay movement. It was in practice accorded social status equal to that of conventual life and marriage.

Merici's initiative was made in a turbulent social and religious period in Italy, a time that saw many monastic communities weaken in religious perspective and succumb to aristocratic

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<sup>30</sup> For a discussion on the Benedictine monastic tradition, see Leclercq, *The Love of Learning*, 12-24.

<sup>31</sup> The term 'company' was used by lay associations, such as the Company of Divine Love, and the Company of Jesus or Jesuits, founded in 1540 by Ignatius Loyola.

<sup>32</sup> Mariani, Tarolli, and Seynaeve, *Angela Merici*. The Mariani text remains authoritative. For a recent study, see Mazzonis, *Spirituality, Gender, and the Self*.

<sup>33</sup> Clarke, *The Ursulines in Cork*, 10; Mazzonis, *Spirituality, Gender, and the Self*, 45.

interests. The spiritual currents of the Renaissance immediately prior to the Council of Trent (1545-63) that focused on charity as a form of apostolic service were reflected in Merici's Company. The Company of Jesus or Jesuits, founded by Ignatius Loyola in 1540, which was to be an enduring influence on the Ursuline institute as it developed in France, was among similar initially-lay associations that emerged in Europe and used the term 'company.' Therefore, Merici's Company, like other simple-vow religious congregations of women, was an enterprise that operated outside the ecclesiastical structures that applied to religious orders.

Members of Merici's Company acted as mentors to girls aged upward from twelve who were to be the wives and mothers of the future. Merici indeed offered a comprehensive program of social and religious training for girls within their home environments, reflecting the practices of education at that time. Her program was not a provision of formal schooling, but a formation of girls for life. Merici's initiative catered for a wide cross-section of the female population from every social rank. For example, records of the Order of St Ursula refer to Merici giving counsel to the family of Francis Sforza, Duke of Milan.<sup>34</sup> Other records show that in 1535, there were about 400 Ursulines in Brescia in a population of 40,000. Thus around one in ten families therein from every social class benefited.<sup>35</sup> According to Angela Merici's historiographers, Merici's innovative pedagogy was based on exhortation and love, an emphasis that respected the diversity of people and recognised varying educational needs across the female population.<sup>36</sup>

A maternal devotedness to those in her charge, apparent in Merici's writings,<sup>37</sup> may be discerned in the Ursuline method of education developed later by the Paris monastery:

She is a true spiritual mother, always serene and joyous, attentive, understanding, and discreet. She maintains the family spirit in the division.<sup>38</sup>

Thus Angela Merici focused on the thorough preparation of girls intellectually, socially and morally, aiding them to become responsible women capable of transforming not only themselves but also a society much in need of renewal. Her program aimed to alleviate deep rooted social ills that stemmed from poverty, sickness, continuous warfare and the neglect of education. As a form of Catholic social work, Merici's program aimed to 'sanctify' the family in a society beset by crisis. Moreover, her Company was concerned with enabling poorer girls

<sup>34</sup> Marie de Saint Jean Martin, *Ursuline Method of Education* (New Jersey: Quinn and Boden, 1946), 96.

<sup>35</sup> See Ledóchowska, *Angela Merici*, 1:176.

<sup>36</sup> Mazzonis, *Spirituality, Gender, and the Self*, 49.

<sup>37</sup> Merici referred to *madre spirituale* (spiritual mothers) whose love was "*più potente senza comparatione, chel corporale*" (without comparison more potent than human love). See Testamento della Madre Suor Angela, 1545, Legato no. 2. reprinted in Ledóchowska, *Angela Merici*, 1: 254.

<sup>38</sup> *Règlements des Religieuses Ursulines de la Congrégation de Paris*, chaps. 4, 5 (Paris: 1705), quoted in Martin, *Ursuline Method*, 319-20.

to become economically independent, a goal not deemed pertinent to upper-class girls in the monastic schools. But her ideals were concerned with the advancement of girls of all social classes and with forming Christian women across the board as agents of change. This transformational aspiration continued as an objective of French Ursuline convent education, as will be shown.

### 2.3 EDUCATIONAL THRUST OF THE CATHOLIC REFORMATION

Merici's Ursulines emerged in a proliferation of new religious institutes that were at the forefront of a Catholic renewal movement or Catholic Reformation that ran parallel to (not subsequent to) the Protestant Reformation. Girls' education in Europe received decisive impetus from the Reformation movements and from the invention of printing, which made the duplication of texts generally affordable and therefore accessible to the wider population.

As the demand for literacy among the general non-clerical population increased, the expansion of education and its more formally organised availability to a wider social spectrum became imperative. The Protestant Reformation saw humanists and reformers agreeing that the most important need of the time was for the provision of secular public schools.<sup>39</sup> The Catholic Church's response to the need for reform received direction and cohesion from the Council of Trent (1545-63) which saw education as the "battle-ground" on which the religious Reformation would be fought. Hence educational treatises on both sides of the divide came to characterise this period.

#### 2.3.1 Female Agency and *Circa Pastoralis*

Decrees of the Council of Trent on monastic enclosure influenced the style and provision of girls' education that would develop in Western Europe from that period on. Pope Pius V's apostolic constitutions, *Circa Pastoralis* (1566) and *Lubricum vitae genus* (1568), upheld Boniface VIII's decree, *Periculoso* (1298) reaffirming the requirement of strict enclosure for any female institute wanting canonical recognition as a solemn-vow institute.<sup>40</sup> *Circa Pastoralis* provided clarity on the question of appropriate lifestyle for the many new uncloistered communities of women who closely resembled nuns, particularly the Italian Ursulines, and shared a common rule of life, but lived in their own homes. It became necessary for the Council to clarify who were *moniales* (nuns), and in what category in the Church the active *sorores* (sisters) belonged. When the Italian Ursulines, along with other

<sup>39</sup> For Martin Luther and John Calvin, education was to serve the public good by engendering morals and good doctrine, objectives shared by Catholic reformers like Angela Merici. The notion of the Christian Church as an agent of transformation drew on the theology of Augustine of Hippo. See Kelty, "Catholic Education."

<sup>40</sup> MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 26-27.

religious women, were requested to clarify their option in the matter, they reaffirmed their agency and chose to remain uncloistered and in simple vows, reflecting the requirements of their active apostolate.<sup>41</sup> It is important to note that in responding to *Circa Pastoralis*, religious women made the choice between simple and solemn vows depending on their apostolic objectives.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, communities of uncloistered women continued to exist<sup>43</sup> and helped sustain the post-Tridentine Church. They were commended for their educational work outside the convents, while cloistered women continued to educate upper-class girls.

## 2.4 PIONEERING FORMAL EDUCATION OUTSIDE THE CLOISTER

### 2.4.1 Italian Ursulines

Italian Ursulines, after Angela Merici's death in 1540, were drawn into staffing Schools of Christian Doctrine at the request of Archbishop Charles Borromeo (1538-1584) of Milan. This arrangement was in direct response to the Council of Trent's decree on education, *The Teaching of Sacred Scripture and the Liberal Arts*, which proposed the establishment of elementary schools of Christian doctrine for the general populace. It was through this newly-defined apostolate that the Ursulines then became teachers, making their first entry into education as it is understood today.

The Milanese Ursulines followed what few pedagogical models were current at that time, developing their own programs in literacy and numeracy, as well as in Christian doctrine and morality. They organised classroom teaching and grouped pupils into classes according to their level of progress rather than age or social position, as was done in the old monastic schools.<sup>44</sup> By the 1580s, the Ursulines were engaged in an extensive teaching apostolate, having six hundred teachers in schools in the diocese of Milan alone.<sup>45</sup>

Ledóchowska has shown that the nature of their apostolate necessitated the adoption of community life by the Milanese Ursulines. Life together was not imposed by Borromeo as has been suggested, but rather emerged through women's agency and was a desired progression towards religious life.<sup>46</sup> As yet, apart from monastic schools, there was no perceived need of and therefore no provision for the further education of girls beyond elementary level.

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<sup>41</sup> Mariani, Tarolli, and Seynaeve, *Angela Merici*, 504-505.

<sup>42</sup> This runs counter to the assumption that enclosure was imposed uniformly across all female congregations.

<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women: Periculoso and its Commentators, 1298-1545* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 129, fn.9.

<sup>44</sup> Jégou, *Les Ursulines*, 24.

<sup>45</sup> See Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 50.

<sup>46</sup> Ledóchowska, *Angela Merici*, 2:99.

The Tridentine decree on education placed particular emphasis on the religious formation of girls whose future activity as Christian mothers would stem the wave of Protestantism which by that time had gained its full momentum.<sup>47</sup> The notion of educating girls for the salvation of society, so evident in Angela Merici's work, defined the educational thrust of the Council. The concept of girls' education for renewing and transforming Western society, beginning with family households, would resonate with women educators and educational planners in subsequent periods of social and political instability, particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as will be seen in the case study of St Rita's College.

#### **2.4.2 French Ursulines and other Simply-vowed Women**

The reputation of the Italian Ursulines reached France and the first French community to follow Angela Merici's Primitive Rule was that of Françoise de Bermond, which was established in L'Isle-sur-Sorgue in Provence in 1594. Following the example of the Milanese Ursulines, Françoise obtained a pontifical brief with the assistance of Fr Romillon, the local canon, to teach young girls Christian doctrine in the local church.<sup>48</sup> In adopting the Rule of the Italian Ursulines of Ferrara (1587), the Ursulines in Provence established themselves as the first Ursuline *congrégation* in France, securing for their community a direct link with Angela Merici's Rule.<sup>49</sup>

In answer to the call by reforming clergy in France for similar schools, other Ursuline communities followed suit, each independently of the other.<sup>50</sup> Initially, the French Ursulines took only simple vows and adopted, without juridical enclosure, a community lifestyle based on the Milanese example.

It is to the Milanese Ursulines, however, that the first entry of women into the field of pastorally-planned education must be ascribed. The widespread use of the term *congrégation* by the simple-vow institutes that were to follow stems from this period, being derived from '*les Ursulines congrégées*', meaning congregated Ursulines. Women streamed into Ursuline teaching *congrégations* in France, as in Italy.<sup>51</sup>

Pious upper-class women, known as *dévotes* who contributed significantly to the strength and tenor of the Catholic Reformation in France,<sup>52</sup> received impetus from the Tridentine reforms

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<sup>47</sup> Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway*, 107.

<sup>48</sup> Jégou, *Les Ursulines*, 22.

<sup>49</sup> See Jégou, *Les Ursulines*, 22-24.

<sup>50</sup> See Mary Magdalen Bellasis, *Towards Unity: History of the Roman Union of The Order of Saint Ursula*, trans. Marie Vianney Boschet (Exeter: Catholic Records Press, 1952).

<sup>51</sup> Bellasis, *Towards Unity*, 2.

<sup>52</sup> Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 193.

to establish simple-vow institutes dedicated to teaching local children in free schools. Thus a generation of elite women capable of funding such private ventures joined the mission of Catholic recovery in France, now the heartland of post-Tridentine renewal initiatives in the Catholic Church.<sup>53</sup> Their communities resembled those of the Italian Ursulines and constituted private initiatives for assisting the needy. Their *petites écoles* (small schools) focused not only on the spiritual welfare of girls but also on their social advancement through higher standard education. As Soury-Lavergne asserts, “the Reformation had the effect of drawing attention to what girls could learn and achieve, if one bothered with them.”<sup>54</sup>

Thus, girls were now taught outside the home and outside the convent, through both Catholic and Protestant schools. Such a development gave rise to a new understanding of the place of education in women’s lives. Moreover, Trent had afforded women an entry into the public sphere of teaching, and many, as Barbara Diefendorf affirms, capitalised on this opportunity.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the *dévotés*, in conferring respectability and social standing on the public role of teaching, had, in effect, opened up teaching as an acceptable vocation for French women.

The above data clearly situates the Ursulines at the head of a significant women’s movement, which initially provided structured elementary education to a wide spectrum of the population. Particularly relevant to this thesis is that the French Ursulines would soon enter the monastic field of girls’ education and consequently pioneer a new institution, the convent day and boarding school, which would provide for both the free public instruction of girls generally as well as for the further education of elite women.

## 2.5 CONVENT DAY AND BOARDING SCHOOL – A NEW INSTITUTION

The idea of providing Jesuit-style collegiate education for girls from the age of six to eighteen was advanced in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century by particular Catholic Reformation women in France. In 1606, Jeanne de Lestonnac, the Baroness de Montferrant-Landiras of Bordeaux (1556-1643), began what appears to have been the first carefully planned convent school conducted by cloistered nuns that also received day students.<sup>56</sup> It became known in English-speaking countries as the convent high school. Yet Jeanne de Lestonnac’s pioneering educational work and the religious institute she founded, the *Compagnie de Notre-Dame* or Company of Mary Our Lady, which spread widely but not to Australia, is rarely mentioned in histories of

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<sup>53</sup> See Rapley, *The Dévotes*; Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*.

<sup>54</sup> Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway*, 109.

<sup>55</sup> Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 8.

<sup>56</sup> On the Company of Mary Our Lady in Bordeaux, see Françoise Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway in Education*.



education. The following synthesis will therefore establish the significance of the convent day and boarding school initiative in the history of Western women's formal education.

The first French Ursuline community to open a convent day and boarding school for girls along the lines of Jeanne de Lestonnac's school in Bordeaux was that in the Rue St Jacques in Paris, founded by Madame de Sainte-Beuve (Madeleine Luillier) in 1612. The *grand couvent*, as it was known, closely resembled the Bordeaux initiative in its design and aims and its educational method.

Both the Company of Mary Our Lady and the Paris Ursulines copied the Jesuit model of college education in an entirely new response to the question of girls' education. In an historical first, each of these institutes obtained canonical approval as a religious order whose *raison d'être* was the education of girls. This represented a significant departure from monastic patterns since the 'new nuns' combined prayer, spiritual reading and teaching and were perceived neither as contemplatives nor as members of a secular institute.<sup>57</sup> A new form of religious life for women thereby came into being, that of the teaching nun. From that time, teaching was regarded as a basic ministry of women's religious life, this contributing to the current notion of 'teaching as a vocation' in Catholic education.

The innovative and private enterprise nature of the convent day and boarding school in France, how it functioned, and what were its aims, will now be examined. The analysis is contained in sub-sections 2.5.1 to 2.5.5 and will demonstrate that the new nuns adapted Jesuit methods and adopted the work of educating women as their primary apostolic commitment, necessitating the alteration of many monastic practices. Furthermore, it will reveal the ideals of empowerment and transformation inherent to the original model of the convent high school.

### **2.5.1 Private Enterprise Nature of the Convent day and boarding School**

The private enterprise nature of French convent day and boarding schools deserves close attention. Significantly, the new establishments created by women for the education of women operated relatively independently of existing Church structures. Instead new convent schools were established as private institutions by high ranking, well-connected women whose associations with eminent clergy and pedagogues assisted their educational goals.

The Ursuline foundation in Paris was initially proposed by Madame Barbe Acarie, a leading Parisian *dévôte* whose salon was a vibrant spiritual centre for leading Catholic reformers,

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<sup>57</sup> Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway*, 110; Rapley, *A Social History*, 15.

doctors of the Sorbonne, distinguished clerics and the pious elite.<sup>58</sup> Mme Acarie's cousin, Mme de Sainte-Beuve, a devout widow belonging to the highest level of French aristocracy, accepted the role of foundress, agreeing to finance the new community on the condition that members pronounced the solemn vows that necessitated enclosure.<sup>59</sup> Another force of the Catholic Reformation, Michel de Marillac, uncle of Louise de Marillac, who later co-founded the Daughters of Charity with Vincent de Paul in 1633, gave Mme Acarie financial advice on the project. As Paris had the "largest concentration of well-educated, wealthy, and cultured women on the continent,"<sup>60</sup> including Mme Acarie, such private ventures flourished. Barbara Diefendorf demonstrates that these women performed public roles in their salons and at court and were supported in their charitable private ventures by the regencies of Marie de Medici and Anne of Austria.<sup>61</sup>

Furthermore, in the new convent school, the income from boarding fees enabled the construction and operation of expensive convent establishments with separate teaching and residential areas and the conduct of large convent day schools that were provided free of charge.<sup>62</sup> The teaching nuns therefore relied on a combination of fees, elite patronage and the dowries of entering novices to support private school enterprises that promoted an evolving culture of self-reliance. This self-supporting model, repeated in subsequent Ursuline foundations across Europe and by other teaching orders that followed, was to be a hallmark of convent education in Australia, as will be seen.

### **2.5.2 Innovative Nature of the Convent day and boarding School**

In answering the educational needs of the period, Jeanne de Lestonnac identified an active role for religious women that reflected the "mixed life" of monastic contemplation and charitable action that was observed by devout upper-class women who nevertheless remained powerfully attracted to monasticism. In order to receive day students as well as boarders into the same educational establishment, de Lestonnac extended the monastic school model to operate a free day school within the convent enclosure. Her institute, the Company of Mary Our Lady, which had become a religious order with the Rule of St Benedict, also obtained approval from Pope Paul V to dispense with monastic obligations such as the recitation of Divine Office and most of the mortifications associated with monastic life. In shedding the more austere elements of monasticism for the demanding work of teaching, the nuns

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<sup>58</sup> Jégou, *Les Ursulines*, 10.

<sup>59</sup> Jégou, *Les Ursulines*, 27.

<sup>60</sup> Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 250.

<sup>61</sup> Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 12, 140.

<sup>62</sup> For further treatment, see Barbaro, "Recovering the Origins of Convent Education," 46, 50 and 55.

introduced religious exercises akin to those followed by simply-vowed women, as well as a religious habit designed for the classroom. Thus the concept of the Benedictine abbey or cloister school was transformed for the reception of day pupils as well as boarders. The teaching commitment, which required the nuns to be in contact with day pupils and parents, necessitated a modification to *clausura*.<sup>63</sup> This modified restriction was defined as ‘minor’ papal enclosure and continued up to 1966 when it was formally abolished by Pope Paul VI.<sup>64</sup> Such modifications highlighted the power of women to act upon their culture and its institutions in order to bring about needed change.

Jeanne de Lestonnac also appears to have pioneered the *internat*<sup>65</sup> or boarding school for girls modelled on the Jesuit colleges. The boarders assumed the same religious lifestyle as the nuns, although they resided in separate quarters but were taught separately from the day students in what was clearly a purpose-built, architecturally planned establishment. Expressive of their own agency, the nuns retained such aspects of the secluded monastic lifestyle as were compatible with the teaching commitment. It was a choice on the part of de Lestonnac to identify with the monastic lifestyle that she was personally familiar with, having briefly resided in a Cistercian convent after her husband’s death. The new institution of the boarding school for girls thus continued the type of education originally given in the great abbeys by adapting to the needs of the new era.

Within a decade, the Ursulines in Paris, Toulouse and Bordeaux received papal approbation to adopt for their own houses, the constitutional precedent of de Lestonnac’s convent school.<sup>66</sup> The new *pensionnats*, or boarding schools, became highly successful as demand for the new construct surged. The phenomenon of the convent day and boarding school, as advanced by the Paris Ursulines, became “the rage” in France. By mid-century, *Les grandes Ursulines* of Paris were the leading educators of French women, or as Rapley affirms, the “teaching order *par excellence* of 17<sup>th</sup> century France.”<sup>67</sup>

The Parisian Ursulines adopted the Rule of St Augustine and added constitutions drawn up for them by canonical advisers at the Sorbonne. Their consequent Rule, as with that of the Company of Mary, forms the basis for the rules of most of the female teaching congregations that were to follow,<sup>68</sup> this reflecting the profound transforming influence of these two

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<sup>63</sup> Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway*, 232-36.

<sup>64</sup> On *Ecclesiae sanctae* and ‘minor enclosure’, see MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 329.

<sup>65</sup> The *internat* was also called a *pensionnat*, referring to the residential fee or *pension* charged.

<sup>66</sup> Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway*, 155, 235.

<sup>67</sup> Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 48.

<sup>68</sup> Foz, *Genesis and Historical Evolution*, 15.

institutes on the style of girls' education that evolved in Western Europe. Like the Bordeaux institute, the Paris Ursulines in 1612 obtained papal approval as a religious order entirely dedicated to the education of girls. The Ursulines added an innovative fourth teaching vow, a development of Jeanne de Lestonnac's initiative, which stated that:

Ursuline religious, besides the three solemn vows common to all Religious, should vow and promise to work for the instruction of young girls...adapting to this end all occupations and offices....And they shall not aspire to dispensations from the instruction of youth.<sup>69</sup>

Thus the addition of the new teaching vow, together with the three solemn vows, transformed the Paris *congrégation* into an enclosed order of teaching nuns. The foremost priority given to women's education by the new teaching nuns was accordingly achieved in the way their lives and their previous monastic practices were adapted and modified. Moreover, as Elizabeth Rapley has noted, the teaching vow, which many religious institutes of women were to adopt, "was their means of resisting interference from outside in the important matter of their teaching vocation."<sup>70</sup> For example, the Paris Ursulines consciously transcended gender norms and current Church restriction by imparting formal catechetical instruction to both boarders and day students. The Ursuline *Règlements* and Constitutions of the Paris convent prescribed this formally:

Although religious instruction is the province of the priest, our holy Constitutions have nevertheless established that the mistresses shall teach catechism several times a week.<sup>71</sup>

The new teaching apostolate thus afforded women a sense of professional identity. Rebecca Rogers, in her study of girls' schooling in 19<sup>th</sup> century France, has noted that the entry requirements of the female teaching orders in her period of analysis required qualifications and commitment that are seldom acknowledged.<sup>72</sup>

### 2.5.3 A Strong Jesuit Influence

With regard to the profane subjects, the new convent school delivered a broad Jesuit-inspired curriculum in order to best serve the varied needs of girls. A plurality of influences may be discerned in Jeanne de Lestonnac's convent school initiative, including humanist, Calvinist and Jesuit ideas. In fact de Lestonnac's educational framework, *Formula for Classes or Schools*, replicated the Jesuits' 1599 *Ratio Studiorum*. Her *Formula* refers to the value of a complete, integrated education for the attainment of 'human perfection,' a holistic ideal of

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<sup>69</sup> *Constitutions of the Monastic Congregation of Paris* (Paris: 1646), quoted in Martin, *Ursuline Method*, 56.

<sup>70</sup> Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 59.

<sup>71</sup> *Règlements*, Part 1, chap. 5 (Paris: 1705), quoted in Martin, *Ursuline Method*, 111.

<sup>72</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 136.

Renaissance humanism embraced in the *Ratio Studiorum*.<sup>73</sup> De Lestonnac's incorporation of humanist pedagogical principles in her *Formula* may also be attributed to the influence of her uncle, the renowned humanist, Michel de Montaigne, who played a significant role in her upbringing.<sup>74</sup> Her idea of creating female establishments comparable to the male colleges reflected a growing tendency among her uncloistered women contemporaries to adopt Jesuit methods in elementary female education. For example, Anne de Xainctonge (1567-1621) in Dôle and Alexis le Clerc (1576-62) in Lorraine both claimed to "do for girls what the Jesuits do for boys."<sup>75</sup> Similarly, but with a collegiate style of education in mind, de Lestonnac modelled her new convent day and boarding school on the Jesuits' college in Bordeaux, *Collège de La Madeleine* (1572).<sup>76</sup>

A strong Jesuit influence can also be discerned in the Ursuline convent school establishment in Paris. From its beginning, notable Jesuits were directly involved in guiding this foundation and in formulating the Constitutions and Directory of Spiritual Exercises.<sup>77</sup> The first printed edition of *Règlements des Religieuses Ursulines de la Congrégation de Paris* of 1652, which outlined the Ursuline method of education, mirrored the holistic approach of the *Ratio Studiorum* in forming the whole person, intellectually, socially, culturally, and spiritually.<sup>78</sup> The *Règlements* resembled Jeanne de Lestonnac's *Formula*, influenced as it was by the *Ratio* and humanism.<sup>79</sup>

The Ursuline organisation of classes, teaching methods and curriculum were similarly modelled on the new Jesuit schools.<sup>80</sup> As with de Lestonnac's school, girls learnt handcrafts such as sewing, tapestry and embroidery.<sup>81</sup> But they also studied Latin and French at a practical level for Latin was then a living language in several fields of scholarship including law. Arithmetic was learnt by the girls in the context of managing money.<sup>82</sup> The *Règlements* also mention the use of emulation and rewards that paralleled Jesuit methods of encouraging study and effort, which included annual ceremonies for the distribution of prizes preceded by

<sup>73</sup> On the humanist influence on de Lestonnac's work see Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway*, 139-143; and Foz, *Genesis and Historical Evolution*, 20-21.

<sup>74</sup> Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway*, 48-57 and 75.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway*, 123. Later, a branch of Alexis le Clerc's congregation became enclosed and conducted upper class boarding schools alongside their free day schools.

<sup>76</sup> On the Jesuit influence on de Lestonnac's educational system, see Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway*, 78-97.

<sup>77</sup> Martin, *Ursuline Method*, 291.

<sup>78</sup> Jean Orcibal, introduction to *Les Ursulines du Faubourg Saint-Jacques à Paris (1607-1662): Origine d'un monastère apostolique*, by Marie-Andrée Jégou (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981), ix-x.

<sup>79</sup> Martin, *Ursuline Method*, 58.

<sup>80</sup> *Règlements*, chap. 1 (Paris: 1705), 2, 3, quoted in Martin, *Ursuline Method*, 310, fn. 45. Martin notes that the 1705 edition is identical to that of 1652, of which there are no surviving copies.

<sup>81</sup> Jégou, *Les Ursulines Faubourg St Jacques*, 155.

<sup>82</sup> *Règlements*, chap. 8 (Paris: 1705), 85, quoted in Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 241.

a literary program and a musical.<sup>83</sup> These Jesuit-inspired Ursuline practices were retained by many Catholic female teaching congregations in Australia, as will be seen.

### 2.5.4 Democratisation of Women's Education

The modification of the cloister school through taking local day girls as well as upper-class boarders constituted a significant step towards the democratisation of women's education in France. Foundational documents of the Bordeaux convent reveal a profound commitment to women's education generally and to teaching girls "according to their condition."<sup>84</sup> "Girls of any age or social class" were "to be taught freely."<sup>85</sup> Thus the new convent school, unlike the monastic schools, extended the provision of quality education to girls from all social ranks.

The nuns taught both day girls and upper-class boarders using the same Jesuit-based curriculum, and concentrated on the study of French, Latin, numeracy and cultural studies.<sup>86</sup> Cultural studies included history, literature, and civilité (the quality of an informed and courteous member of society) which incorporated lessons in social duty, charity and the virtues of justice, chastity, friendship and loyalty. French texts such as the Quatrains of Pybrac and Mathieu were used to develop literacy and general knowledge.<sup>87</sup> At that time, elementary level reading was in Latin, while senior girls and boarders were taught to read in French. Initially, reading and writing were two separate disciplines, in that children in the *petites écoles* were taught to read before they could master writing;<sup>88</sup> however girls in convent schools were at the outset taught to write. Training in useful household skills was also considered essential for girls.<sup>89</sup>

Jégou's research reveals that the first twelve novices of the Ursuline congregation in Paris were mostly from the professional or merchant class - the new middle-class - and not from the aristocracy as would be the case in the older monasteries.<sup>90</sup> Significantly, the convent day and boarding school empowered women through advocating a broader educational vision for women than did the upper-class monastic model.

<sup>83</sup> *Règlements*, chap. 2 (Paris: 1705), 30, quoted in Martin, *Ursuline Method*, 312-314.

<sup>84</sup> Foundational Documents, 146, arts. 10, 11, quoted in Foz, *Genesis and Historical Evolution*, 39.

<sup>85</sup> The Company of Mary Our Lady, Bordeaux, *Rules and Constitutions 1638*, R.10, quoted in Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway*, 143.

<sup>86</sup> See *Formula for Classes* Ch 3 and 4, reprinted in Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway*, 356-359 (Appendix 3).

<sup>87</sup> Rules and Constitutions 1638, 250-255, R. Bo. RR. 1 and 12, quoted in Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway*, 217.

<sup>88</sup> On the small network of Catholic elementary schools founded by congregations of pious women, see Curtis, *Educating the Faithful*.

<sup>89</sup> Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 162.

<sup>90</sup> On the contribution of the Ursuline convent school to the formation of the *bourgeoisie*, a new middle-class with new aspirations, see Jégou, *Les Ursulines Faubourg St Jacques*, 39, 163.

### 2.5.5 Formation of Women as Agents of Influence

17<sup>th</sup> century female education continued to be valued by the French Church as the means of regenerating society. The aim of convent education to form educated and responsible Catholic women capable of transforming society was embedded in the convent school tradition that in subsequent centuries would spread to foreign lands, including Australia.<sup>91</sup> Above all, however, the new teaching convents aspired to forming mothers of profoundly Christian families.<sup>92</sup>

Foundational documents of the Company of Mary Our Lady indicate that the boarders' education was concerned with forming leading Catholic women as agents of renewal in French society.<sup>93</sup> The boarders, by virtue of the additional time spent at school and the requirement of social and spiritual training in the monastic tradition, were offered an additional or higher level of education, which the Paris Ursulines defined as:

A personal education which prepares outstanding persons and leaders for society, for the world, and for the cloister.<sup>94</sup>

*The Rules for Boarders* emphasised the development of “good and noble qualities which it behoves a Christian girl or woman to have, either in the world or in Religion,” and the need to show “modesty, propriety, purity, discretion...decorum and civility in all things.”<sup>95</sup> The upper class boarders were taught separately from the day pupils, as prescribed by the social patterns of the day, however, the same Jesuit-inspired general curriculum was offered to all students, as has already been noted. The boarders did not wear uniforms but were expected to adopt the sober dress worn by widows or *dévotés*, in order to display humility and piety rather than “vain or superfluous” adornments.<sup>96</sup> Until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, boarding students in Australian convent high schools were not required to wear uniforms either, reflecting this much older French convention.

The upper-stream educational provision by the Paris Ursulines clearly catered to the needs of young elite women, who in time would exert considerable religious and social influence in European society. Hence, it was to the daughters of this Parisian upper-class, the future leading women of French society, that the Paris Ursuline convent boarding school was geared.

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<sup>91</sup> See Rogers, *From the Salon*, 227-253.

<sup>92</sup> See Orcibal, introduction, ix.

<sup>93</sup> Company of Mary Our Lady, *Foundational Documents*, 146, arts. 10, 11, quoted in Foz, *Genesis and Historical Evolution*, 39.

<sup>94</sup> As expressed by Marie de Saint Jean Martin in *Ursuline Method of Education*, 50-51. At the time Martin wrote this book she was Prioress General of the Roman Union of the Ursuline Order.

<sup>95</sup> *Rules for Boarders*, R.1, reprinted in Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway*, 354.

<sup>96</sup> Jégou, *Les Ursulines*, 149. For a discussion on the simple dress and black cape worn by the *dévotés* see Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 17.

Consequently, the aim of forming cultured Catholic women within the respectable and monastic milieu of the convent boarding school came to characterise the French model of convent education that was transferred to Australia in the 19th century, as will be seen.

## 2.6 SIMPLE AND SOLEMN-VOW FEMALE CONGREGATIONS

Before examining the almost uniform movement of the French Ursulines towards enclosure, it is necessary to clarify the distinction, which is not often recognised, between institutes of solemn vows and those of simple vows. Religious women who took simple vows were technically in legal classification lay women. They were permitted by the Church to establish schools as private ventures, and so to teach, as many did. Many never sought canonical approbation as a religious order, but remained uncloistered following nevertheless the social protocols of women of standing of their day. Their institutes were recognised as pious associations of women who observed some monastic traditions but took simple vows which had no legal binding force, whereas solemn vows were binding in both canon and civil law.<sup>97</sup>

In France, simple-vow institutes generally taught primary level children from the lower classes, while solemn-vow institutes taught within a convent enclosure and provided structured girls' schooling in convent schools that included distinctive upper-stream provision for boarders, as has been seen.<sup>98</sup> Significantly, over the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, many solemn-vow congregations evolved into teaching communities promoting girls' secondary education when no other provision for girls' higher education was made. As will be seen, the Presentation Sisters in Ireland, after 1805, followed this trend when they were accorded solemn vows. The Order's subsequent development in Australia will be examined in Chapter Four.

### 2.6.1 Agency of Solemnly-vowed Women

From 1617, all but one of the French Ursuline congregations adopted enclosure along the lines of the Company of Mary Our Lady and of the Paris Ursulines.<sup>99</sup> Teresa Ledóchowska has shown that the acceptance of enclosure "came without difficulty" for the French Ursulines.<sup>100</sup> More recent studies indicate that many simply-vowed women influenced by François de Sales's emphasis on internalised piety were already imitating cloistered nuns in

<sup>97</sup>For example, the Daughters of Charity, co-founded by Louise de Marillac and Vincent de Paul in Paris in 1633, were active women whose charitable mission included educating young girls. See Cameron, *A Dangerous Innovator*, 82.

<sup>98</sup>On Catholic primary schooling in France, see Curtis, *Educating the Faithful*.

<sup>99</sup>Anne de Xaintonge's Ursulines of Dôle in the Franche Comté continued living in their own homes but later formed simple-vow communities. Soury-Lavergne, 119.

<sup>100</sup>Ledóchowska, *Angela Merici*, 2:165.



their pursuit of spiritual perfection.<sup>101</sup> While some new communities such as de Sales's Visitandines were pressured to accept enclosure,<sup>102</sup> there was no equivalent pressure to impose the cloister on the Italian Ursulines, as is seen in the Rule of the Milanese Ursulines authorised by Charles Borromeo in 1567:

A rule drawn up for young women who desire to serve God in the state of virginity, though remaining in the world. Also for those, who on account of their poverty or other impediment cannot enter a monastery.<sup>103</sup>

It appears that claustration was not so much imposed by the Church hierarchy upon unwilling or submissive women as it was actively sought and self-imposed. Mounting evidence suggests that the idea of 'women as victims' within the socio-religious context of the French *dévot*es and the cloistral tradition is historically unsustainable.<sup>104</sup> Religiously inclined Catholic Reformation women were indeed pressured by Pope Paul V to observe Pius V's constitution, *Circa Pastoralis*, in choosing either monastic enclosure with solemn vows or a secular communal life with simple vows. The fact that the simple-vow institutes continued to expand, however, and be endorsed by Church hierarchy, indicates that canonical recognition was not an ultimate goal nor was it considered essential or even desirable for the charitable work they undertook. For instance, many male religious and bishops encouraged active women to resist the social and civic pressure for canonical recognition.<sup>105</sup>

Enclosed convents in effect replicated the grand households of upper-class women where the 'world' came to them. Diefendorf affirms that:

...convents were not sealed off from the world outside but remained rooted in the local community through a multitude of social, economic, and political ties.<sup>106</sup>

It was therefore possible for teaching nuns to exchange ideas, rules, educational documents and manuals that enabled the general adaptation of convent curricula to changing needs and circumstances. This will be seen to be the case in relation to enclosed or semi-enclosed female teaching congregations in Australia.

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<sup>101</sup> Lux-Sterritt, *Redefining Female Religious Life*, 155.

<sup>102</sup> On de Sales's Visitandines, see MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 42.

<sup>103</sup> *Regola della Compagnia di Santa Orsola*, Milano 1567, quoted in Ledóchowska, *Angela Merici*, 1:167.

<sup>104</sup> Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity* supports this view.

<sup>105</sup> François de Sales advised against enclosure of new religious orders, see Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 113. See also the advice of Michel de Marillac to the Paris Ursulines, quoted in Jégou, *Les Ursulines*, 27, and that of Fourier to Alix le Clerc and also that of Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity, quoted in Rapley, *The Dévotes*, 69 and 87, and the advice of Archbishop of Besançon to Anne de Xaintonge, in MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 30.

<sup>106</sup> Letters between convent superiors enabled frequent dialogue on school practices. Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 248.

## 2.7 WOMEN RELIGIOUS AND THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF TEACHING

The idea of setting professional standards for teaching sisters had been developing in the convents since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Most teaching institutes followed the higher standards of teaching set by the Paris Ursulines.<sup>107</sup> Rogers has demonstrated that from the 1830s, French convents offered a full range of subjects in their novitiates, enabling novices to pursue ‘serious study’ in their teacher-training at the hands of the best of teachers that included professors and Jesuit tutors.<sup>108</sup> By the 1850s, women in convents had acquired a sense of professional identity - an objective that early feminists had hoped to achieve for secular women.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, varying models of womanhood were presented to girls in convent schools, from maternal teachers to those they perceived as ‘professional women.’ In advocating careers in teaching, the female congregations consequently broadened girls’ education and expanded their options with regard to future societal roles.

In 1847, the Rules of the Company of Mary Our Lady advanced the idea of the learned sister and made reference to education in the sciences. This constituted an innovation in the curriculum for women at that time:

The time is no longer such...that one can hope, without the help of the human sciences, either to give glory to God, nor great service to one’s neighbour...Our vocation requires sisters who are both learned and saintly.<sup>110</sup>

Between 1850 and 1880 women in France were increasingly taking teaching examinations at the completion of their schooling.<sup>111</sup> The teaching certificate or *brevet* was often sought by lower middle-class girls (in the day schools) who aspired to conduct schools as private businesses. Although bourgeois girls rarely took up teaching posts, the *brevet* was highly valued as it marked out the well-educated woman, and enhanced thereby her marriage prospects. Rogers’s examination of the private writings of convent schoolgirls in 19<sup>th</sup> century France shows that the teaching sisters did not simply respond to demand, but actively urged students to pass the *brevet*.<sup>112</sup> Her study demonstrated that from the mid-1890s most teaching orders in France “were fully aware of the need to bring their teaching practices and contents in line with a modernizing world.”<sup>113</sup> Ultimately, the Catholic teaching sisters contributed to the professionalisation of teaching in other parts of the world, including Australia, as will be seen in Chapter Four.

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<sup>107</sup> See Rogers, *From the Salon*, 150.

<sup>108</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 146-48.

<sup>109</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 144 and 286, fn. 34.

<sup>110</sup> *Tresor Des Religieuses De Notre Dame* Toulouse, 1847, Part I, quoted in Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway*, 327.

<sup>111</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 183.

<sup>112</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 185 and 292.

<sup>113</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 221.

## 2.8 JESUIT-STYLE BOARDING SCHOOLS OF THE ENGLISH LADIES

Around the time that Jeanne de Lestonnac and the Paris Ursulines modified enclosure for the active teaching apostolate, Englishwoman Mary Ward (1585-1645) sought to establish a teaching institute that would gain canonical approval as a religious order free from the obligation of enclosure.<sup>114</sup> This novel plan, though not fully realised in her lifetime, saw Ward establish the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM), or the English Ladies as it was popularly known on the Continent, at St Omer in Flanders in 1609.<sup>115</sup>

Against the backdrop of religious persecution in Protestant England, Mary Ward opened boarding schools on the Continent for local populations, as well as for expatriate English girls, and for girls specially sent to the Low Countries to be educated as Catholics, an impossible prospect back in England.<sup>116</sup> Ward's first boarding school, established in St Omer in 1611, replicated the Continental Jesuit schools currently available to English boys. In fact her educational framework, *Schola Mariae*, was based on the Jesuit's *Ratio Studiorum*.<sup>117</sup> Thus her schools, like those of Jeanne de Lestonnac and the Paris Ursulines, adopted the Jesuit method of education.

Additionally, as with the teaching vow adopted by the Paris Ursulines, the English Ladies ranked the work of teaching as their main apostolic activity.<sup>118</sup> The sisters supported themselves through charity, members' dowries and Mary's personal financial input along with any surplus from the *pension* charged for the boarders' upkeep. Clearly, Mary Ward's educational initiative, given impetus by the English efforts towards Catholic recovery, paralleled the convent day and boarding school innovation that the Church deemed essential for the progress of Catholic Revival in France. By 1628, the 'Jesuitesses' had schools throughout Europe, including at St Omer, Liège, Cologne, Trèves, Rome, Naples, Perugia, Munich, Vienna, Pressburg and Prague. The success of the Ladies' schools, as with the convent day and boarding schools in France, was reflected in the large numbers of girls attending them.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>114</sup> On the educational work of the English Ladies, see Lux-Sterritt, *Redefining Female Religious Life*.

<sup>115</sup> For a comprehensive and authoritative study of the English Ladies see Henriette Peters, *Mary Ward: A World in Contemplation* (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1994).

<sup>116</sup> See *Schola Beatae Mariae*, item 3, quoted in Cameron, Jennifer, *A Dangerous Innovator: Mary Ward, 1585-1645* (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls Publications, 2000), 188.

<sup>117</sup> Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway*, 125.

<sup>118</sup> *Ratio Instituti* f. 5, quoted in Lux-Sterritt, *Redefining Female Religious Life*, 24.

<sup>119</sup> At the English Ladies' school in Munich, the Paradeiserhaus, in the 1670s, there were three hundred students in the day school and fifty boarders. See Evangelisti, *Nuns*, 217.

The problems faced by the English Ladies mainly resulted from the conflict between the Jesuits and secular clergy in England.<sup>120</sup> In time, however, Mary Ward's institute, as with the female teaching orders in Europe, adapted itself, flourished and ultimately established a rich education tradition. This thesis focuses on the French-inspired convent school tradition which the Loreto Sisters brought to Australia from Ireland, not England. Thus in the early modern period and in different national contexts, collegiate style education based on the Jesuit-inspired Paris Ursuline model was pursued as the great enabler of women.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrated that the Paris Ursulines and Jeanne de Lestonnac's Company of Mary Our Lady pioneered the convent day and boarding school for which there was no precedent, and spearheaded a significant women's movement dedicated to girls' education. Both orders, but especially the Paris Ursulines whose numbers were greater, profoundly influenced the way girls' education subsequently developed in Europe and in English-speaking countries.<sup>121</sup>

This chapter revealed that while women pioneers of the convent day and boarding school were profoundly motivated by faith, they did not confine their efforts to advancing the Church's evangelising mission, as some might believe, but were directly concerned with empowering and advancing women through education. Thus, at the heart of the educational impulse of apostolic women was an essentially feminist ideal, albeit in embryonic form. This chapter proposed that the teaching nuns should be viewed as women of their times who were constrained by the anthropology of their era, but at the same time were well educated, forward-looking, pragmatic and empowered by the opportunities presented to them. Influenced by the milieu of the Catholic Reformation they responded in a timely way to the demand for female education that increased along with the extraordinary success of their convent schools.

This chapter demonstrated that convent schools were established as private enterprises, and as such conferred on the teaching nuns a level of autonomy then unavailable to many women. Having secured canonical status, their educational initiatives flourished and clearly placed them in the vanguard of the Catholic mission and of significant educational developments. Thus the teaching nuns in early modern Europe achieved much more than raising local

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<sup>120</sup> For further treatment, see Mary Wright, *Mary Ward's Institute: The Struggle for Identity* (Darlinghurst, NSW: Crossing Press, 1997).

<sup>121</sup> See Rogers, *From the Salon*, especially the chapter, "Beyond the Hexagon: French Schools on Foreign Soils," 227-53.

literacy rates. Jeanne de Lestonnac and the Paris Ursulines laid the foundations for the democratisation of education and for the new age of learning for women that would characterise the next century. In striving to match the Jesuit colleges for boys, the nuns' educational frameworks showed a strong interest in women's intellectual formation that reflected humanist and Jesuit influences, and incorporated a holistic approach to education that stemmed from the great abbeys of the Middle Ages.

This chapter revealed that, as agents of change, the teaching nuns expected similar qualities of their students to whom they imparted an education that was oriented to a variety of ends, and that was empowering and transformational in both its aims and outcomes. The coming chapter will examine the transfer of the Continental convent school model to Ireland by Nano Nagle in 1771. It will demonstrate that the empowerment and transformation traditions of the convent day and boarding school were faithfully continued in Nagle's establishment of the Presentation teaching congregation and in the style of women's education that subsequently developed in Ireland.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE CONVENT SCHOOL IN IRELAND**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will examine the extension of the French convent school tradition to Ireland in the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It will demonstrate that Nano Nagle brought the Paris Ursulines to Ireland in 1771 and replicated their successful convent school in the Rue St Jacques in order to provide quality education for bourgeois girls and afford free schooling to poorer children. This initiative meant that girls from the rising middle-class in Ireland who would otherwise have gone to Europe for a convent education were now to be formed for future roles as wives, mothers and leading women who could enact social reform and contribute to the renewal of the Irish Catholic Church. Additionally, the large day school while preparing local day girls for societal roles would enable them to earn a living and thus support themselves and their families as might be required of them.

The following analysis will show how Nano Nagle and her Presentation Sisters were at the forefront of a significant conventual movement among religious women from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards which advanced women's education and ultimately re-established Catholic schooling in Ireland. It will address the continuity with the French convent school model and points of divergence resulting from adaptations made by Catholic sisters to the particular social, religious and political circumstances of Ireland. In doing so, it will emphasise the powerful agency of the Irish religious sisterhoods in establishing structured secondary schooling for girls, and it will focus on the European convent school traditions of empowerment and transformation as they were applied in the Irish national setting.

#### **3.1 GIRLS' EDUCATION IN PENAL IRELAND**

Not until the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century did a resurgence of female religious life occur in Ireland similar to that attributed to the 17<sup>th</sup> century Catholic Reformation movements in France. Catholic religious orders were eradicated in Ireland with the 1539 dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII. The English Penal Code, suppressive of Catholicism, was enacted in the wake of James Stuart's defeat in 1691 and was not finally abolished until 1829, though it was enforced with diminishing severity as time went on. The Code in effect, however, crushed all efforts at renewing Catholicism in Ireland.<sup>1</sup> Although some female orders had

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<sup>1</sup> Clear, *Nuns*, 48-49. Clear points to the existence of several female religious houses in Ireland during the Middle Ages, these being: Augustinian, Cistercian, Benedictine, and Franciscan. It remains unclear, however, whether Dominican nuns were also present.

returned from exile in Europe during the period of the Stuart Kings, their communities were prevented from establishing Catholic schools by English Law and were periodically suppressed. The first returning group, the Poor Clares, arrived in Dublin in 1629.<sup>2</sup> The Carmelites followed in 1640 and soon afterwards a community of Dominican nuns was founded in Dublin.<sup>3</sup> Residing in Channel Row, Dublin, the Dominican women evaded the law by adopting secular dress and living unobtrusively. In this way, nuns were able to receive small numbers of Catholic gentry daughters to be educated while boarding.<sup>4</sup>

In the main, however, girls in the upper ranks of Irish Catholic society were still sent to the Continent for their schooling in convents. As with the daughters of recusant families in England, these girls received education that prepared them for their future role as Catholic women who would wield considerable social influence. The Ursulines in Paris thus taught many Irish girls. Helen MacCarthy, for example, of the noble house of Muskerry in Cork was placed in the Ursuline boarding school in the Rue St Jacques in 1661.<sup>5</sup> But for most of Ireland's subjugated Catholic majority, only two authorised school systems were available to them locally - the cost-free Charity schools and government-sponsored Charter schools. Charity schools grew out of the private philanthropic efforts of Protestant women who built schoolhouses on their estates for their tenants' children. Their objective, however, was to instruct and proselytise "children of Popish natives...so that the whole nation may become Protestant and English."<sup>6</sup>

English control of Irish education is epitomised by the Charter schools established by the Church of England for the proselytising of youth and suppressing the Irish vernacular.<sup>7</sup> The only Catholic instruction available outside family homes was gained in illegal hedge schools. These were conducted in the open air behind embankments and hedges to prevent detection and the consequent prosecution of teachers.<sup>8</sup>

Due to the official climate of anti-Catholicism in Ireland, the country lagged behind much of Europe, especially France, in providing structured girls' education on the proven model of the Paris Ursulines. It appears that convent day and boarding schools on the French model did not

<sup>2</sup> The Poor Clare community originally came from the convent in Gravelines, Flanders, which Mary Ward established in 1609 before founding the later Loreto institute. Clear, *Nuns*, 48-49.

<sup>3</sup> Clear, *Nuns*, 49.

<sup>4</sup> Channel Row convent records, cited in Mrs Thomas Concannon, *Irish Nuns in Penal Days* (London, 1931), 77.

<sup>5</sup> Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 61, fn. 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Report of The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge*, (Dublin, n.d., ca. 1730) quoted in Raphael Consedine, *Listening Journey: A Study of the Spirit and Ideals of Nano Nagle and the Presentation Sisters* (Melbourne: Dove, 1983), 43.

<sup>7</sup> Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 11-13. Walsh refers to reports by Catholics that corrupt school teachers in some Charter Schools recruited Irish children into exploitative child labour schemes.

<sup>8</sup> Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 13-16.

become available in Protestant Ireland until 1771. The introduction of such institutes initially came about through the drive of wealthy Corkwoman Nano Nagle (1718-1784), who established an independent foundation of the Paris Ursulines of the *grand couvent* in the Rue St Jacques, in her home city of Cork. Since the mid-1600s, there had been at least three failed attempts at forming a community of Irish Ursulines.<sup>9</sup> In succeeding with her initiative, however, Nagle decisively reinstalled Catholic convents in penal Ireland. The Ursuline convent boarding school in Cork was therefore the forerunner of much post-Reformation conventual education in Ireland.

### **3.2 NANO NAGLE (1718-1784) - AGENT OF INFLUENCE**

Nano Nagle came from a Catholic merchant family of Anglo-Norman descent in County Cork. The agricultural boom of the 1740s to the 1810s brought Catholic merchant families in the commercial centres of Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Kilkenny and Dublin, into greater economic prominence.<sup>10</sup> From within this burgeoning middle-class emerged increasingly articulate and influential, philanthropic women who had been educated in Continental convents. Such women aimed to regenerate both their society and the Catholic Church in Ireland. By the early 1800s, they had the financial resources to initiate transformative programs for social alleviation and education of the poor, and to establish the modern female teaching congregations. By the mid-1800s, these women had founded convent schools in Ireland that had all the marks of the transformation and empowerment traditions of the Continental convent school and Nano Nagle in fact spearheaded this conventual movement, as will be seen.

Honora (Nano) Nagle was born on the Nagle's Ballygriffin estate in 1718. Her paternal ancestors had landholdings in Munster that had been confiscated during Cromwell's reign. These were recovered during the restoration of the Stuart Charles II, towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, only to be largely lost again with the defeat of James II. For several generations, the Nagles dominated the flourishing export trade from the port of Cork.<sup>11</sup>

Nano Nagle initially attended a hedge school in the ruins of Monanimy Castle in County Cork. She was sent later to the Continent for further education, probably at the Irish

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<sup>9</sup> Ursuline records reveal that unsuccessful attempts were made to establish an Ursuline community in Ireland in 1644, 1658 and 1689. For further discussion, see Clarke, *The Ursulines in Cork*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Magray, *The Transforming Power*, 33. Magray examines the role of the Catholic upper-middle class in the formation of an Irish Catholic identity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>11</sup> Consedine, *Listening Journey*, 3.



Benedictine convent of Ypres in Flanders.<sup>12</sup> Upon completing her schooling, she went to Paris and resided there with her younger sister Ann for twelve years. Here the two sisters joined an elite group of Franco-Irish families who enjoyed the privileged lifestyle of the Parisian upper-classes and the religious freedoms then unavailable in Ireland.<sup>13</sup> In the late 1740s, Nano Nagle entered a religious community, the identity of which is unknown, but it was most likely the same convent in Ypres where she had been educated.<sup>14</sup> In any case, her abiding concern for the suffering Catholic majority in Ireland led Nagle as a lay woman back to Cork where she resolved to tend as best she could to the sick and destitute, and to provide free elementary Catholic schooling for the poor.

### 3.2.1 Re-establishment of Catholic Education in Ireland

In 1754, Nagle opened her first elementary Catholic school in a small rented house in Cove Lane, Cork City.<sup>15</sup> This action was in defiance of the Penal Code which remained in force despite a decreasing severity of its application. Her small school bore the marks of a parish primary school, ideally situated as it was close to the chapel of St Finbarr's.

Nagle's initial concern was solely for the education of girls, but by 1769 she had also established two schools for boys as well as four more for girls.<sup>16</sup> This provision of schooling came at a time when the need for boys' Catholic education had yet to be answered by a teaching congregation of brothers.<sup>17</sup> It was not until 1802 that Edmund Rice, inspired by Nagle's educational work, founded the Christian Brothers and began a system of structured schooling for boys, as will be seen.

Nagle worked apart from her family, perhaps in fear of repercussions for them, until her brother came to hear of her teaching activity.<sup>18</sup> In fact she escaped prosecution from the law and gained support from several influential Catholics in Cork.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, her schools were tolerated by the Protestant ascendancy and several reasons suggest themselves for this. Firstly, Nagle opened her schools in a period when the Penal Laws were less rigorously

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<sup>12</sup> Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 37-38; cf. Consedine, *Listening Journey*, 12-13. According to Walsh, Nano may have attended the famous St Cyr convent of the Dames de St Louis in France; however, Consedine relies on a tradition that places Nano at the Ypres convent from 1730 to 1734. Consedine notes that several of the Ypres nuns were related to the Nagles.

<sup>13</sup> Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 39.

<sup>14</sup> Consedine, *Listening Journey*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> Catholics were excluded from voting, acquiring land, and holding positions in Parliament, the legal profession, the constabulary and military forces. Confiscation of property was commonplace. Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 1-8.

<sup>16</sup> Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 45.

<sup>17</sup> Jesuit schools existed such as that of Fr John Austin in Saul's Court, Dublin, which was opened in the early 1770s. See Consedine, *Listening Journey*, 64.

<sup>18</sup> Nano Nagle, Letter to Miss Fitzsimons, July 20, 1770, reprinted in Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 353.

<sup>19</sup> Clear, *Nuns*, 25; Magray, *The Transforming Power*, 40.

enforced.<sup>20</sup> The changing political climate would eventually lead to the Relief Acts of 1778 and 1782 that did permit licence-bearing Catholics to conduct schools. Although Nagle's schools predated this dispensation, the rigour of the penal laws had already lessened. Secondly, Nagle's schools attracted girls from hundreds of impoverished families, which pointed to an overwhelming need for female education in Ireland at that time. Any educational provision for girls was as Caitriona Clear maintains "looked upon with favour almost universally."<sup>21</sup> Thirdly, Nagle's elevated social standing permitted her the autonomy historically reserved for upper-class women, which the Catholic women's philanthropy movements in European societies enjoyed. Furthermore, the Ascendancy may have accommodated Nagle's 'poor' schools hoping that the "introduction of middle-class morals to the wider Catholic population would create a more peace-loving and governable Irish population."<sup>22</sup>

### 3.2.2 A Strong French Influence and Vocational Orientation

In her educational ventures, Nano Nagle drew upon the spiritual and educational influences of France where she had lived for many years. In her schools, she adopted the curriculum of the *petites écoles*, which were mostly conducted by simple-vow congregations of religious women. In comparing the curriculum of the *petites écoles* examined by Sarah Curtis, with T. J. Walsh's summary of the daily program in Nagle's schools, it is clear that Nagle adapted the French program that included reading, writing, basic arithmetic and the Catechism.<sup>23</sup> However, pupils in the *petites écoles* would primarily read; few moved on to writing, which was reserved for exceptional students or those whose family situations required it. Significantly, Nagle ensured writing as well as reading for girls, both of which were promoted in convent schools in France.<sup>24</sup> By contrast, in the Charity schools in Ireland only boys were taught to write.

Nagle's study program as in the *petites écoles* was vocationally oriented. Girls mastered needlework and other handiwork, enabling them to earn an income and escape destitution.<sup>25</sup> She employed teachers for the secular curriculum, while she herself gave religious instruction in each school. To counteract the suppression of the Irish language, children in Nagle's

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<sup>20</sup> This period followed the demise of the Stuart cause at Culloden in 1746.

<sup>21</sup> Clear, *Nuns*, 25.

<sup>22</sup> Magray, *The Transforming Power*, 148, fn. 49.

<sup>23</sup> Curtis, *Educating the Faithful*, 83-88; Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 49.

<sup>24</sup> This was a transitional period between an oral and written culture, as seen in the shipping lists of passengers to Australia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which comprised two separate columns: 'Able to Read' and 'Able to Write.'

<sup>25</sup> Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 49.

schools were taught to read both in English and in Irish from texts such as the Douai catechism.<sup>26</sup>

### 3.2.3 The Counter-Cultural Dimension

No other educational system significantly counteracted the dominant Charter schools in Cork in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century apart from Nagle's schools. A letter from Nagle's successor, Mother Angela Collins, to Teresa Mulally in 1786, notes the counter-cultural impact of Nagle's schools:

The best divines of this city [say] that there never was so much good done as has been promoted by our holy foundress's establishment, as it's the only counterpoise to the Charter schools and the only means to prevent the growth of heresy.<sup>27</sup>

Any assumption that Nano Nagle was solely concerned with catechetical teaching denies the reality of her broader educational agenda. Although the efficacy of her schools is difficult to quantify, Nano's curriculum raised levels of literacy and numeracy, trained local youth for employment, and at the same time effected religious regeneration. For Nagle, the purpose of female education was to give girls the skills necessary for self-reliance. She thereby hoped for the ultimate alleviation of poverty and the transformation of society itself. Her pragmatic approach to curriculum should be assessed in the light of no system of government elementary schooling existing at that time. It was not until 1831 that the National Board of Education came into being in Ireland and established government schools modelled on the Catholic schools initiated by Nagle. Most Catholic schools at that time accepted direction from the Board in an effort to meet the needs of Irish children generally.<sup>28</sup> The Christian Brothers later withdrew their schools to enable greater independence.

## 3.3 SECURING THE FUTURE OF NAGLE'S SCHOOLS – THE IRISH URSULINES

By the late 1760s, several hundred pupils were attending Nagle's clandestine Irish schools. The burden of conducting such a large enterprise on her own soon caused her physical and financial strain. In deteriorating health, she sought to procure a religious order and supply committed and well-trained teachers to advance her work. Nagle was already receiving valuable support from a Jesuit priest Patrick Doran, and his nephew Francis Moylan, curate at St Finbarr's parish and later Bishop of Cork - both of whom had recently returned from

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<sup>26</sup> The title page of the *Douai Catechism* used by Nano Nagle reads: "The/ Doway/ Catechism/ in/ English/ and/ Irish." This text is mentioned in Walsh, Nano Nagle, 49, fn. 9.

<sup>27</sup> M Angela Collins, Letter to Teresa Mulally, March 17, 1786, excerpt in Consedine, *Listening Journey*, 108.

<sup>28</sup> Clear, *Nuns*, 26.

France. Together with these men, Nagle decided on the Paris Ursulines whose educational standing was known to her from her years in Paris.

In 1767, in response to a request by Francis Moylan, the superior of the Ursuline convent in the Rue St Jacques consented to train Irish volunteers as Ursuline teachers who would then found a convent in Cork and take forward Nagle's work.<sup>29</sup> In fact in 1771, the Paris Ursulines sent four Irish nuns to Cork: Eleanor Fitzsimons, Margaret Nagle (Nano Nagle's cousin), Elizabeth Coppinger (a relative of Nagle and also of William Coppinger, later Bishop of Cloyne), and Mary Kavanagh (a distant relative of Nagle and also of Elizabeth Coppinger).<sup>30</sup>

Nagle was cautious in the period leading up to the arrival of the Ursulines and thus advised Eleanor Fitzsimons, the first volunteer for the mission, that "the less noise is made about affairs of this kind in this country the better."<sup>31</sup> Presentation Annals of the 1830s note that despite "severe trials" Nagle "rather extended than confined the range of her exertions."<sup>32</sup> The financial means to finally secure the Ursuline foundation came from a generous legacy bequeathed to Nagle by her Uncle Joseph who had been a lawyer in Cork. Through Nagle's agency, the Ursulines became the first new female religious order established in Ireland since the Reformation, and the first institute to establish structured Catholic girls' secondary schooling on the French model.

### 3.4 ADOPTING THE FRENCH CONVENT SCHOOL MODEL

Nano Nagle is recognised as the foundress of the Irish Ursulines, having endowed and established the Cork foundation in 1771.<sup>33</sup> The following year, in 1772, the Cork Ursulines opened the first French-style *pensionnat* or convent boarding school in Ireland, Nagle's Cove Lane school being attached to it as a large free school. Through this foundation, Nagle clearly intended to answer the educational needs of the middle-class as well as of the poor. In a letter to Fitzsimons dated well before the arrival of the Ursulines in Cork, Nagle wrote:

I hope you'll act in regard of the young ladies as you think proper, and be sure I shall always approve of it. I must say I was desirous they would learn what was proper to teach young ladies hereafter, as there is a general complaint both in this kingdom and in

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<sup>29</sup> Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 61-62.

<sup>30</sup> See Mrs Morgan John O'Connell, *Nano Nagle: A Woman's Record of a Woman and Her Work*, which was originally published in serial form in *The Irish Catholic* in 1889, and reprinted in Australia in 1998 by the Australian Presentation Society. The writer, Mary Ann O'Connell, had links with the Coppinger and Fitzsimon families and in her book gives a valuable account of Nano Nagle's life's work. Copy in QPA.

<sup>31</sup> Nano Nagle, Letter to Eleanor Fitzsimons, 20 July 1770, in *The Collected Letters of Nano Nagle from the Transcripts of the Original Letters in the Ursuline Convent, Cork, Ireland, and Presentation Convent, Georges Hill, Dublin* (Aberdeen, South Dakota: Presentation Convent, Aberdeen, 1990), 9.

<sup>32</sup> Cork Presentation Annals (ca.1830s). The data in these annals was obtained from the founding sisters of the Presentation Order. Copy in QPA.

<sup>33</sup> See Clark, *The Ursulines in Cork*, 2.

England that the children are taught only to say their prayers. As for spiritual matter, I am sure the nuns will take good care of that.<sup>34</sup>

Against a background of continuing religious suppression, however, the boarding school opened with only twelve boarders. Nevertheless, it gradually became a highly successful school, receiving applications from “various quarters” throughout Ireland, especially from Dublin, where there was as yet no equivalent educational provision.<sup>35</sup>

Since older monastic orders in Ireland, such as the Poor Clares, had dispensed with enclosure, the grille and religious habit to avoid detection,<sup>36</sup> Nagle may have hoped for similar modifications by the Ursulines. In a letter to Fitzsimons she wrote of the need to relax conventual rules to suit conditions in Ireland:

I think religious discipline would be too strict for this country, and I own I should not rejoice to see it kept up.<sup>37</sup>

The Ursulines did not in fact introduce the grille or, initially, the religious habit, but they made few other modifications to Continental conventual life.<sup>38</sup> One adaptation, however, as a precautionary measure until 1779, was the customary wearing of French black gowns and caps, while the Ursuline habit was reserved for receptions and professions.<sup>39</sup> To Nagle’s disappointment, the new nuns maintained full papal enclosure, and consequently only the one school in Cove Lane, now within their enclosure, came under the Ursulines’ immediate supervision. Nagle also had envisaged that the Ursulines would “do all in their power to forward other establishments [in Cork], as in all appearance several may spring from this.”<sup>40</sup> Further convents, however, did not eventuate in Cork, as at that time there was no scope for more than one boarding establishment in a city of that size.

The key problem for Nagle was not that the Ursulines’ work in Cork “extended only to running pension schools for daughters of the well-off”, as Fahey has claimed,<sup>41</sup> but that their enclosure could accommodate only one poor school. Though the Paris Ursulines of the Rue St Jacques were renowned for educating the daughters of European aristocracy, they had not confined their teaching to the upper-classes. In accord with their constitutions, they also conducted a large free school for the local Parisian poor within the one establishment, as has been shown. In fact Nagle wrote of her “vast pleasure to find that Miss Kavanagh [one of the

<sup>34</sup> Nagle to Fitzsimons, 20 July 1770, 9.

<sup>35</sup> Cork Ursuline Annals (1772), quoted in Clarke, *The Ursulines in Cork*, 25.

<sup>36</sup> MacGinley, *A Lamp Lit*, 34.

<sup>37</sup> Nano Nagle, Letter to Eleanor Fitzsimons, 17 July 1769, reprinted in Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 346.

<sup>38</sup> Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 88; Considine, *Listening Journey*, 60.

<sup>39</sup> Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 85.

<sup>40</sup> Nano Nagle, Letter to Eleanor Fitzsimons, 29 April 1770, reprinted in Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 349.

<sup>41</sup> Fahey, “Female Asceticism,” 48.

postulants for the Cork mission] is so well pleased with teaching in the poor-school [in Paris].”<sup>42</sup> Thus in 1772, the Annals of the Ursuline convent in Cork reported that the nuns:

...had been enabled from the very commencement to instruct poor children in the principles of our holy religion besides teaching them reading, writing, arithmetic and needlework.<sup>43</sup>

By 1790, as many as three hundred children were attending the Ursuline’s poor-school attached to the Cork convent.<sup>44</sup>

### 3.5 THE PRESENTATION SISTERS (1775) –

#### FIRST OF THE MODERN IRISH FEMALE CONGREGATIONS

Nagle wished to continue the schools that remained outside the precinct of the Cork Ursuline convent, and she set out to establish a religious congregation of women who could conduct her original schools without the impediment of enclosure. To that end in 1775, she founded the Sisters of the Charitable Instruction of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, later renamed as the Presentation Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary (PBVM).<sup>45</sup> By that time, a limited papal recognition had been accorded to a simple-vow institute in the 1749 *Quamvis Iusto* ruling of Pope Benedict XIV. The decree had been issued for an Austrian community of Mary Ward’s English Ladies.<sup>46</sup> As was the case earlier, *filles séculières* (simple-vow female congregations) depended on episcopal approval for their corporate existence, and were not to be categorized as nuns, but could use the title ‘sister.’<sup>47</sup> This important, but as yet partial, step towards papal approval of simple-vow institutes came at a time when the number of such institutes in Europe was increasing while vocations to religious orders were on the decline.<sup>48</sup>

With increasing recognition from Rome, simple-vow institutes rose in status and emerged as the main form of female religious life in post-revolutionary France.<sup>49</sup> The Italian Ursulines provided the definitive model for such institutes. Although the Enlightenment has been viewed as one of continuous decline for the Catholic Church, particularly in France, the tremendous resurgence of simple-vow female teaching congregations over that period paints

<sup>42</sup> Nano Nagle, Letter to Eleanor Fitzsimons, 17 December 1770, reprinted in Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 355.

<sup>43</sup> Cork Ursuline Annals (1772), with reference to *Constitutions of the Ursuline Religious of the Congregation of Paris*, chap. 8, quoted in Clarke, *The Ursulines in Cork*, 25.

<sup>44</sup> Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 85.

<sup>45</sup> Nano Nagle, Letter to Miss Mulally, 29 September 1776, in *The Collected Letters*, 29.

<sup>46</sup> On this Austrian case, see Magray, *The Transforming Power*, 8.

<sup>47</sup> The word *filles* came to be literally translated in English-speaking countries as ‘daughters’ when in France it also had the meaning of ‘pious unmarried women engaged in good works.’

<sup>48</sup> For further discussion on the decline of vocations to religious orders, see M. R. MacGinley, “Nuns and Sisters - A Question of Historical Evolution,” *The Australasian Catholic Record* 85, no. 3 (2008): 301-309.

<sup>49</sup> The 1789 Revolution abolished solemn vows. French courts then recognised only simple vows on the grounds that the solemn vow of poverty denied Religious the right to own property. MacGinley, *Dynamic of Hope*, 43-5.

an alternative picture, one of renewal.<sup>50</sup> Decline of the canonically recognised orders in Western Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was thus countered by the flourishing of many new active female congregations.

In Ireland, however, developments in women's religious life followed a different timetable and were restrained by the anti-popery legislation. It was Nano Nagle who, in effect, opened the way for uncloistered religious teaching institutes when she established the Sisters of the Charitable Instruction as an active congregation in 1775. The initial community comprised three of her dedicated teaching associates, Elizabeth Burke, Mary Fouhy and Mary Ann Collins, who together lived with Nagle in her cottage in Cove Lane. The four aimed to "consecrate themselves entirely to the instruction of the poor."<sup>51</sup> Nagle modelled her pioneering institute upon the Sisters of Christian Instruction (1642), which she had observed in the parish of St Sulpice in Paris.<sup>52</sup> The French sisters conducted *petites écoles* for the Parisian poor and visited the sick, aged and destitute in the city's abhorrent slums. Nagle's congregation initially followed the Rule of the St Sulpice community until more permanent directions could be taken.<sup>53</sup> After Nagle's death in 1784, it was left to Francis Moylan to act in accord with her wishes, obtain pontifical approval and "settle [the congregation] on a solid footing."<sup>54</sup>

A qualified approval came in 1791 which suggested that the sisters' constitutions should be adaptations of the Italian Ursuline model for uncloistered communities. Nagle's confessor, Franciscan friar Fr Laurence Callanan, collaborated with Moylan in giving the sisters the new title of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Two dates mark the foundation of the Presentation Order - January 1775, when the community was formed, and June 1776 when the women received their religious habit.

The innovative character of Nagle's institute may account for the congregation's difficulty in attracting entrants during its first thirty years. Well-established Catholic families for whom

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<sup>50</sup> For an extensive analysis of the growth of *filles séculières* in France in that period, see Claude Langlois, *Le Catholicisme au Féminin: Les Congrégations Françaises à Supérieure Générale au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris: 1984.

<sup>51</sup> Bishop Francis Moylan, Letter to Archbishop Thomas Troy of Dublin, 7 November 1788, reprinted in Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 372-373.

<sup>52</sup> The Sisters of Christian Instruction were founded in 1642 by Abbé Jean-Jacques Olier. They conducted at least fifteen schools in St Sulpice. See Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 102.

<sup>53</sup> Between 1778 and her death in 1784, Nano Nagle had considered several French religious rules, including those of the Hospitallers of the Third Order of St Francis, known as the Grey Sisters, and of the Hospitallers of St Thomas of Villanova, and those of the Sisters of the Charitable Schools of the Holy Child Jesus or the *Dames St Maur*. See Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 102.

<sup>54</sup> Bishop Francis Moylan, Letter to Fr Laurence Callanan, 27 October 1785, reprinted in Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 369-370.

the “enclosed devotional life retained a higher spiritual value”<sup>55</sup> were naturally reluctant to hand over their daughters to this uncloistered group. In the main, such families revered the old monastic tradition upheld by the Ursulines in Cork whose convent, by comparison, had no shortage of aspirants. Consequently, in the transition period from the familiar image of enclosed nuns to one of new active religious women, the Presentation Sisters had difficulty realising Nagle’s vision of an expanding Catholic school system. The sisters continued to seek papal approbation to assure the survival and expansion of their institute, which by the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century comprised six teaching communities. It was not until 1805 when Pius VII on April 9 approved the congregation as a religious order, that the institute began to flourish. The Holy See’s reluctance from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to grant solemn vows to any new congregations, particularly in light of the abolition of such vows in France, would explain the delay in this decision.<sup>56</sup> Indeed the Presentation Sisters were perhaps the last congregation to be accorded solemn vows and in consequence adopted the style of enclosure of the Irish Ursulines.<sup>57</sup>

Presentation foundations in Ireland grew steadily over the next century. Their convent schools assimilated the various influences of French religious thinking, Ursuline and Jesuit pedagogy and the monastic Rule of St Augustine, all of which encouraged a love of learning and respect for the individual. Presentation convents were erected on the same canonical model as those of the Paris Ursulines, and the Presentation Rule incorporated the Ursulines’ specific teaching vow. However, the Presentation constitutions committed the sisters solely to instruction of the poor and forbade *pensionnats*, or boarding schools, for the wealthy. As a consequence, the Order escaped the financial burden of providing boarding schools, and from 1800 spread quickly throughout Ireland, especially following the 1831 introduction of the National School System to which their schools could become linked. Thus the Presentations would establish a convent with a large primary school every two to three years. By 1850, the Order had erected almost half of the ninety-one convents in Ireland.<sup>58</sup>

### 3.6 TRANSFORMATIONAL WORK OF THE IRISH SISTERHOODS

Catholic Emancipation, with the final abolition of the Penal Code in 1829, provided a significant impetus for many women in Ireland to enter the expanding field of convent education. In fact the number of female religious institutes in Ireland increased from six in

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<sup>55</sup> Fahey, “Nuns in the Catholic Church,” 9.

<sup>56</sup> For further discussion, see Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 177-178.

<sup>57</sup> Only monastic groups from that time onward were accorded solemn vows. See MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 54.

<sup>58</sup> Clear, *Nuns*, 36.



1800 (these being the Ursuline, Presentation, Dominican, Poor Clare, Carmelite and Augustinian Orders) to thirty-five by 1900.<sup>59</sup> The number of women in such institutes thus multiplied eight-fold between 1841 and 1900.<sup>60</sup> Magray, in her significant study of women religious in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland, challenges the accepted view that the conventual movement in the period between 1852 and 1878 was the result of a 'devotional revolution' conceived by clerics and led by Dr Paul Cullen, Archbishop of Dublin.<sup>61</sup> She shows convincingly that the Irish sisterhoods worked within the Catholic Church, but also formed a relatively independent, powerful movement that led the process of religious, social and cultural reform in Ireland, and did not play a merely secondary role in it.

Indeed the modern Irish sisterhoods that developed from the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, such as the Presentation, Mercy and Charity Sisters, may be situated within the expanding movement of women reformers involved in charity and poor relief in Great Britain and the Continent at that time. The French, Industrial and Agricultural Revolutions brought about new needs that occasioned movements of social, political and economic reform. In France, Catholic women's networks and institutes grew rapidly, beginning with Vincent de Paul's and Louise de Marillac's Ladies of Charity who from the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century supported the most widespread of the congregations, the Daughters of Charity. Such institutes aimed to alleviate the widespread economic hardship which primarily affected women. In Ireland, partial industrialisation and an increase and then contraction in population gave rise to new social, pastoral and educational needs.<sup>62</sup> Female poverty was commonplace, given the dearth of employment opportunities, lack of skills and education and low pay for women. In a concerted response, the foundresses of the new Irish sisterhoods developed transformative social programs that included hospital work and homes for widows, orphans, abandoned women and children, and prostitutes.

Magray has documented the success of the conventual movement in Ireland in effecting socio-educational reform. This success may be attributed specially to its institutional organization which produced social outcomes that few Catholic lay women could achieve alone. Maria Luddy demonstrated that from 1830 female religious congregations had become

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<sup>59</sup> This data, originally from Mrs Thomas Concannon's study, *Irish Nuns: Annals of the Dominican Convent of St Mary's Cabra with Some Account of Its Origin, 1647-1912* (Dublin, 1912), is quoted in Magray, *The Transforming Power*, 9.

<sup>60</sup> Clear, *Nuns*, 36-37.

<sup>61</sup> See Magray, *The Transforming Power*, 3-13.

<sup>62</sup> Magray, *The Transforming Power*, 33. The assumption that women joined religious congregations in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland because of decreased marriage prospects cannot be sustained. Magray demonstrated that such women were essentially motivated to do charitable works at a time of great social change.

“the public face of private philanthropic enterprise.”<sup>63</sup> The foundresses of the new religious institutes were, like Nano Nagle who preceded them, usually women of independent means who belonged to rich farming, industrialist, landowning, professional and business families that formed Ireland’s emerging upper middle-class.<sup>64</sup> Religious life offered these elite Catholic women the most respectable and effective means of realising their philanthropic goals.<sup>65</sup>

### 3.7 WOMEN RELIGIOUS AND THEIR CONVENT SCHOOLS IN IRELAND

As already noted, Nano Nagle’s Presentation Sisters were the wellspring of the modern Irish congregations that followed, one after the other, beginning with the Brigidine Sisters in 1807. In 1840, houses of women religious working for the poor made up eighty-one per cent of all convents in Ireland, and of these, fifty-five per cent belonged to the Presentation Order.<sup>66</sup> Among the recently founded Irish institutes, the Mercy and Presentation congregations attracted the most entrants; by 1900 they together comprised fifty-eight per cent of Irish convents.<sup>67</sup> It will be seen that Edmund Rice who opened his first Christian Brothers’ boys’ school in Waterford in 1802 hoped to do for boys what the Presentation Sisters were already doing for girls,<sup>68</sup> this reflecting the far-reaching and transforming influence of the sisters on large segments of the Irish population. The modern Irish sisterhoods who ultimately established convent day and boarding schools in Australia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the agency they expressed in adopting and adapting French convent school traditions will now be examined.

#### 3.7.1 The Brigidine Sisters (1807), Tullow

Daniel Delaney, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, founded the Brigidine Sisters in Tullow in 1807.<sup>69</sup> The Brigidine constitutions were closely modelled on those approved earlier for the Presentation Order.<sup>70</sup> Delaney initially sought a Presentation foundation for his diocese to answer the need for free elementary schools for the poor, but his request was declined due to a

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<sup>63</sup> Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy*, 35.

<sup>64</sup> These leading families provided religious leadership in Catholic communities. See Magray, *The Transforming Power*, 33.

<sup>65</sup> See Clear, *Nuns*, 148-156.

<sup>66</sup> Clear, *Nuns*, 101.

<sup>67</sup> Clear, *Nuns*, 52.

<sup>68</sup> Ignatius Murphy, *The Church since Emancipation, Catholic Education: Primary Education*, A History of Irish Catholicism 5 (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1971), 1-24.

<sup>69</sup> Sturrock, *Women of Strength*, 1.

<sup>70</sup> It was for this reason that the sisters assumed that their vows were in fact solemn, which further explains their observance of enclosure at the time of their coming to Australia. When final approbation of the Brigidine congregation was granted later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, their vows were declared to be simple and enclosure thus not required of them. MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 213-4.

shortage of Presentation Sisters.<sup>71</sup> While the reforming Bishop's initiative of establishing the Brigidine Sisters is thoroughly documented, the story of female influence on the institute's early development is less well known. Delaney's close friend, Judith Wogan-Browne from a notable Leinster family, used her wealth to endow the foundation and expansion of the Brigidine congregation and its schools. Her story is instructive of the significant role devout lay women played from the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the establishment and operation of the new Irish institutes.

Like prominent Catholic women such as Madame de Sainte-Beuve and Nano Nagle, who did not enter their own teaching institutes, Wogan-Browne never joined the Brigidine community either, but she remained the congregation's spiritual guide until her death.<sup>72</sup> Wogan-Browne was educated at the prestigious Irish Benedictine convent at Ypres in Flanders. She in turn played a commanding role in the cultural formation of the Brigidine Sisters and introduced Benedictine monastic practices into their religious formation. Delaney even authorised Wogan-Browne to preside at the weekly community Chapter meetings when he was absent.<sup>73</sup> Further evidence of her authority is clear from her opposition to Delaney's plan of establishing boarding schools, which were provided for in the Brigidine constitutions from the beginning. This development, however, was not implemented without Wogan-Browne's consent.<sup>74</sup> It was not until 1836 when she was in failing health that she agreed to the Brigidines establishing convent boarding schools.<sup>75</sup>

### **3.7.2 Mary Aikenhead and the Sisters of Charity (1815), Dublin**

In 1815, Mary Aikenhead founded the Sisters of Charity in Dublin. Aikenhead's father was a member of the wealthy Protestant society of Cork, while her mother belonged to a prosperous Catholic merchant family in the city. Though she was brought up as a member of the Established Church, she was introduced to Catholicism by her Catholic foster parents John and Mary Rorke.<sup>76</sup> At the age of six, Aikenhead returned to the family home and Mary Rorke was brought into the household where she continued to influence the young girl's faith formation. When Aikenhead's father converted to Catholicism on his deathbed, she was

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<sup>71</sup> Margaret Gibbons, *Glimpses of Catholic Ireland in the Eighteenth Century: Restoration of the Daughters of St Brigid* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, n.d., ca.1930), 141.

<sup>72</sup> Magray, *The Transforming Power*, 24-25.

<sup>73</sup> Sturrock, *Women of Strength*, 4.

<sup>74</sup> Magray, *The Transforming Power*, 144, fn. 64.

<sup>75</sup> By the mid-1840s, the Brigidines had opened convent boarding schools in Thurles (1787), Waterford (1816) and Sligo (1850). By 1886, there were six Brigidine convents in Kildare and Leighlin with a total of 248 members. See Sturrock, *Women of Strength*, 5.

<sup>76</sup> Margaret Donovan, *Apostolate of Love: Mary Aikenhead, 1787-1858* (Melbourne: Polding Press, 1979), 3.

increasingly drawn towards her Catholic relatives. In 1802, at fifteen, she was received into the Catholic Church by Bishop Moylan.

When Aikenhead sought to enter a religious community, there were but two convents in Cork available to her, the Ursuline and the Presentation, both enclosed. Although both Orders were committed to teaching the poor (an idea that appealed to Aikenhead) she wished to pursue Nagle's original ideal of an uncloistered religious institute able to undertake social relief.<sup>77</sup> In 1807, an invitation from Mrs Anna Maria O'Brien, then on a visit to Cork with her sister Frances Ball (later Mother Teresa Ball foundress of the Loreto Sisters in Ireland), brought Aikenhead to Dublin towards the end of the same year. O'Brien played a central role in Catholic philanthropy in Dublin at that time.<sup>78</sup> At O'Brien's home, Aikenhead met Fr Daniel Murray, later Archbishop of Dublin, with whom she collaborated to bring a community of Vincent de Paul's Daughters of Charity to Ireland, but she wished for some religious training before accepting the role of foundress. Accordingly, Aikenhead spent a novitiate period in the Micklegate Bar convent of Mary Ward's institute in York, which had been established in 1686.<sup>79</sup>

At the time Aikenhead completed her studies, religious life in France remained in a troubled state. Murray's idea of training Irish sisters in France was thus abandoned. Aikenhead accordingly founded, with Murray's support, a new Irish religious congregation which she named the Sisters of Charity. The ideals of her new institute paralleled those of St Vincent de Paul, and its constitutions followed those of the Bar Convent.<sup>80</sup> In 1833, with the help of Jesuit advisors, the Irish Sisters of Charity gained papal approbation, their Constitutions being based closely on those of the Jesuits. Aikenhead's new institute, originally inspired by the work of the Presentation Sisters, although her chief concern was health-care for the poor, focused initially on providing free schools financed by the dowries of entrants rather than on fee-paying boarding establishments. The Charity Sisters' uncloistered lifestyle enabled them to undertake social relief work that required regular visitation of the poor and the sick in their homes.

In a similar fashion, Margaret Aylward, a wealthy woman from Waterford whose family was connected with Mary Aikenhead's, modelled her Holy Faith Sisters (1867) on St Vincent de

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<sup>77</sup> Donovan, *Apostolate of Love*, 14.

<sup>78</sup> Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy*, 36.

<sup>79</sup> From the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Bar Convent attracted girls from Ireland, initially as student boarders and later for religious training. Anna Maria Ball and her sister Frances had been among the first Irish boarders at the school. See Donovan, *Apostolate of Love*, 20.

<sup>80</sup> Donovan, *Apostolate of Love*, 25.

Paul's Daughters of Charity.<sup>81</sup> She was educated by the Ursulines in Thurles, and her subsequent involvement in the Dublin charity movement from 1851 to 1889 was considerable.<sup>82</sup> Like the Presentation and Charity Sisters, Aylward's Holy Faith Sisters did not enter the field of convent boarding schools. Instead, Aylward established a network of city schools for the poor and an orphanage in Dublin, St Brigids. The Holy Faith Sisters did not come to Australia until 1961, and began their teaching work in Canberra, mostly in Catholic parish schools.

In 1835, the Charity Sisters established the first Catholic hospital in Ireland, St Vincent's, in Dublin.<sup>83</sup> Mary Aikenhead had sent three sisters to the Hospitalières of St Thomas of Villanova in Paris to train in their hospitals there as preparation for this project. St Vincent's was without precedent in Ireland since public hospitals, along with schools of medicine and of law, were up to that time under Protestant control. Although the Act of Catholic Emancipation was passed in 1829, Catholics continued to be excluded in practice from public positions of trust. Aikenhead, however, aimed to train Catholic doctors and nurses to care for patients of all religious denominations. Thus from 1834, hospitals in Ireland first began to be staffed with religious women.

As will be seen in the following chapter, the Charity Sisters were the first of the female religious institutes to come to Australia, arriving in 1838, where Bishop Polding envisaged ministry to convict women. Ultimately they were to establish convent high schools in Australia in the tradition of the Paris Ursulines.

### **3.7.3 Frances Ball and the Loreto Sisters (1822), Dublin**

Francis Ball, foundress of the Loreto Sisters, belonged also to Mrs Anna Maria O'Brien's influential and charitable circle in Dublin. In fact Ball was O'Brien's sister, and was approached by Archbishop Murray to make a foundation of Mary Ward's institute in Ireland.<sup>84</sup> It was envisaged that the new teaching community would provide structured female education beyond elementary level for the growing number of middle-class families in Dublin. In 1814, Ball took this plan forward and herself entered the novitiate in the Bar Convent, which had agreed to train Irish women for the proposed new community. Using her personal finances, Ball and two companions returned to Ireland in 1821, and in the following year made an independent foundation of the English Institute in rented premises at Harold's

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<sup>81</sup> Clear, *Nuns*, 51 and 97.

<sup>82</sup> The Holy Faith Sisters were canonically recognised with simple vows in 1867. See Jacinta Prunty, *Margaret Aylward 1810-1889: Lady of Charity, Sisters of Faith* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), 165.

<sup>83</sup> Donovan, *Apostolate of Love*, 71-72.

<sup>84</sup> Clear, *Nuns*, 50.

Cross, Dublin. Then in November of 1822 the community moved to Rathfarnham to a convent the Archbishop had provided for them south of Dublin. There they opened the first convent boarding school in Dublin for middle-class girls.<sup>85</sup> The foundress, by now known as Mother Mary Teresa Ball, named the convent Loretto Abbey, and from that time the new teaching congregation was known as the Loreto Sisters.<sup>86</sup> In mid-1823, the sisters opened a free elementary poor-school which was financed by the boarding school.

In establishing boarding schools on the Continental model, the Loreto Sisters answered the educational needs of affluent Catholic families, conscious that both the Presentations and Sisters of Charity focused exclusively on the poor. The Bar Convent boarding school in York itself replicated the Ursuline model of girls' education.<sup>87</sup> Teresa Ball made about twelve subsequent foundations in Ireland before her death in 1861, each comprising a convent boarding school and an attached free school. In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, several overseas foundations expanded the institute's global outreach.<sup>88</sup> In 1875, the Loreto Sisters from Ireland came to Australia and established Loreto Convent high school at Ballarat.<sup>89</sup> They adopted the traditional Paris Ursuline model and Loreto became a leading Catholic girls' college in Victoria.

#### **3.7.4 Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy (1831), Dublin**

Prior to founding the Sisters of Mercy in 1831, Catherine McAuley's philanthropy focused on the overall alleviation of women in need, as well as on the care of orphans and poor children in Dublin. McAuley financed her social and educational work through the fortune she inherited from William and Catherine Callaghan, a Quaker couple with whom she had lived following her mother's death in 1798.<sup>90</sup> Significantly, she invested in her own training as a teacher before establishing her schools. She undertook a period of personal intensive study and made observation of the teaching methods and social care programs others had developed.<sup>91</sup> She travelled to France to examine the emerging primary school system that developed from the *petites écoles* that had inspired Nano Nagle's work. In 1827 at Baggot Street in Dublin, she built a large multipurpose complex in which she opened a sizeable 'poor school' on the model of the *petites écoles*, as well as a residence for working women. This

<sup>85</sup> Although the Brigidines were the first of the Irish congregations to include the idea of boarding schools in their constitutions, they did not implement this provision until the late 1830s, as already noted.

<sup>86</sup> By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, spelling of Loretto had changed to Loreto, except in North America. Clear, *Nuns*, 50.

<sup>87</sup> Wright, *Mary Ward's Institute*, 102.

<sup>88</sup> Overseas foundations were made in India (1841), Mauritius and Gibraltar (1845), Canada (1847), and Manchester and Cadiz (1851). See Wright, *Mary Ward's Institute*, 107-108.

<sup>89</sup> MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 201.

<sup>90</sup> McGrath, *These Women?*, 6.

<sup>91</sup> M Bertrand Degnan, *Mercy unto Thousands* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1958), 126-127.

facility, known as the House of Mercy, was clearly a centre for transformational activity and reflected McAuley's deep interest in education, particularly in training young women for employment and in providing cost-free elementary schooling for the poor.

At that time, she maintained the lay status of her work and had no intention of joining a religious congregation.<sup>92</sup> In 1828, she gave her enterprise the title, 'Institute of Our Lady of Mercy', and her associates, known as Ladies of Mercy, used the title 'sister' within the walls of the Baggot Street complex. They considered themselves secular yet they adopted conventual practices such as a regular pattern of prayerful life and a uniform mode of dress. This reflected the monastic tradition but also the agency of Catholic philanthropic women as they determined the lifestyle that best served the needs of their work.

McAuley collaborated with Daniel Murray, now Archbishop of Dublin, to establish a new simple-vow institute of women religious whose main objective was to work among the poor and thereby augment the work of the Sisters of Charity. She chose the Ursuline-based Rule of the Presentation Sisters who at that time led the field in schooling the poor. In 1830, joined by two companions, McAuley undertook a formal novitiate at the Presentation Convent, Georges Hill, to train herself as foundress of the new institute. December 12, 1831, is celebrated as foundation day of the Sisters of Mercy, the day on which the three women took simple perpetual vows in the new congregation. Their simple vows did not require the Presentations' observance of enclosure, and their Rule stated that the institute was "established for the Visitation of the Sick Poor, and charitable instruction of poor females, according to the Rules and Constitutions of the Presentation Order."<sup>93</sup> McAuley was clearly influenced by Nano Nagle's original idea of a fully active community of apostolic women.<sup>94</sup> Apart from the emphasis on active works of charity, the Mercy constitutions remained closely modelled on those of the Presentations.

Besides Murray, who had been an influential figure in her life for some years, several clergy including Dominican friend Dr Andrew Fitzgerald encouraged and supported McAuley in her objectives. By the time of her death in 1841, the year that the institute's final approbation was accorded, McAuley's Sisters of Mercy had established sixteen convents, including several in England. In that period, many postulants entered the congregation, and the Dublin convent was prospering.<sup>95</sup> Then in 1846, a Mercy foundation in Australia was made in Perth where the

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<sup>92</sup> McGrath, *These Women?*, 9.

<sup>93</sup> Rules and Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy, quoted in Degnan, *Mercy unto Thousands*, 131-132.

<sup>94</sup> Mary Xavierius O'Donoghue, *Mother Vincent Whitty: Woman and Educator in a Masculine Society* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1972), 11.

<sup>95</sup> Degnan, *Mercy unto Thousands*, 196.

sisters established what appears to be Australia's first girls' secondary day school, as will be seen. Later, in 1861, Mother Vincent Whitty, who had been the superior of the Baggot Street Convent, established the Mercy congregation in Brisbane, opening All Hallows' School, a convent boarding school in the French tradition, in 1863.

### **3.7.5 The Christian Brothers - Gentlemen of the Presentation Order**

Edmund Rice, who had assisted the Presentation Sisters in establishing their girls' school in Waterford in 1798, aimed to adapt for boys the Presentation educational system for girls. In fact, he adapted and integrated the Presentation Rule into the charter of his male congregation and commenced his boys' schools in Waterford in 1802.<sup>96</sup> Rice and six companions prepared for their profession of vows according to the adapted Presentation Rule, and Rome commended their new institute in 1809. John Power, Bishop of Waterford and Lismore, at the suggestion of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, authorised Rice to draw up rules and constitutions based on those of the Presentation Sisters.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, the brothers made perpetual vows in the chapel of the Presentation Sisters at Waterford and they were even known for some time as the Gentlemen of the Presentation Order. Like Nano Nagle, Edmund Rice developed a practical educational curriculum that included geometry and bookkeeping, which would assist the illiterate and unskilled to gain employment.<sup>98</sup>

That the Christian Brothers carefully followed the Presentation system of education shows both the power of those women's agency and the collaborative nature of the sisters' work generally. Indeed the commanding early leaders of the conventual movement in Ireland, Nano Nagle and Teresa Ball for instance, collaborated effectively with clergy and achieved their educational goals, but were able to challenge episcopal authority when necessary. It must be acknowledged, however, that later on, as women of less wealth or influence entered religious congregations, control from above was more difficult to confront.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, stories of collaboration between the foundresses of teaching congregations and the clergy merit further attention by historians. Clear's study, for example, cites many instances of mutual respect and collaboration between the sisters and bishops in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> William O'Donnell, "Edmund Rice - A Glimpse at his Life, Merchant to Teacher Blessed," *Catholic School Studies* 69, no. 2 (1996): 2-10; Patrick Cronin, "Edmund Rice: The Educationalist - A Vision of Education for the Masses," *Catholic School Studies: A Journal of Education for Australian Catholic Schools* 69, no. 2 (1996): 11-14.

<sup>97</sup> Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 192-193.

<sup>98</sup> Denis McLaughlin, *The Price of Freedom: Edmund Rice Educational Leader* (East Kew, VIC: David Lovell, 2007).

<sup>99</sup> See Magray, *The Transforming Power*, 129-130.

<sup>100</sup> See Clear, *Nuns*, 56-64.



### 3.8 THE DEMAND FOR FRENCH-STYLE CONVENT SCHOOLS

Well-to-do families in Ireland placed great emphasis on obtaining a French-style education for their daughters. By the 1830s, Ireland's growing Catholic middle-class were putting pressure on the new teaching congregations to provide more convent boarding schools along the lines of the highly successful Ursuline schools and of the Loreto Sisters' boarding school at Rathfarnham. It was generally expected of daughters of wealthy families to be educated beyond elementary level in French-style convent boarding schools, as earlier generations of elite Irish women had been.<sup>101</sup> The teaching congregations certainly hoped that many such girls would form the teaching corps of the new convents and would require a level of education appropriate for their social rank, and suited to a religious teaching vocation. This Irish demand for convent boarding schools in the French tradition peaked in the wake of the French Revolution.<sup>102</sup> The Napoleonic wars and the Irish trade recession had occasioned fewer Irish girls going abroad for further education. The present thesis is primarily concerned with the translation of this French model of Catholic girls' secondary education from Continental Europe and Ireland to Australia.

#### 3.8.1 The Dominican Sisters

Among the older orders in Ireland, the Dominican Sisters at Cabra, in Dublin, established a convent boarding school in 1836 to meet the increasing demand for elite Catholic female education. It was considered also a means of financing their free school that opened in 1820, since governments had yet to provide free schooling. Thus, by the mid-1840s, French-style convent day and boarding schools were provided in Ireland by the Ursuline, Loreto, Dominican and Brigidine sisters. The Dominican Sisters had moved to Cabra in 1819 from their once flourishing convent in Channel Row, Dublin, which had been founded from their Galway community in 1717. The sisters had for generations educated the daughters of the 'old' Catholic gentry, as has been seen, and followed the cloistered contemplative tradition of Second Order Dominicans. A further Dominican foundation was made in 1847 in Kingstown where the Cabra model was replicated. Significantly, it was from here that a community of Dominican Sisters was sent to Maitland, Australia, in 1867, to work in Bishop James Murray's new diocese there.<sup>103</sup> The women accordingly opened a paying day school as well as a boarding school that became a leading educational establishment in the colony.

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<sup>101</sup> Clear, *Nuns*, 120.

<sup>102</sup> Clear, *Nuns*, 120.

<sup>103</sup> On the history of the Dominican foundation in Maitland, see MacGinley, *Ancient Tradition*, 37-66.

### 3.8.2 Influx of French Congregations in Ireland

The establishing of French institutes of women religious in Ireland from the 1840s coincided with the ascent of the modern Irish congregations. However, unlike the Irish congregations, which relied on donations from the Catholic business and professional classes, the French sisters in Ireland deployed their own resources to establish convents and schools.<sup>104</sup> Among the best known French institutes that established convent boarding schools in Ireland were the *Sacré Cœur* Sisters (1800) from 1842, the Faithful Companions of Jesus (1820) from 1844, St Louis Sisters (1842) from 1859, and the La Sainte Union Sisters (1826) from 1863. They opened exclusive day and boarding schools while the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul (1633)<sup>105</sup> and the Good Shepherd Sisters (1835), as part of their social care commitments, opened only day schools for the less affluent.<sup>106</sup> In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, several communities of French sisters came to Australia and established convent day and boarding schools on the Paris Ursuline model, including the *Sacré Cœur* Sisters, the Faithful Companions of Jesus and the Sisters of Sion (1847) who arrived in Sale, Victoria, in 1890.<sup>107</sup>

### 3.8.3 The Sacred Heart Institute

Sophie Barat, foundress of the *Société du Sacré Cœur*, Society of the Sacred Heart, established foundations in Ireland where she was assured of prospective novices with which to expand into Protestant England and other English-speaking countries.<sup>108</sup> The institute's charter was modelled on the Jesuit-derived constitutions of Jeanne de Lestonnac's Company of Mary Our Lady.<sup>109</sup> Although the *Sacré Cœur* Sisters did not take solemn vows, which were by then legally inadmissible in France and had been discontinued for new institutes by the Church, the women nevertheless observed a strict form of enclosure that was, however, less restrictive than full papal enclosure. Of the sisters, many were former Ursulines from before the Revolution or women who had been educated by the Ursulines and sought to emulate their model.<sup>110</sup>

From the 1840s, the Society began spreading to many parts of the world, with its schools enjoying international recognition and prestige on account of the cultured education they

<sup>104</sup> Clear, *Nuns*, 43.

<sup>105</sup> They were also known as French Sisters of Charity.

<sup>106</sup> Clear, *Nuns*, 58, 104 and 105.

<sup>107</sup> For a brief account of the Sisters of Sion in Australia, see Patricia Watson, "The Sisters of Sion in Australia," *Gesher* 4, no.1 (2010): 21-22.

<sup>108</sup> The first English foundation was made in Berrymead in 1842, then in Cannington in 1843, and Roehampton in London in 1851. Rogers, *From the Salon*, 242.

<sup>109</sup> Margaret Williams, *The Society of the Sacred Heart: History of a Spirit, 1800-1975* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978), 46. Williams's history of the institute remains authoritative.

<sup>110</sup> Williams, *The Society*, 56.

provided upper-class girls. Rogers found that while the *Sacré Cœur* Sisters made numerous adaptations to foreign customs and conditions, their boarding schools followed the French plan of study without modification.<sup>111</sup> Thus in Ireland, originally in Roscrea in the 1840s, the sisters aimed to progress girls' education by using the traditional French program of the *Sacré Cœur* schools that was based on the Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum*. Later, in Australia, as the next chapter will show, the *Sacré Cœur* Sisters and the Faithful Companions of Jesus retained many aspects of both French Catholic culture and spirituality in their convent day and boarding schools.

### **3.9 DEMOCRATISING WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN IRELAND – ADVENT OF THE CONVENT PAY-DAY SCHOOL**

The most significant development in girls' education in Ireland in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was the introduction of fee-paying day schools by the female teaching congregations. Up until this innovation of the late 1830s, the teaching sisters had provided two levels of education in the traditional convent school model that reflected the two social tiers of society. The Presentation, Charity and Mercy Sisters concentrated on the lower level, and provided cost-free elementary schools generally throughout Ireland rather than opening upper class boarding schools, whereas the Ursulines, Loreto, Brigidine and Dominican Sisters conducted both.<sup>112</sup> Although the first institute to open a pay-day school in Ireland appears to have been the Loreto Sisters at Navan in 1833,<sup>113</sup> the Presentation constitutions in 1805 permitted the establishment of convent pay-day schools in localities where no similar schools existed; however the provision was not implemented until 1838.<sup>114</sup> Thus one may attribute the pay-day school initiative to the Presentation Sisters.

The new convent pay-day schools provided affordable further education to girls in lower middle-class families. For them free or 'poor schools,' as they were known in Europe, were socially unacceptable, but boarding school fees were prohibitive. Known as 'middle' schools, because they added a middle level between the two-tiered educational provisions of French-style convent schools, the pay-day school reflected the emerging stratification of European societies into three tiers.<sup>115</sup> By 1862, Cardinal Cullen declared that the middle-class had "a grave and urgent need of Catholic education."<sup>116</sup> Ireland's emerging convent pay-day schools accordingly answered this need. They enabled daughters of local shopkeepers, craftsmen,

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<sup>111</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 246.

<sup>112</sup> Clear, *Nuns*, 104.

<sup>113</sup> Wright, *Mary Ward's Institute*, 103.

<sup>114</sup> Clear, *Nuns*, 104.

<sup>115</sup> O'Connor, "The Revolution," 42-43.

<sup>116</sup> Clear, *Nuns*, 104.

small landowners and farmers to receive the enriching education of the French tradition, which had hitherto benefited only the Catholic gentry. A moderate fee of two to four pounds was charged - around one-tenth of the boarding fee at the Ursuline convent in Blackrock, Cork, which in 1870 was forty guineas, nineteen shillings.<sup>117</sup> As at the convent boarding schools, girls were received from five years of age to late teens; and the curriculum deployed was similar though less enriching, with one foreign language being taught instead of several.

Clearly, the affordability of convent pay-day schools enabled the democratisation of education in Ireland in that higher level schooling now became available to the larger female population of the middle-class. According to Anne O'Connor, the pay-day schools and convent schools in Ireland were:

...two of the most important developments in the education of Catholic girls in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, because they were the only schools which gave them the opportunity to move upwards in society, catering as they did for both their primary and secondary education.<sup>118</sup>

On the Continent, the female teaching orders had contributed to the broadening of education to all by increasing the number of students in their boarding schools.<sup>119</sup> By the 1780s, many high-class establishments, which had formerly served around thirty to sixty boarders at most, were now opened to the growing middle-class.<sup>120</sup> The additional income thus gained enabled the teaching sisters to continue the operation of large free schools. The opening of convent boarding schools to a wider section of the female population contributed significantly to the gradual democratisation of education in Europe, which trend was incorporated in the social and political reforms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

When the Presentation and Mercy Sisters opened pay-day schools in Ireland from 1838, they gained a foothold in the education of middle-class girls, and thus broadened their respective social and educational reach.<sup>121</sup> The Presentations in time conducted at least twelve such day schools. These, however, were discontinued towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when other teaching congregations had become widespread, and national schools entered the field of secondary education.<sup>122</sup> Such adaptations to changing situations clearly exemplify female agency in creating educational institutions that best served women.

<sup>117</sup> MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 376, fn. 184.

<sup>118</sup> Anne V. O'Connor, "Influences Affecting Girls' Secondary Education in Ireland, 1860-1910," *Archivum Hibernicum* 41 (1986): 93.

<sup>119</sup> France's financial crisis of the 1720s reduced many convents to poverty, and the ban on reception of novices by the *Commission des secours* in 1727 deprived them of needed youth. Out of necessity, the nuns expanded their boarding schools to remain self-sufficient. See Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister*, 89.

<sup>120</sup> Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway*, 332.

<sup>121</sup> Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 364.

<sup>122</sup> O'Connor, "Influences," 93.

### 3.10 POST-REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS ON GIRLS' SCHOOLING

#### 3.10.1 Educating Future Wives and Mothers

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the teaching congregations in Ireland and Continental Europe combined elements of Ursuline and Jesuit education with post-revolutionary ideas on women's education. Between the 1830s and 1860s, French pedagogical literature addressed the need to appropriately educate girls for their future responsibilities as married women in charge of households. Women's publications and prominent female writers, such as Sarah Strickney Ellis and Harriet Martineau, promoted the idea that women required training to perform their maternal tasks honourably and efficiently.<sup>123</sup> Nathalie de Lajolais in 1843 advocated better education for women, not only to assist them to perform their maternal duties, but also to help them realise individual happiness:

One must raise girls for their happiness, no matter what their future is in society, rather than forming them exclusively for the habits and needs of men, rather than arguing in one hundred ingenious ways that man is the sole goal of their virtue.<sup>124</sup>

The approach taken by religious teaching congregations clearly concentrated on the critical role of mothers in transmitting religious and moral values to their children. However, the sisters' work in maternal education also had broad social implications, since women, as mother-educators could contribute to the re-Christianisation of society. Rogers notes that certain convent-schooled women also "gained the moral authority to visit the poor or the imprisoned, to move beyond the confines of the home."<sup>125</sup> Moreover, Catholic girls' schools, by virtue of their traditionally broad curriculum, conveyed a variety of educational messages to girls and emphasised skills and values that were not always domestically oriented.<sup>126</sup>

#### 3.10.2 The Importance of the French Language in Convent Education

In following the French pattern, convent boarding schools and convent pay-day schools in Ireland provided training in the social graces, in the purity of use of the French language, and in conversing intelligently and agreeably on a range of subjects that included history and French literature. Elite Catholic circles in Ireland considered a thorough knowledge of the French language essential for a balanced and cultured education and for reading the French spiritual texts which continued to influence post-Reformation Catholicism.

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<sup>123</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 94.

<sup>124</sup> Nathalie de Lajolais, *Le livre des mères de famille et des institutrices sur l'éducation pratique des femmes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Paris: Didier, 1843), 15-16, quoted in Rogers, *From the Salon*, 94.

<sup>125</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 92.

<sup>126</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 161.

Irish congregations, such as the Brigidines in Tullow in the 1860s, employed a French governess to help with French pronunciation.<sup>127</sup> Native French institutes went further and advertised French as the language of their school, highlighting the fact that their boarders were bi-lingual. An advertisement for the Sacred Heart of Mary convent boarding school in Lisburn, which appeared in the Irish Catholic Directory for 1875, is an illustration:

As French is the language generally spoken in the convent, the pupils will have the advantage of learning to speak it fluently and with the purest accent.”<sup>128</sup>

Evidence of the strong emphasis placed on French culture may be gathered from school entertainment programs, such as those of the Cabra Dominican nuns, which listed recitations, plays and operettas in French.<sup>129</sup> It will be seen that French as a foreign language continued to be taught in convent high schools in Australia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and thereafter in secondary girls’ colleges like St Rita’s, Clayfield, up to the present point in time.

### **3.10.3 Training in the Refinements - Upper-class Education**

In Ireland as on the Continent and later in Australia, lessons in politeness and deportment were deemed necessary for the formation of cultured ‘young ladies.’ An observer of convent education in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland remarked:

The refinement of manners which naturally characterizes ladies by birth and education is one of the striking features presented on entering convent schools after leaving a school of any other description.<sup>130</sup>

The importance of the social graces in French upper-class education up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century may be traced to a significant 12<sup>th</sup> century monastic tradition, rarely explored in histories of education. Monastic thinkers, both male and female, approached education in terms of the inner and outer formation of the individual in two contrasting ways. For the Augustinian canons, notably the Victorines, the training of novices emphasized outer comportment as a means of refining the ‘inner person’ or of attaining inner purity.<sup>131</sup> However, for the Benedictines, and this included Bernard of Clairvaux, exterior perfection simply reflected the soul’s perfection. Thus the quest for inner perfection was inextricably linked to outward poise and control.

<sup>127</sup> *Brigidine Centenary Record* (Tullow: 1937), cited in O’Connor, “The Revolution,” 38.

<sup>128</sup> *The Irish Catholic Directory* (1875), quoted in O’Connor, “The Revolution,” 38.

<sup>129</sup> Programs and prize lists, Dominican Convent, Cabra, 1864 to 1900, cited in O’Connor, “The Revolution,” 39.

<sup>130</sup> Report of J. Percival Balmer, Assistant Commissioner, *Royal Commission of Inquiry, Primary Education, Ireland, Report 1870*, vol. 2., 451, excerpt in Walsh, *Nano Nagle*, 225, fn. 4.

<sup>131</sup> Muessig, “Learning and Mentoring,” 87.

The high-born choir nuns also perceived wealth as a measure of virtue. Hildegard of Bingen for example received only women of noble families into the Rupertsberg convent.<sup>132</sup> Medieval nuns were considered “perfect by virtue of their noble birth” and their fine attire was “a necessary accoutrement for their roles as divine intercessors.”<sup>133</sup> In time, nuns replaced their secular and characteristically upper-class attire with a more modest religious habit, denoting an acquired canonical, but by no means less exalted, status. The above summary is important in tracing the history of ideas pertaining to training in refinements. It will be seen that elements of this refinement tradition were adopted in convent day and boarding schools in Australia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### 3.10.4 Development of Academic Standards and Vocational Training

The assumption that French-style convent schools focused mainly on religious formation and the refinements, but neglected ‘serious’ education, requires constant revision. Rogers has demonstrated that while the ideals of virtue, obedience, honesty and piety were stressed in such convent schools, “so too was hard work, including intellectual work.”<sup>134</sup> This present thesis has shown that although the teaching sisters were clearly motivated by faith, their convent schools, influenced as they were by the Paris Ursuline model of girls’ education, placed great emphasis on the holistic formation of women. Rogers has demonstrated that the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ursuline boarder was:

...introduced to a broad range of academic subjects and allowed to develop her intellectual skills through access to a natural history study, a botanical garden, and treatises on archaeology and geometry, as well as keeping a literary journal.<sup>135</sup>

Accordingly, the Catholic teaching sisters, while disposed to the refinements and to developing ‘*le gout*’ or good taste, retained a broad perspective on women’s education that was reflective of the Jesuit-based holistic tradition. This broad approach inevitably led to ambiguities in girls’ education. For example, both social refinements and intellectual endeavour were highly prized in 19<sup>th</sup> century convent boarding schools in Western Europe.

In Ireland, the Catholic teaching sisters’ concern for serious study has not been explored to the same extent as has the work of Irish Protestant women reformers in the 1860s. A possible reason for this failure is that Protestant women educators exerted immense influence through their professional associations, especially through the Ulster Head Schoolmistresses’ Association founded in 1880, and which represented around seventy Protestant girls’ schools

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<sup>132</sup> Muessig, “Learning and Mentoring,” 92.

<sup>133</sup> Muessig, “Learning and Mentoring,” 93.

<sup>134</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 189.

<sup>135</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 181.

in Ireland.<sup>136</sup> This association, in conjunction with the Central Association of Irish Schoolmistresses and Other Ladies Interested in Irish Education, founded in 1882, called for a government school system that would support women's right to be educated. Such a highly organised and visible movement of Protestant women largely overshadowed the Catholic teaching sisters' parallel interest in progressing girls' education. It also eclipsed the significant achievements of the Catholic teaching sisters who pioneered educational parity between girls and boys, not only at the primary level, but also at the higher or secondary level which their convent day and boarding schools provided, as has been seen.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, educationalists interested in raising the academic standards and vocational orientation of girls' further education, especially in Great Britain, questioned the relevance of training in the refinements in the new economic order that was based on the values of industry. French female activists such as Jeanne Deroin and Eugénie Niboyet<sup>137</sup> called for major reforms to the public service, university faculties and educational academies that would open professional careers to women. Joséphine Bachellery insisted that women needed useful or vocational education to survive the modernisation of society. She argued that girls from the *classes moyennes* (middle classes) "needed an education that would prepare them for professional lives."<sup>138</sup> Juliette Lambert (later Adam) argued that the objective of women's further education should be entry to the professions.

From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the *Sacré Cœur* Sisters, clearly in step with the new currents of thought on women's education, revised their curriculum to give improvement to the academic quality of their institute's program of studies. However, refinement training remained an essential component of the *Sacré Cœur* curriculum and thus of the formation of Europe's future leading women. The revised program of *Sacré Cœur* schools across Western Europe in the 1860s has been described as "intellectually ambitious."<sup>139</sup> The program included lessons in grammar, rhetoric, contemporary history and the literary history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, cosmography, arithmetic, sacred literature, archaeology, common law principles, physics and chemistry that applied to industry, Christian philosophy that developed logical skills, as well as practical hygiene and domestic economy.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> On Protestant girls' schools in 19<sup>th</sup> century Ireland, see O'Connor, "The Revolution."

<sup>137</sup> Deroin and Niboyet adhered to Saint-Simonian thought which promoted cooperation among the classes and also between men and women. On the influential writings of Claude Henri de Rouvroy, comte de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) see Claire G. Moses, "Saint-Simonian Men/ Saint-Simonian Women: The Transformation of Feminist Thought in 1830s France," *The Journal of Modern History* 54, no. 2 (1982): 240-267.

<sup>138</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 89.

<sup>139</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 182.

<sup>140</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 181.



A significant point which is often overlooked is that in Ireland, the female teaching congregations' provision of vocational education in their large free schools certainly predated the work of numerous feminists including Mary Wollstonecraft who advocated useful education for women in England in the 1790s. As has already been seen, Nano Nagle's lesser known educational initiatives enabled girls to earn a living, and thus helped improve employment opportunities for women. This chapter has also shown that the teaching sisters in convent day and boarding schools offered elementary and vocationally oriented courses to primary level students and a broader holistic education to day and boarding students. This latter education included cultural and academic subjects, fostering of the feminine virtues, as well as training in productive skills such as needlework. The narrow utilitarian objectives of vocational education, however, stood in contrast to the broader holistic aims of the French boarding school tradition.

In England, Protestant women educators responded to the climate and social values of an industrialising Europe and focused on training women for the workplace. This English approach reached Ireland in the 1860s.<sup>141</sup> Anne O'Connor refers to the educational reform that proceeded in Ireland between 1860 and 1910 as a "revolution in girls' secondary education."<sup>142</sup> In Ireland, the establishment of Protestant women's colleges reflected the spreading interest in girls' education beyond elementary level. Such further education was already being provided in convent schools, as has already been noted. The Protestant colleges included the Ladies' Collegiate School (later Victoria College) founded in Belfast by Margaret Byers in 1859, and the Queen's Institute (1861), Alexandra College (1866) and School (1873) that were established in Dublin by Anne Jellicoe.<sup>143</sup>

Anne Jellicoe, the Quaker educational reformer, founded Alexandra College to provide a university-type education for girls aged 15 years and over.<sup>144</sup> Her program prepared girls for work as teachers or governesses, and was influenced by competitive examinations that reflected the trend in England. Once the Royal University of Ireland opened in 1879 and offered degrees to women, Alexandra College consciously prepared girls for the university.<sup>145</sup> Significantly, the Dominican and Loreto Sisters soon followed Jellicoe and established

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<sup>141</sup> On women in education in 19<sup>th</sup> century England see Joyce Goodman and Sylvia Harrop, eds., *Women, Educational Policy Making and Administration in England: Authoritative Women since 1880* (London: Routledge, 2000); Jane Martin, *Women and the Politics of Schooling in Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Leicester University Press, 1999).

<sup>142</sup> O'Connor, "The Revolution," 33.

<sup>143</sup> O'Connor, "The Revolution," 32; Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy*, 17.

<sup>144</sup> Quaker women involved in philanthropic work established refuges, schools and crèches, and were instrumental in initiating the suffrage movement in Ireland. See Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy*, 64.

<sup>145</sup> O'Connor, "The Revolution," 33.

Catholic women's colleges for higher education.<sup>146</sup> Congruently from 1875, headmistresses of private girls' colleges in England, influenced by the French convent school example, were moving towards the professionalisation of teaching for women.<sup>147</sup>

In France, it was not until 1880, under the Camille Sée Law, that a national and public system of *collèges* and *lycées* for girls was created.<sup>148</sup> As has been seen however, convent schools already provided what constituted secondary education for girls - a field that was both pioneered and maintained by Catholic teaching sisters without government support. The rationale for the State providing for girls' further education was to open 'honourable' careers such as teaching to women without turning girls into *bas-bleus* (blue-stockings) or teaching nuns. The fee-paying colleges were for the French non-Catholic middle-class, mainly Protestants and Jews. At the same time, the new Ferry laws introduced a primary system of government schooling in 1880 that was compulsory, free and secular.<sup>149</sup> Such State-funded schools, which bourgeois girls generally did not attend, had a clearly vocational orientation.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, convent schools in Ireland and France were meeting the requirements of national systems that required vocational subjects. Boarding establishments for the upper-classes like those of the Sacred Heart congregation, were still in high demand, and tended to add new branches of learning to the traditional curriculum. The Superior General of the Sacred Heart institute at this time, Mother Goetz, emphasised the institute's provision of a 'complete' education for young women, which could meet contemporary needs while reflecting the characteristically holistic approach of French convent schooling:

How important it is for our Society to keep, in its work of teaching, the solidity and the elevation by which it can reach the standards of present-day needs, and give to the young people educated in our houses – together with precious lessons in faith, duty and solid virtues – all the knowledge which they have the right to expect from our zeal in a strong, complete, and careful education.<sup>150</sup>

The French congregations in Ireland, such as the *Sacre Coeur*, resisted the narrowing of the curriculum that occurred in the utilitarian model developed in Britain at that time. The Ursulines and Dominican Sisters as well resisted the increasing emphasis on external examinations that would qualify girls for employment, primarily because their boarders were not destined to become working women. The utilitarian curriculum remained irrelevant to this small segment of the female population, which was certainly expected to be well-educated in the holistic sense.

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<sup>146</sup> O'Connor, "Influences," 94-95.

<sup>147</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 194.

<sup>148</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 202.

<sup>149</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 205.

<sup>150</sup> Mother Goetz, *Circulaires* (1867), 46, quoted in Williams, *The Society of the Sacred Heart*, 130.

The elitist orientation of the Sacred Heart convent schools, however, served their clientele well; these were the next generation of *dévotés*, charitable ladies whose social outreach constituted their identity. Moreover, according to Williams, the Sacred Heart sisters, whose founding aim was to renew Christianity in post-revolutionary France, feared the universities and social change generally because both were “often actively anti-Christian.”<sup>151</sup> The Dominicans, however, essentially promoted women’s higher education, as has already been noted. They provided halls of residence for women in universities, and a teaching facility at the Dominican college at Eccles Street, Dublin, for female students who obtained their degrees from the Royal University.<sup>152</sup>

### 3.11 PAPAL RECOGNITION OF SIMPLE-VOW TEACHING CONGREGATIONS

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, simple-vow institutes had far exceeded solemn-vow orders in number.<sup>153</sup> Canon law had by then adapted itself to the unprecedented growth of active female congregations in Europe in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Andreas Bizzarri, Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, formulated guidelines for approving new religious institutes in his *Methodus*, developed around 1850.<sup>154</sup> According to his criteria, the new communities, of which many were female teaching congregations, were required to be centralized institutes, with special authority accorded to their superiors-general.<sup>155</sup> The institutes were categorized as congregations not orders, and as previously the members were known as sisters not nuns. Furthermore, the congregations were to be regulated by their own constitutions; they were to observe episcopal enclosure rather than papal, thus allowing their fully active apostolic works.

Significantly, simple-vow institutes could now receive approbation from Rome, whereas previously they were approved only at the episcopal level. Such recognition had the effect of further elevating the religious status and cultural authority of simply-vowed conventual women. The simple-vow Irish sisterhoods had already entered the field of secondary education through their pay-day schools and convent boarding schools. Continued success in this provision, comparable to that of solemn-vow orders like the esteemed Ursulines, was now assured for many simple-vow institutes that were to establish convent day and boarding schools in Australia during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>151</sup> Williams, *The Society of the Sacred Heart*, 131.

<sup>152</sup> See Kealy, *Dominican Education*.

<sup>153</sup> See MacGinley, “Nuns and Sisters,” 301-309.

<sup>154</sup> For further analysis of Bizzarri’s *Methodus a quae Sacra Congregation Episcoporum et Regularum servatur in approbandis novis institutis votorum simplicium*, see Fahey, “Female Asceticism,” 42-44.

<sup>155</sup> There were about twice as many women in religious congregations as there were male religious and clergy. Fahey, “Nuns in the Catholic Church,” 8.

## CONCLUSION

Chapters Two and Three of this thesis have demonstrated that the empowerment and transformation traditions of the convent day and boarding school constitute a significant strand in the broader history of women's education in Europe. This history is part of the story of religious and philanthropic women whose transforming influence on segments of the population moved social frontiers outward. Such women through their own initiatives and often in collaboration with clergy not only expanded access to girls' formal education, but promoted convent schools as a means to renew the Church and create a stable and civil society.

Nano Nagle's contribution to universal primary and secondary education in Ireland has not been fully acknowledged in Irish educational histories, given the political and religious ideologies that have competed for prominence in that still divided country. In a parallel way, the historiographical traditions in France, both the Republican and Catholic versions of history, have underestimated the significance of the French Catholic teaching congregations who laid the foundations for modern primary and secondary schooling. In her study of elementary schooling in 19<sup>th</sup> century France, Sarah Curtis points out that "historians have not yet given Catholic education the same detailed social and cultural analysis as secular schooling."<sup>156</sup> The same may be said of French-style convent schools established by female religious for the further education of women in Ireland and subsequently in Australia. This thesis endeavours to redress this inadequacy in the historical record and extend the disparate work available.

This chapter has specifically demonstrated that the French pattern of girls' education introduced to Ireland by Nano Nagle's Ursulines in 1771 was a template for post-Reformation convent education in that country. The coming chapter will examine the adaptation of the European convent school model to different conditions in Australia. It will focus on the mostly Irish institutes of women religious who advanced women's education in Australia through a common vision of the transforming power of education informed specifically by the Paris Ursuline tradition adapted to changing circumstances.

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<sup>156</sup> Curtis, *Educating the Faithful*, 7. Curtis's study focuses on primary education in France.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONVENT HIGH SCHOOL IN AUSTRALIA

#### INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to trace the development of convent education in Australia from 1848 when the Irish Mercy Sisters established Australia's first Catholic girls' secondary school in Perth, to the early 1900s, when the Presentation Sisters opened their first Queensland convent day and boarding school, Our Lady's College, at Longreach in the Central West. The story of the Longreach Presentation Sisters who founded St Rita's College in Brisbane in 1926 will be taken up in the case study that follows this chapter. Stephanie Burley pointed out in the 1990s that "throughout the literature little reference is made to the largely independent, order-owned schools set up for young ladies."<sup>1</sup> This chapter seeks to develop and extend the disparate literature available. It will demonstrate that the first wave of Catholic teaching sisters who migrated to Australia between 1838 and 1875 commenced their educational 'mission' by establishing European-style convent day and boarding schools for colonial girls rather than by comprehensively taking over the parish school system, as has been presumed. Only a few institutes, like the Irish Sisters of Charity, began with a broader social charter before subsequently entering the field of convent education.

It will be seen that the empowerment and transformation traditions of the convent day and boarding school constitute a significant thread in the history of Catholic women's education in Australia. This chapter will demonstrate that the Catholic sisters pioneered structured girls' secondary education in Australia which initiative paved the way for women's political emancipation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It will show too that the teaching sisters adopted the European convent school model and then adapted it to new social and educational pressures in the colony. Importantly, this chapter will identify the similarities in the curricula of private girls' schools in 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia that suggest a common European source. It will then examine the Catholic teaching sisters' common curriculum, music tradition and commitment to forming well-educated, cultured and responsible women in colonial Australia. As a contextual study, this chapter will demonstrate how the empowerment and transformation traditions of the convent day and boarding school are evident in the teaching sisters' *habitus* (or social understandings), aims, stories, pedagogical practices and curriculum offerings, all of which have been largely overlooked in educational, feminist and religious histories of Australia.

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<sup>1</sup> Burley, "None More Anonymous?," 23.

#### 4.1 THE CONVENT HIGH SCHOOL PROJECT IN AUSTRALIA

The Catholic sisters' commitment to girls' education in Australia provided the impetus for a conventual movement of considerable scale between 1849 and 1866 that saw women religious establish convent day and boarding schools across the breadth of the mainland as well as in Tasmania, achieving a vast geographical reach in less than two decades.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the widely held assumption that from the late 1830s Catholic sisters from Ireland and Continental Europe came to Australia for the purpose of staffing the emerging Catholic parish school system demands revision. It was not until the passing of the Education Acts in all States between 1872 and 1895,<sup>3</sup> and the withdrawal of government-paid teacher salaries, that women religious were increasingly sought for parish schools.<sup>4</sup> The convent high school project that served women in the colony was initially the sole domain of the Catholic teaching sisters, while the Catholic clergy provided parish schools under lay teachers. It is true that at the foundation of each convent high school, the sisters usually agreed to staff the existing parish school as well. Although a more enveloping involvement with general elementary education did come to characterise the sisters' work in Australia, their initial concern was with founding convent high schools. This picture is supported by Maurice Ryan's research that shows that parish schools continued to be almost fifty per cent lay staffed in the early decades following the Education Acts.<sup>5</sup> Lay teachers in parish schools were often Catholic middle-class women working for the small government salary or as volunteers,<sup>6</sup> this reflecting the current view, as previously noted, that elementary education of the poor was a form of charity.<sup>7</sup>

When the Catholic sisterhoods arrived in Australia, as to other mission fields such as America and India, they immediately established convent day and boarding schools. These institutions were known in Australia as convent high schools – implying that a higher or further enriching education was offered beyond elementary level schooling. At these convent high schools,

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<sup>2</sup> See Anna Barbaro, "Women Religious and their Convent High Schools in Australia: A Case Study of the Presentation Sisters in Queensland," *Proceedings of Brisbane Catholic Historical Society* 10 (2006): 1-21. See also M. R. MacGinley, "Irish Women Religious and their Convent High Schools in Nineteenth Century Australia," *The Australasian Catholic Record* 87, no.1 (2010): 3-19.

<sup>3</sup> 1872-VIC; 1875-QLD; 1880-NSW; 1885-TAS; 1852-SA; 1895-WA.

<sup>4</sup> See Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2: 345-46.

<sup>5</sup> Maurice Ryan, "Mythic Foundations of Australian Catholic Schools: Assessing the Heritage for Religious Educators", in *Echo and Silence*, ed. Maurice Ryan (Katoomba, NSW: Social Science Press, 2001), 217-230. See also Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:285-86.

<sup>6</sup> See V. Thomas, "The role of the laity in Catholic education in Sth Australia from 1836 to 1986" (PhD thesis, Flinders University, Adelaide, 1989), quoted in William Griffiths and Denis McLaughlin, "Towards an understanding of the administration of Australian Catholic education," *International Studies in Educational Administration* 28 (2000): 25-41.

<sup>7</sup> Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy*, 214.

girls received what was considered quality education, and gained literacy and numeracy. As well they gained employment skills which enabled them to competently perform societal roles and to earn an income if necessary.<sup>8</sup> Thus in Australia as in Ireland, the Catholic teaching sisters were part of a broader 19<sup>th</sup> century movement of socially conscious women that sought to advance women through quality education, and to bring about social alleviation and moral regeneration, as well as cultural change.

Leading Catholic families and their parish priest often strove together to persuade religious sisters to settle in their parish and provide a convent high school. Margaret Walsh, in her history of the Good Samaritan Sisters, has noted that the sisters “could, independently, accept or refuse their request” instancing “the power and influence of active religious women,” since “their response was never a foregone conclusion.”<sup>9</sup>

As the Catholic sisters were drawn into replacing wage-earning lay teachers in parish schools across Australia, their educational apostolate expanded. Hence the convent school project in Australia subsumed the much-needed task of conducting, and thereby sustaining, the evolving parish school system. In so doing, the Catholic teaching sisters exerted more agency and resolve in addressing the education question in colonial Australia than has been recognised. Here as in Europe, the convent high school was the enabler of women. It existed to serve women and pursued educational aims that were empowering.

## **4.2 FORERUNNERS OF THE CONVENT HIGH SCHOOL**

### **4.2.1 Perth, Western Australia (1849)**

The Mercy Sisters in 1849 at Victoria Square in Perth opened the first European-style convent secondary school in Australia.<sup>10</sup> The foundation was initially a pay-day school, only later would it become a convent high school with boarders. The Mercy Sisters were the second group of women religious to come to Australia, arriving in the Swan River Colony in 1846.<sup>11</sup> Their coming was preceded by the Irish Sisters of Charity who arrived in Sydney in 1838. Unlike most other congregations that were to establish convent high schools upon arrival, the Sisters of Charity did not enter the high school field for at least two decades. Instead, these sisters initially focused on prison ministry and on creating social service institutions where

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<sup>8</sup> On the contribution of the Catholic sisterhoods to the development of social welfare, health care and educational institutions in the United States, see Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*.

<sup>9</sup> Walsh, *The Good Sams*, 144.

<sup>10</sup> McLay, *Women Out of Their Sphere*.

<sup>11</sup> McLay, “Writing Mercy Women’s History,” 38.

none had existed before.<sup>12</sup> However, they also supervised in lay-staffed Catholic elementary schools.

The Mercy Sisters came to Australia to open a convent school in response to a request by the newly appointed Bishop of Perth, John Brady.<sup>13</sup> The sisters left from St Catherine's convent, Baggot Street, Dublin, and arrived in Perth in 1846. There they established a convent under the leadership of Mother Ursula Frayne.<sup>14</sup> Frayne planned to open three schools, "one for the poor, one for the rich and one for the dear natives"<sup>15</sup> on the model of the convent pay-day schools in Ireland, as has been examined in the previous chapter. M Ursula Frayne indicated to the Archbishop of Dublin in 1852 that the income from fees was adequately financing the sisters' educational mission in Perth:

We have endeavoured to lighten the burden on the mission by opening a school for the children of the gentry distinct from the poor school. It is doing very well.<sup>16</sup>

Later, with the increasing demand for convent high school education in the West Australian colony, the Mercy pay-day school in Perth was expanded to a full convent day and boarding school in the European tradition, this development reflecting the Perth sisters' readiness to adapt to changing needs.

#### **4.2.2 Sydney, New South Wales (1851)**

On the eastern mainland, Bishop John Bede Polding, first Vicar Apostolic of New Holland and Van Diemen's Land, besought female teaching orders from England, Ireland and France to make foundations in Australia for the main purpose of providing European-style convent high schools for colonial girls. As early as 1841, Polding expected that at least one of the institutes that he had approached would open a 'high quality' Catholic girls' college in Sydney. It was envisaged that a convent day and boarding school would serve as a counterpart to St Mary's Seminary for boys, which Polding had recently established at Woolloomooloo. Fogarty has noted that St Mary's Seminary aimed to "transcend the mere bread-and-butter preoccupations of the masses" and to prepare an "elite from among whom the offices of Church and State could eventually be filled."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The sisters initially opened a poor school at Parramatta which was discontinued soon afterwards. See Donovan, *Apostolate of Love*, 233.

<sup>13</sup> Geraldine Byrne, *Valiant Women: Letters from the Foundation Sisters of Mercy in Western Australia, 1845-1849* (Melbourne: Polding Press, 1981), xi, xii. Brady became embroiled in litigations with various clergy and in a long-running dispute with the Mercy Sisters in Perth.

<sup>14</sup> Byrne, *Valiant Women*, xi.

<sup>15</sup> M Ursula Frayne, Letter to Rev. M Cecilia Marmion, 10 January 1846, quoted in Byrne, *Valiant Women*, 20.

<sup>16</sup> M Ursula Frayne, Letter to Archbishop Paul Cullen of Dublin, 25 September 1852, excerpt in Patrick Francis Moran, *History of the Catholic Church in Australasia* (Sydney: Oceanic Publishing, 1896), 567.

<sup>17</sup> Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2: 312.



In a parallel way, Catholic sisters aimed to form well-educated Catholic women who would provide a stabilizing and humanising cultural influence on their families and upon the neighbourhoods of small pioneering communities. A convent high school would also serve as a source of vocations, preparing religiously inclined women for a transforming role in the colony's future development. Furthermore, Polding clearly recognised that convent high schools, by virtue of their private enterprise nature, would be quite separate from the parochial schools he had established.<sup>18</sup>

At the beginning, Polding made a personal approach to Madeleine Sophie Barat's Society of the Sacred Heart in France, and then called upon the Irish Ursulines and the Presentations in Ireland. None of the three teaching institutes, however, was able to make a foundation in Australia at that time. M Sophie Barat's response to Polding was: "Refusal or indefinite postponement - that is my usual answer. How painful..."<sup>19</sup> Thus women religious who did come to Australia clearly exercised agency in making decisions about where to establish foundations (often limited by an over-commitment at home or elsewhere) about the level of autonomy they resolved to maintain, and about the style of education they wished to provide. In Ireland, the persistence of destitution, disease and famine, all the result of rapid social and economic change, drew heavily on the sisters' resources and personnel. Moreover, overseas expansion had already absorbed many personnel from these convents. For example, the Presentation Order had established foundations in Newfoundland (1833), Manchester (1836), Madras (1842) and San Francisco (1854) before coming to Australia in 1866. Bishops in Australia who also sought male religious for establishing boys' colleges encountered similar constraints.

By 1848, Polding had succeeded in bringing two English Benedictine nuns to Sydney, Dame Magdalene le Clerc from Stanbrook Abbey in Worcestershire, and Sr Mary Scholastica Gregory from Princethorpe convent in Warwickshire. The women established themselves on the Parramatta River at a property acquired by Polding, which he named 'Subiaco', and there began a high-class monastic-style convent boarding school along Benedictine lines. The nuns designed Subiaco as a replica of Princethorpe, their exclusive boarding school conducted in England by Benedictine nuns displaced from France during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>20</sup> In 1851,

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<sup>18</sup> See Pauline Fitz-Walter, "Benedictinism Encountered in Australian Education: A Critical Appraisal of the Educational Contribution Made by the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of Saint Benedict" (M Ed thesis, University of Queensland, 1968). See also Frances O'Donoghue, *The Bishop of Botany Bay: The Life of John Bede Polding, Australia's First Catholic Archbishop* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1982).

<sup>19</sup> The Sacred Heart Sisters eventually arrived in Australia in 1882 and established a convent boarding school at Rose Bay. See Williams, *The Society of the Sacred Heart*, 125-26.

<sup>20</sup> See MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 75-7.

Subiaco was opened as a convent high school modelled on the French *pensionnat* and it accepted boarders from the colony and from the Pacific Islands. *The Sydney Chronicle* in 1848 rightly surmised that Subiaco sought to equal the “vast benefits which have resulted from the establishment of St Mary’s Seminary” for boys.<sup>21</sup> In pointing out the teaching credentials and commitment of the Subiaco nuns, *The Chronicle* described the women as:

...ladies generally high-born and accomplished...devoted principally to the education and training of female youth.

Subiaco soon gained a reputation for quality education of girls and became a source of religious vocations, including for the Sisters of Charity whose social work and prison ministry had already brought them into prominence as transforming women.<sup>22</sup> As in Ireland, the Sisters of Charity became increasingly involved in formal education. Following their coming to Sydney (1838) and until 1858, they conducted no schools themselves but assisted and supervised lay teachers – paid by the government – in the expanding parish school system. However, their subsequent foundations almost all began with the foundation of a school, as in Ireland.<sup>23</sup> In Sydney they were to undertake a teaching support program which assisted and supervised lay teachers in the expanding parish school system.

The imperial-styled ‘mission’ of the French teaching orders in the French colonies reappeared in colonial Australia at the hands of French institutes such as the *Sacré Coeur* Sisters and the Faithful Companions of Jesus as they implemented the French convent school model. In a similar fashion, at Rydalmere’s Subiaco, the Benedictine nuns placed emphasis on French literature and language, and in the first decade of the school the teachers were recruited from Princethorpe.<sup>24</sup> The Benedictine community at Princethorpe derived originally from the abbey of Montargis which was founded in France in 1630.<sup>25</sup> The sisters at Subiaco also retained elements of cloistered monastic life, for example, of individual or small-group instruction in less formal situations than classrooms. Subiaco soon emerged on the eastern mainland of Australia as the forerunner of French-style convent high schools that were later to spread wider.

#### **4.2.3 Brisbane, Queensland (1861)**

From further north in the new State of Queensland, moneyed families sent their daughters to Subiaco in Sydney or to Europe to receive the convent high school education that was unavailable in Brisbane. Queensland’s first Catholic bishop, James Quinn, was unsuccessful

<sup>21</sup> *The Sydney Chronicle*, September 9, 1848, quoted in Fitz-Walter, “Benedictinism Encountered,” 52.

<sup>22</sup> Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2: 380-81.

<sup>23</sup> Donovan, *Apostolate of Love*, 233.

<sup>24</sup> MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 79.

<sup>25</sup> See MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 75-7.

in persuading the Irish Dominican nuns at Sion Hill, Dublin, to establish a much needed convent high school in his new diocese. However, the more mobile Mercy Sisters answered that need and led by Mother Vincent Whitty arrived in Brisbane in 1861 from the Baggot Street convent in Dublin.<sup>26</sup> M Vincent's letters reveal that she had received requests also from women on remote properties in Queensland to establish a convent boarding school in Brisbane for the further education of girls. Among the petitioners were a past pupil of Subiaco, a young woman who was ultimately "sent to England to finish her education at Stanbrook" Abbey,<sup>27</sup> and another woman who sought for her daughters "a better education" in Queensland.<sup>28</sup> Thus, in 1861, soon after arrival in Brisbane, the Mercy Sisters opened a fee-paying school at St Stephen's church in Elizabeth Street. The school was transferred to Ann Street in 1863 and became All Hallows' School.<sup>29</sup>

Prior to the establishment of Brisbane Girls' Grammar School in 1869, All Hallows' was the only Queensland school dedicated to the education of girls and to providing what then constituted secondary education.<sup>30</sup> Such an educational initiative placed the Mercy Sisters in Brisbane at the forefront of developments in women's education at a time when there was no widespread call for schooling beyond primary level.<sup>31</sup> However, demand for such Catholic women's educational institutions increased markedly in Queensland with the success of All Hallows' Convent School.

#### 4.2.4 Hobart, Tasmania (1868)

Until the Presentation Sisters from Fermoy in Cork, Ireland, opened St Mary's convent high school in Hobart in 1868, Catholic girls in Tasmania were either sent to Subiaco in Sydney or to England and Continental Europe for further education. It appears the only other noteworthy girls' boarding school in Tasmania was a small private academy, Ellinthorpe Hall (ca. 1827), in Hobart Town, but it had closed in 1840.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>26</sup> O'Donoghue, *Mother Vincent*, 104.

<sup>27</sup> M Vincent Whitty, Letter to Reverend Mother, Baggot Street, Dublin, 13 May 1861, reprinted in *Mercy Women Making History: From the Pen of Mother Vincent Whitty* (Ashgrove, Qld: Corporation of the Trustees of the Order of the Sisters of Mercy in Queensland, 2001), 25-31.

<sup>28</sup> See O'Donoghue, *Mother Vincent*, 105.

<sup>29</sup> Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*; see also Peter Connell, "The Built Heritage of All Hallows' Convent and School." *Proceedings of Brisbane Catholic Historical Society* 7 (2000): 101-123.

<sup>30</sup> O'Donoghue, *Mother Vincent*, 60. The development of denominational colleges and grammar schools for girls is traced in Theobald's study, *Knowing Women*.

<sup>31</sup> O'Donoghue, *Mother Vincent*, 60.

<sup>32</sup> Such academies were often short-lived. One of the founders of Ellinthorpe Hall, Hannah Davice, moved the school to Ross before closing it in 1840. Another of the founders, Susannah Purbrick, went on to establish another school, Carr Villa, near Launceston in 1848, but in 1866 it too was discontinued. See Theobald, *Knowing Women*, 35-37.

The Hobart Presentation convent, adjoining St Mary's cathedral, was the first of five independent Australian Presentation foundations made directly from Ireland. The sisters came to Tasmania at the request of Daniel Murphy, Bishop of Hobart, whose youngest sister, (Ellen) Mother Xavier Murphy, was superior of the Fermoy convent.<sup>33</sup> Upon the completion of their convent in 1868, the sisters "at once" opened St Mary's College, a convent day and boarding school "for the education of girls of the upper and poorer classes."<sup>34</sup> Previously in their history, the chief commitment of the Presentation Sisters lay with the free education of the poor, and they had been opening pay-day schools since 1838, as has already been noted. In Ireland, the Order's Rules and Constitutions forbade the opening of boarding schools, not least because ample provision of such schools for upper-class girls was already being made by institutes such as the Ursuline, Loreto, Brigidine, Sacred Heart and Dominican Sisters.

### **4.3 ADAPTING TO NEW NEEDS – DEMOCRATISING WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA**

#### **4.3.1 Boarding Provision in Convent High Schools**

Once in Australia, institutes such as the Presentation and Charity Sisters obtained papal rescripts required to open boarding schools which they had not conducted in Ireland.<sup>35</sup> Thus, prior to leaving Fermoy, the Presentation Sisters applied to Rome to open a 'Boarding School for Young Ladies' in Hobart that would cater to the better-off families of the district.<sup>36</sup> When approval came in 1867, the sisters established St Mary's College as a convent day and boarding school on the European model.

The readiness of the Hobart sisters to adapt to new needs exemplifies the agency of women religious in adjusting constitutional rules to allow for their present educational apostolate. A year later, *The Tasmanian Catholic Standard* applauded the adaptability of the Hobart Presentation Sisters in providing education to children in favourable economic circumstances "as the Constitutions stipulated might be done where there was no other provision" for such middle-class schooling:<sup>37</sup>

Though specially devoted to the education of the poor, we are glad to see by the advertisement that the ladies of the Presentation Convent will be prepared to teach a higher class of pupils as well...parents will now have an opportunity of having their

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<sup>33</sup> M. R. MacGinley, *Roads to Sion: Presentation Sisters in Australia 1866-1980* (Brisbane: Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary [hereafter PBVM], 1983), 52.

<sup>34</sup> Moran, *History of the Catholic Church in Australasia*, 287.

<sup>35</sup> In some instances, such as at Presentation convents at Elsternwick, Geraldton and Wagga Wagga, the boarding provision was added later to the convent day high school. See MacGinley, *Roads to Sion*, 166.

<sup>36</sup> Noela Fox, *An Acorn Grows Among the Gums: The Presentation Sisters, Tasmania, 1866-2006* (Hobart: Presentation Sisters Property Association, Tasmania, 2006), 19.

<sup>37</sup> Consedine, *Listening Journey*, 297.

daughters instructed in the highest branches, and accomplishments of the first order placed within their reach...<sup>38</sup>

Similar adaptations were made by the Sisters of Charity in Sydney after they obtained a papal rescript that affirmed their “gratuitous attendance on the poor” and freedom “to devote themselves to the welfare of the richer classes, particularly in day and boarding schools, receiving therefrom the usual fees.”<sup>39</sup> The Charity convent high school at Potts Point (1886) quickly became a leading educational centre for women in New South Wales, drawing boarders from around the continent and even from the Pacific Islands.<sup>40</sup> By 1910, the Charity Sisters had opened convent high schools in New South Wales also in Concord, Paddington and Katoomba.<sup>41</sup> In Victoria, they established the highly successful Melbourne Catholic Ladies’ College in 1901. In similar fashion, the Poor Clare Sisters who arrived in Sydney from Ireland in 1883 found it necessary also to adapt their Rule “to meet the exigencies of the place and time”:

It was decided to open a school at Waverley for young ladies although contrary to our usual custom of teaching the *poor* only.<sup>42</sup>

Over time, and as new needs arose, the Catholic sisters made further changes to enclosure rules, religious dress norms and congregational structures, as will be seen.<sup>43</sup>

Boarding provision for girls by the modern institutes, like the Presentation Sisters, represented a major adaptation of regulation to the educational needs of remote-area children. Anne McLay affirms that Mercy boarding schools were:

...a constructive attempt to help girls, and frequently smaller boys, who were educationally disadvantaged by the isolation of outback and rural Australia.<sup>44</sup>

Thus the opening of boarding schools in Australia was more a function of distance rather than privilege. This trend became common in many frontier societies in the so called ‘New World,’ but especially in Australia, which likewise escaped the rigid class structure of Europe. That students in colonial parish schools came from a range of socio-economic backgrounds rather than a vast impoverished class is evidence of this democratisation. Accordingly, a small fee

<sup>38</sup> *The Tasmanian Catholic Standard*, January 1868, quoted in MacGinley, *Roads to Sion*, 68.

<sup>39</sup> As stated in rescript obtained by Archbishop Vaughan in 1879, quoted in MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 88.

<sup>40</sup> Founding superior, Sr Ursula Bruton, oversaw the school’s development into a secondary girls’ college at Potts Point where the sisters had established Australia’s first Catholic hospital, St Vincent’s, in 1857. See Donovan, *Apostolate of Love*, 236-38.

<sup>41</sup> Donovan, *Apostolate of Love*, 238.

<sup>42</sup> Minutes of a meeting of vocals and discreets on December 28, 1883, quoted in M. R. MacGinley, *A Lamp Lit: History of the Poor Clares Waverley Australia 1883-2004* (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls, 2005), 57.

<sup>43</sup> It is of interest that Angela Merici’s influential writings contain guidelines regarding the adaptation of congregational rules to new circumstances: “If with change of times and circumstances, it becomes necessary to make fresh rules, or to alter anything, then do it with prudence,” *Testamento*, 1545, Legato no. 11., reprinted in Ledóchowska, *Angela Merici*, 1: 264-265.

<sup>44</sup> McLay, *Women on the Move*, 306.

usually applied in Australian parish schools,<sup>45</sup> as well as in all government schools until the implementation of ‘free, secular and compulsory’ education enacted in the Education Acts (1872-1895).

#### **4.3.2 Removing the Exclusive Upper Stream Provision in Catholic girls’ schooling**

In adapting the French model of convent schooling to new cultural and social conditions in Australia, the Catholic sisters combined the two higher educational levels which were kept separate in Europe the *grand pensionnat* (exclusive boarding school) and the *pension* (pay-day school).<sup>46</sup> Thus the convent day school came to incorporate the ‘finishing course’ of European boarding schools which prepared upper-class women for leading societal roles. Socially, this meant that before long in Australian convent high schools, both day pupils and boarders attended the same classes. In this way Catholic sisters extended the enriched curriculum of the European boarding school to a broader segment of the Australian population. Such social levelling meant that girls from the wider social spectrum of a colonial setting were formed as leading Catholic women.<sup>47</sup> This egalitarian trend also appeared in less-restricted European convents at that time, as has been shown in the previous chapter.

#### **4.3.3 Delivering Affordable Schooling**

The provision of convent high schools, also known as ‘select’ schools, by institutes such as the Presentation, Charity and Mercy Sisters, might not seem to be congruous with their devotion to the poor. However, prior to the Education Acts (1872-1895) in each State that legislated for compulsory and free education, the concept of free schools was not current in Australia, except as provided for the very poor who received elementary schooling as a form of charity, either in Catholic schools or in public charity schools. Even the government schools were not free - their weekly fees were set at around nine pence (9d), similar to but often higher than fees at parish schools.<sup>48</sup> Most female congregations conducting parish schools kept fees to a minimum to ensure equality of access as well as to remain competitive once compulsory schooling was introduced.

In sum, the Catholic teaching sisters clearly contributed to the democratization of education in Australia. They removed the exclusive character of the upper-class educational provision of the European boarding school, provided more-affordable general schooling and until free

<sup>45</sup> The weekly fee was around 3d (three pence) for younger children and 6d (six pence) for the older students. See Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:340.

<sup>46</sup> Barbaro, “Recovering the Origins of Convent Education,” 45-56.

<sup>47</sup> Among the exceptions (usually schools of the older orders), was the Dominican’s exclusive boarding school in Maitland which remained separate from the select day school until pupils began to be entered for the Sydney University Junior and Senior examinations. On the Maitland convent, see MacGinley, *Ancient Tradition*, 51-53.

<sup>48</sup> MacGinley, *Roads to Zion*, 89, fn. 15.

public education was legislated waived fees for poorer colonists unable to pay the operative weekly fee of government schools.

#### 4.4 DUAL PROVISION OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

High schools established by the Catholic sisters in Australia were not secondary schools in the contemporary sense, since students ranged in age from four to late teens, and experienced no transition from primary to secondary. The sisters provided elementary education in both their fee-paying convent high schools and in the parish schools they agreed to staff. Such dual provision of elementary education continued well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as will be seen. A fee difference was maintained between children at the parish school and the primary-age children at the convent high school. For example, parish fees were around six pence (6d) per week compared with two shillings (2/-) for day pupils at the high school; boarders' tuition was included in the boarding fees except for extras such as music.<sup>49</sup>

After the withdrawal of government funding from Catholic schools, the congregations that responded most readily to staffing parish schools were the Mercy, Presentation and Good Samaritan institutes and the Sisters of St Joseph. The Good Samaritan Sisters, founded by Archbishop Polding in 1857, arose in the penal colony as the first of the religious institutes founded in Australia.<sup>50</sup> They began with a broad social apostolate to young women in need of protection.<sup>51</sup> The sisters also opened convent high schools, among which St Scholastica's at Glebe in Sydney and Lourdes Hill College in Brisbane would become leading secondary girls' colleges in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Sisters of St Joseph, founded by Mary MacKillop and Julian Tenison Woods in 1866, were established as a teaching institute to provide elementary schooling to the general populace.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, unlike the overseas congregations with their convent school tradition from Europe, the Josephites did not initially provide high schools. These four female congregations played a significant role in sustaining and expanding the Catholic parish school system across Australia. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, almost all institutes of women religious in Australia became self-supporting through their fee-paying convent high schools. The income generated from school fees together with generous

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<sup>49</sup> Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2: 350.

<sup>50</sup> They followed St Benedict's Rule, this reflecting Polding's religious heritage and the revival of Benedictine traditions in the neo-monastic movement in Europe at that time. On this background, see Fitz-Walter, "Benedictinism Encountered."

<sup>51</sup> Originally established as the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, their title was changed to the Sisters of the Good Samaritan in 1866 to avoid confusion with the better known French Institute of the Good Shepherd that came to Melbourne in 1863. See Walsh, *The Good Sams*, 34 and 65.

<sup>52</sup> For further treatment, see Margaret McKenna, *With Grateful Hearts!: Mary MacKillop and the Sisters of St Joseph in Queensland, 1870-1970* (North Sydney: Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart, 2009).

donations from loyal supporters assured the continuance of the parish schools the women staffed.

#### 4.5 AUTONOMY OF THE CATHOLIC TEACHING SISTERS

While the Church-governed parish schools in Australia restricted the sisters' autonomy, the convent high school initiative developed as the sole province of religious women who owned and administered their colleges independent of clerical influence or financial support.<sup>53</sup> These women largely escaped what Pierre Bourdieu saw as "the gendered structuring of the educational system" that "has powerfully contributed to masculine domination."<sup>54</sup> Moreover, religious sisters exercised their teaching profession differently from their female counterparts in the emerging private and government secondary school movement. For example, women such as the headmistress of Brisbane Girls' Grammar School were compelled to compete with men for positions of leadership and responsibility, an issue explored by Marjorie Theobald.<sup>55</sup>

By contrast, the Catholic sisters' self-reliance permitted them autonomy in most matters, especially in the way schools and convents were established, staffs constituted, courses structured and financial problems solved. The sisters made decisions about where to move their institutes, based on needs and personnel available. Accordingly, the sisters exercised agency in determining the scope of their educational apostolate across Australia.

#### 4.6 PIONEERING SECONDARY EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

Historians have not fully explored the extent to which the Catholic sisters laid the foundations of a secondary school system in Australia.<sup>56</sup> Australian educational historian Alan Barcan has rightly acknowledged the important contribution to secondary education of the Benedictine monks at St Mary's College (1852), Lyndhurst, in Sydney;<sup>57</sup> however, equal credit must be accorded to institutes of women religious such as the Benedictine nuns at Subiaco, for their significant role in developing structured girls' secondary education in Australia.

Indeed the agency of women religious in pioneering structured secondary education in Australia has been seriously overlooked. For example, in the Queensland coastal town of Yeppoon, St Ursula's Presentation Convent High School (1918) was the forerunner of

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<sup>53</sup> See Barbaro, "Recovering the Origins of Convent Education," 49.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Rogers, *From the Salon*, 11.

<sup>55</sup> On the dispute in the late 1890s between the school's headmistress, Miss Eliza Fewings, and the school's board of trustees, see Theobald, *Knowing Women*, 104.

<sup>56</sup> See Barbaro, "Women Religious and their Convent High Schools," 22.

<sup>57</sup> Alan Barcan, *A History of Australian Education* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1980), 123.



secondary education in what was to become a virtual ‘town of schools.’<sup>58</sup> In most Australian towns of any size, the sisters’ arrival marked the introduction of European style convent day and boarding schools and the establishment of what constituted carefully planned secondary education for girls. Yet this significant development is seldom attributed to the Catholic sisters. For example, as at February 2009, the website of the Archives Centre of New England Girls’ School (1895), Armidale, stated that the college was Armidale’s “first girls’ boarding school and day school” but in actuality, the Ursuline school in Armidale predated it by thirteen years!<sup>59</sup>

In 1870, there were fifteen convent high schools in Australia, in the late 1880s there were eighty-five (more than half were in New South Wales), by 1900 there were 153, and by 1910 there were 212.<sup>60</sup> At least one convent high school appeared in every major Australian city as well as in many regional and more remote country towns. Ronald Fogarty, historian of Catholic education in Australia, affirms that from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> when Australian State governments first entered the field of secondary education, convent high schools constituted the only organised system of secondary education for girls.<sup>61</sup> Up to that point, Catholic women religious formed the largest movement of primary and secondary school educators in Australia. It was a pioneering educational venture reminiscent of the initiatives of the female teaching orders in post-Reformation France and Ireland. And all of this was achieved at little or no cost to the Church.

Apart from convent high schools, there were a number of small, usually short-lived, ladies’ academies that were privately owned and operated by generally well-educated women.<sup>62</sup> The appearance of such schools in New South Wales from 1806 onwards was documented by Elizabeth Windschuttle in her 1980 study of middle-class female education; however, many of these establishments, as Marjorie Theobald points out, may have been small elementary schools.<sup>63</sup> There were also at this time small privately owned Catholic girls’ schools known as seminaries that were operated by lay Catholic women. These seminaries included the schools

<sup>58</sup> M. R. MacGinley, *A Place of Springs: The Story of the Queensland Presentation Sisters, 1900-1960* (Brisbane: Leader Press, 1977), 110-11.

<sup>59</sup> View “Museum: Archives Centre, New England Girls’ School, Armidale NSW,” accessed February, 2009, [www.abc.net.au/rn/museums/2009/award/Armidale\\_Archives](http://www.abc.net.au/rn/museums/2009/award/Armidale_Archives). Furthermore, in 1879, the Mercy Sisters established a high school, St Mary’s College, at Gunnedah which became part of the diocese of Armidale. *St Mary’s College Magazine* (1929), cited in “Religious Orders in the Diocese of Armidale,” Catholic Schools Office, view at Armidale, [www.arm.catholic.edu.au](http://www.arm.catholic.edu.au).

<sup>60</sup> Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:332 and 342-346.

<sup>61</sup> Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:348.

<sup>62</sup> For a further treatment, see Theobald, *Knowing Women*.

<sup>63</sup> Elizabeth Windschuttle, “Educating the Daughters of the Ruling Class,” in *Melbourne Studies in Education* 1980, ed. Stephen Murray-Smith (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1980); Theobald, *Knowing Women*, 15.

of a Miss Tray in NSW in 1841, Mrs McDonnald in Melbourne in 1851, and in Queensland in 1875 those of Miss Davis in Warwick and Mrs Dowsdel in Brisbane.<sup>64</sup> In contrast, convent high schools, by virtue of their lengthy tradition and reputation for high quality and well-structured girls' education, were more likely to be long lived and well patronised, as most of them were.

#### 4.7 SERVING WOMEN OF ALL DENOMINATIONS

From the outset, convent day and boarding schools in Australia served students of all denominations. Even though the Catholic hierarchy had not yet been re-established in England, many Protestants in Australia enrolled their daughters in convent schools to access the most thorough education available to girls at that time. Mother Ursula Frayne opened the Mercy pay-day school in Perth in 1849 for an entirely Protestant clientele, as mentioned in her letter to Archbishop Cullen of Dublin in 1852:

The children who attend it are all Protestants, but very well disposed. Thank God, it has tended to remove many prejudices against our holy religion....The Catholics are all poor people; the greater number of the Protestants are also poor and but few are wealthy, yet we have collected nearly £300, principally from the Protestants, who value the schools so much that they freely gave what they could afford.<sup>65</sup>

The sisters certainly played a role in discouraging sectarianism in the communities they served. The niece of a Protestant minister was among the seven students initially enrolled at the Perth Mercy school.<sup>66</sup> Also in Brisbane, even though several smaller private schools were available, for example, Bellevue House, a 'Select Boarding School for Young Ladies,' Mrs Thomas's Academy for Young Ladies and Grosvenor House 'Establishment for Young Ladies, many non-Catholics applied for enrolment at All Hallows' School.<sup>67</sup> Over its first two decades, from 1861 to 1881, the number of non-Catholic students at All Hallows' exceeded that of Catholics.<sup>68</sup> Admitting fee-paying students of all denominations into convent high schools reflected not only the Catholic sisters' pragmatism in securing income, but also their encompassing commitment to women's education. Moreover, the sisters were far less concerned with proselytising youth than has been assumed. While the teaching sisters were religiously-motivated, they in fact tended to educate rather than proselytise. Indeed, M Vincent Whitty at All Hallows' "feared proselytism" and Bishop James Quinn forbade it.

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<sup>64</sup> Advertisements in *Australasian Chronicle*, February 6, 1841 and *Herald*, Melbourne, January 22, 1851, and also *Brisbane Courier*, July 5, 1875, quoted in Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:345.

<sup>65</sup> Frayne to Cullen, 25 September 1852, 567.

<sup>66</sup> Byrne, *Valiant Women*, xvi.

<sup>67</sup> *Moreton Bay Courier*, January 8, 1861 and Pugh's Almanac 1867, cited in Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 13.

<sup>68</sup> Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 13.

Non-Catholics who wished to attend religious classes had to have their parents' written consent and also the bishop's.<sup>69</sup>

Notwithstanding the increased availability of private schools for girls the Catholic sisters in Australia continued to play a significant role in the education of both Protestant and Catholic women during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was not until the post-World War II period that the admission of 'non-Catholics' to Catholic schools was discouraged on account of increasingly heavy demands on the Catholic system, as will be seen.<sup>70</sup>

#### 4.8 THE EXPANDING SECONDARY SCHOOL MOVEMENT

The convent high school establishment of structured female education in Australia was in time followed by the introduction of other privately owned girls' colleges and government-funded secondary schools. As social conditions improved towards the later decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, influential thinkers such as Sir Charles Lilley in Queensland encouraged the introduction of State-funded girls' secondary schools. The Brisbane Girls' Grammar School was established in 1875 by the trustees of the State-funded Brisbane (Boys') Grammar School, as an exclusive non-denominational girls' high school and as a separate department of the boys' school. In South Australia, the Advanced School for Girls was established in Adelaide in 1879, and in New South Wales, the Sydney Girls High School commenced in 1883.<sup>71</sup>

It was not until the prosperous 1880s, and as a consequence of the successful convent high school initiative of the Catholic sisters, that other Christian Churches began to provide similar collegiate institutions for Protestant women.<sup>72</sup> In Melbourne, the Presbyterian Ladies' College appeared in 1875 and Methodist Ladies' College in 1882. The Church of England made no similar provision for secondary education in Victoria until 1903 when the Melbourne Church of England Girls' Grammar School began.<sup>73</sup> In Yeppoon, Queensland, St Faith's Church of England boarding school for girls opened in 1923, again five years after the Presentations began St Ursula's College. The Queensland Government trailed further behind, not entering the field of secondary education in Yeppoon until 1957.

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<sup>69</sup> O'Donoghue, *Mother Vincent*, 37.

<sup>70</sup> Report of Third National Catholic Conference of Directors and Inspectors, 1944, 7, cited in Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:348.

<sup>71</sup> Theobald, *Knowing Women*, 92.

<sup>72</sup> Several private ladies' colleges also followed suit, including Ruyton, Tintern, Oberwyl and Lauriston in Victoria, and Normanhurst, Redlands, Abbotsleigh and Ascham in New South Wales. See Theobald, *Knowing Women*, 93. See also Kyle, *Her Natural Destiny*, 103-110.

<sup>73</sup> Theobald, *Knowing Women*, 10.

Furthermore, with few Catholic boys' colleges in existence prior to the 1880s, many convent high schools in Australia accepted boys, usually in elementary classes, for a 'high quality' and mostly primary education. This practice continued into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. By 1930, convent high schools still exceeded the number of Catholic boys' secondary colleges, 226 to 55.<sup>74</sup> In Yeppoon, boys attended St Ursula's Presentation College until St Brendan's Christian Brothers' College for boys opened in 1940.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, from 1912 onwards, the Presentation Sisters at Our Lady's College, Longreach, prepared both boys and girls for the Junior examination of the Queensland University.<sup>76</sup> Besides providing convent high schools, some congregations, like the Mercy Sisters, also opened boarding schools for boys to the age of twelve.<sup>77</sup>

#### 4.9 A COMMON EDUCATION TRADITION

Similarities in the syllabi of private ladies' colleges and convent high schools in 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia denote a common education tradition of French origin that directly influenced the style and quality of those institutions.<sup>78</sup> Respected historian Marjorie Theobald has suggested that this style of education could have originated in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in England.<sup>79</sup> In fact, as this thesis has shown, it was a French construct advanced by the Paris Ursulines who, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, had already profoundly influenced the development of female education in Europe.

The following analysis seeks to demonstrate that the Paris Ursuline syllabus which emphasised the intellectual, social, and religious formation of women, underpinned the curriculum of both convent high schools and many small other-than-Catholic private ladies' colleges in 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia. Such schools advertised their curriculum as "offering the advantages of a Superior Education," which Fogarty has noted included grammar, foreign languages (usually French), history, geography, astronomy, globes, writing and arithmetic.<sup>80</sup> The terms, 'superior' or 'English education' referred to the curriculum of select high schools, as distinct from elementary schools.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:226 and 331.

<sup>75</sup> MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 128.

<sup>76</sup> MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 123.

<sup>77</sup> For example, the Mercy Sisters opened a boys' boarding school at Inverell, NSW, in 1891. "Religious Orders in the Diocese of Armidale," Catholic Schools Office Armidale, accessed July 1, 2011, [www.arm.catholic.edu.au](http://www.arm.catholic.edu.au).

<sup>78</sup> See Barbaro, "Recovering the Origins of Convent Education," 45.

<sup>79</sup> Theobald, *Knowing Women*, 15, 94.

<sup>80</sup> Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:377.

<sup>81</sup> Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:349.

The distinctive French-style curriculum advertised by the Ursulines in Blackrock, Cork, around the time of its importation to Australia by the Catholic sisterhoods, comprised:

English in all its branches, history, astronomy, use of globes, French, Italian, every species of fancy and ornamental work, while the best masters attend for dancing, drawing, singing and music....History, geography, grammar and natural philosophy are taught by lecture in the higher classes.<sup>82</sup>

At Subiaco, the Benedictine nuns who replicated the syllabus at Princethorpe offered in their general curriculum:

English, French and Italian languages, writing, arithmetic, geography and the use of globes, history, plain and ornamental needlework, dance and music.<sup>83</sup>

The Perth Mercy Sisters in 1849 advertised a similar, albeit more general, program of studies at their pay-day school in Perth:

Besides a solid English Education, comprising grammar, geography, history, writing, arithmetic, &c., &c., the French language will be taught; also music, drawing, and plain and ornamental works.<sup>84</sup>

One of the early private girls' schools that appeared in this period was the Misses Thompson's Kyneton Ladies' Academy in Victoria. In 1857 it advertised a course of studies that mirrored the Ursuline syllabus:

All the branches of a sound English Education, viz., reading, writing, arithmetic (practical and mental), grammar, geography, history, composition, chronology, use of the globes, with plain and ornamental needlework, pianoforte, singing, drawing, French and dancing.<sup>85</sup>

The fees at Kyneton were also in line with convent high schools, in that boarders paid forty-five guineas per year and additional fees for specialized tuition in music or other cultural subjects. Subiaco's fee was forty guineas per year.<sup>86</sup>

Catholic sisters in Australia adopted the Ursuline method of education in their convent high schools because it had served European women well, and could be adapted to the needs of colonial women. The Presentation Sisters, whose juridical lineage as a religious family lies within the stream of the Paris Ursulines from the Rue St Jacques, modelled their first convent high school in Australia, St Mary's College, Hobart, on the Ursuline convent high school at Blackrock, Cork. Among the Hobart sisters, two had been educated by the Ursulines at Blackrock.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, prior to leaving for Tasmania, the sisters visited their former Ursuline

<sup>82</sup> School advertisement, *The Irish Catholic Directory* 1838, 461, cited in MacGinley, *Roads to Zion*, 73.

<sup>83</sup> MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 78; cf. Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2: 376.

<sup>84</sup> *Inquirer*, August 1, 1849, quoted in Byrne, *Valiant Women*, xvi.

<sup>85</sup> Theobald, *Knowing Women*, 33.

<sup>86</sup> On fees at Kyneton, see Theobald, *Knowing Women*, 33. On convent boarding school fees, see MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 79.

<sup>87</sup> They were Srs Stanislaus O'Brien and Mary Xavier Murphy. See MacGinley, *Roads to Zion*, 52.

teachers in Blackrock and collected French spiritual texts and teaching manuals for use in Australia. Records of St Mary's early curriculum indicate that once established in Hobart, the Presentations replicated the Blackrock syllabus but broadened the subject offerings over time. *The Mercury's* report of the 1875 Exhibition at St Mary's listed the curriculum at the elemental level as reading, spelling, grammar, drawing, geography, history, arithmetic, writing, and needlework. At the higher level were included Greek, Roman, English and Irish history, French, Italian, orthography, astronomy, algebra, geometry, zoology, sacred and secular music, and singing.<sup>88</sup>

Significantly, the Presentation Sisters in Australia retained an unbroken link with Nano Nagle's Ursuline convent in Cork. The Cork Ursulines in turn maintained a continuous connection with the education tradition derived from the Paris Ursulines of the Rue St Jacques. This connection was noted in the annals of the Ursuline convent in Cork in 1816:

The rise and progress of the Monastery of St Jacques...must be a matter of interest to us to trace back our own house to its origin; [and] a source of holy joy to find the chain of old tradition handed down to us unbroken, every link as firmly riveted as if it had never stood the wear of time... every rule now in use among us, every observance, every religious practice so perfectly in accordance with those taught us by our first mothers, that the parent house and its filiation may indeed happily be looked on as identical.<sup>89</sup>

In the main, Catholic female teaching institutes in Australia adopted the Paris Ursuline system of education. Such institutes included the Mercy and Presentation Sisters in Perth; the Mercy Academy of Mary Immaculate, Melbourne; All Hallows' Mercy convent, Brisbane; Dominican Priory, Maitland; Convents of the Sacred Heart in Sydney and Melbourne; Loreto Mary's Mount, Ballarat and Brigidine Convent, Beechworth, to name a few.<sup>90</sup> The Catholic sisters' agency in transplanting and adapting the Ursuline convent curricula to the new environments of colonial Australia is of itself a reflection of the empowerment and transformation traditions of Catholic women's education.

#### 4.10 QUALITY OF CONVENT HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

Some historians have assumed that prior to 1920 the primary aim of Catholic girls' secondary education in Australia was "domestic, moral, religious and accomplishment attainment" with only "some interest in academic achievement."<sup>91</sup> This assertion cannot be sustained, as girls in convent high schools were clearly not denied opportunities for academic study. In reality, these girls experienced the broad and rigorously taught Jesuit-based convent high school

<sup>88</sup> *The Mercury*, December 24, 1875, 1.

<sup>89</sup> Preface to Annals of the Ursuline Convent, Cork, ca.1816, quoted in Clarke, *The Ursulines in Cork*, 15.

<sup>90</sup> Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:377.

<sup>91</sup> As suggested by Kyle in *Her Natural Destiny*, 73.

curriculum, which is seen in this present study to have comprised three strands - academic, cultural and vocational subjects. In convent archives across Australia there are numerous accounts of outstanding student achievement in convent high schools prior to 1920, indicating an obvious concern for educational excellence and academic endeavour.

Historically, as is already shown, the Catholic sisters in Europe in order to progress women's education had sought to provide girls' education comparable to that offered to boys in Jesuit schools. In Australia, some newspapers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century saw significance in the Catholic sisters' broad view of women's education in Australia. *The Daily Advertiser* in 1895 noted that the Presentation curriculum at Mt Erin was comparable to the curriculum at leading boys' colleges. Such reports reveal the sisters' underlying concern with engendering a rigorous intellectual culture in their convent high schools:

Great attention is paid to the development of their pupils' minds by a course of study which in most respects compares favourably with the curriculum adopted in the best secondary schools of the other sex. In the teaching of mathematics especially, the sisters display ability rarely met with in academies for girls...<sup>92</sup>

A chronicle of the Mt Erin convent which was printed in 1881 referred to the sisters' emphasis on the intellectual as well as spiritual formation of girls. The booklet noted the remarks of a Fr Buckley who anticipated that pupils at Mt Erin would:

...leave their mark in society...and convince a censorious world that the Catholic Church was no more opposed to intellectual improvement than to spiritual advancement.<sup>93</sup>

It is of interest that in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in Australia, science, then described as natural philosophy, was offered in convent high schools before it was introduced in many boys' colleges.<sup>94</sup> Science was a fashionable interest of educated women in France at that time, and was taught in convent schools there. The inclusion of science in school curricula in Europe was also the result of a growing interest in technical and vocational education to prepare youth for the newly industrialised world of work.<sup>95</sup> In Ireland, the Ursulines at Blackrock, as well as the Brigidines, Loreto, and Cabra Dominicans advertised natural science in their convent high school curricula during the 1840s. From the time of transfer of such curriculum to Australia in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, science was offered in many convent high schools.

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<sup>92</sup> *The Daily Advertiser*, December 14, 1895, clipping, Wagga Wagga Presentation Archives (hereafter cited in footnotes as WWPA).

<sup>93</sup> J. G. O'Connor, ed., "A Brief History of the Founding of the Sacred Heart Presentation Convent, Wagga Wagga," with *Mt Erin Exhibition Day Program*, 1880 (Sydney, 1881), 80. WWPA.

<sup>94</sup> Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:366.

<sup>95</sup> It was not until the 1860s, that the discipline of science was expanded and reconstructed in the universities in England by natural scientists such as Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley.

While Sydney's leading Catholic boys' school, St Mary's College, Lyndhurst, offered natural philosophy and elementary physiology from the mid-1850s, most boys' colleges did not follow suit until the late 1860s when the demand for science increased in tandem with the public examination trend.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, the teaching sisters kept abreast of developments in science. For example, in 1886 the Ursulines in Armidale frequently received a Fr Pierce Corcoran to inform the teachers on "the various up-to-date branches of science."<sup>97</sup>

#### 4.10.1 Teaching Credentials of the Catholic Sisters

The Catholic sisters' own level of schooling throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century suggests their competence as teachers. Most were educated and accomplished women originally convent-schooled in Europe. This Continental background had significant implications for the style of Catholic girls' education that developed in Australia. Furthermore, many pioneering sisters, particularly the Presentations, had been taught by the Ursulines themselves. For example, the founding sisters of St Mary's Presentation College in Hobart, Mother Xavier (Ellen Murphy) and Mother Stanislaus (Eliza O'Brien), were former pupils of the Ursuline convent high school in Blackrock.<sup>98</sup> Several sisters at St Mary's College in Hobart also were educated by the Ursulines at Thurles. Others were past pupils of the Sacred Heart Sisters' convent at Roscrea or of various convent boarding schools in France.<sup>99</sup>

The Catholic sisters established extensive convent libraries. The Presentation archives in Wagga Wagga contain numerous books which had been part of the sisters' professional library at Mt Erin in the 1890s. The volumes include academic texts and manuals on a range of subjects such as pedagogy, French spirituality and reference books on modern languages as well as Latin, mathematics, chemistry, the arts and music.<sup>100</sup>

Formative influences on the Catholic teaching sisters in Australia integrated elements of Dominican intellectualism, the French school of spirituality and the new parameters for active religious women pioneered by women like Mary Ward and Nano Nagle for the apostolate of teaching. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, France remained the leading centre for new religious institutes and vocations, and continued as the seminal training ground for many clergy and teaching brothers coming to Australia from Ireland and Continental Europe.<sup>101</sup> Not

<sup>96</sup> Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:366.

<sup>97</sup> Kneipp, *This Land of Promise*, 47.

<sup>98</sup> MacGinley, *Roads to Zion*, 52.

<sup>99</sup> MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 139.

<sup>100</sup> These volumes are to be found in the collections of the Presentation Sisters, Wagga Wagga.

<sup>101</sup> On the training of clergy at the renowned Irish College in Paris in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Patrick Boyle, "Irish Colleges, on the Continent," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 8 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), accessed March 18, 2011, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08158a.htm>.



surprisingly, the French style of convent education derived from the Paris Ursulines that had profoundly influenced women's education in Europe provided the blueprint for the distinctive style of Catholic girls' schooling that developed in 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia.

#### 4.10.2 Exhibition Days

All convent high schools in Australia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century held public Exhibition Days that involved an annual oral examination, a concert and the distribution of prizes. These Exhibition Days reflected a French convent school tradition that was based on the Jesuit principle of emulation, as previously noted.<sup>102</sup>

The Jesuits recommended emulation by way of "honourable rivalry, devoid of ill-will" rather than coercive punishment to encourage study and effort.<sup>103</sup> The Paris Ursulines in their 1705 *Règlements* incorporated the method of emulation prescribed in the *Ratio Studiorum*, specifically: oral competitions, examinations and rewards for merit.<sup>104</sup> This French practice was retained in Australian convent high schools through their many public competitions, exhibitions, eisteddfodau, diocesan scholarships and prize-giving ceremonies, all designed to reward academic achievement, application to study and good conduct.<sup>105</sup>

St Mary's Presentation College in Hobart held its first Exhibition in December 1868. The program was typical of most convent high school Exhibitions at that time:

The pupils, graded in various divisions, were examined orally in languages, history (sacred and profane), geography, mathematics, astronomy and other matters. Regret was expressed that no Frenchman or French lady was present to appreciate the purity and fullness of the accent rendered by the young ladies. Musical interludes interspersed the phases of the examination procedure, while some choice specimens of fancy work, crochet, Berlin work...cushions and other trophies of the needle were exhibited.<sup>106</sup>

Students were examined before the school community, parents and friends. Examiners were usually well-educated and literary-minded clergy. The usual visitors were religious as well as civic dignitaries, including the local bishop, the Governor of the time and his retinue, and members of the local community, together with the leading Catholic families of the district. A report of the musical entertainment presented at Mt Erin's Exhibition Day in 1880 is typical, and it highlights how convent events contributed significantly to the cultural life of many towns, as will be further explored:

<sup>102</sup> *Règlements*, chap. 2 (Paris: 1705); cf. General Congregation of 1558, *Decree* 123, *Institutum Soc. Jesu*, ed. Florentiae, Part 2, 184, excerpts in Martin, *Ursuline Method*, 285-320

<sup>103</sup> Allan P. Farrell, *The Jesuit Code of Liberal Education* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1938), 81, 290, 291, quoted in Martin, *Ursuline Method*, 313.

<sup>104</sup> *Règlements*, chap. 2 (Paris: 1705) excerpt in Martin, *Ursuline Method*, 285-320

<sup>105</sup> For examples of such Exhibitions, see Presentation Convent, Star of the Sea, Elsternwick, *Annual Concert, Exhibition and Distribution of Prizes Programmes*, 1885-1889; 1895; 1899; 1901; 1914; 1925; 1926. QPA.

<sup>106</sup> *Tasmanian Catholic Standard*, December 1868, quoted in MacGinley, *Roads to Zion*, 71.

Cellini's "Ave Maria" was beautifully rendered... [Also] recitations, songs, choruses, instrumental solos, duets, trios, &c., on three pianos and two harmoniums... Zingarelli's "Laudate" was heard with rapt attention.<sup>107</sup>

#### 4.11 ADAPTING TO THE PUBLIC EXAMINATION SYSTEM

The Catholic sisters in Australia kept abreast of educational developments on the Continent and in England. The growing trend in England of providing a more academic and vocational emphasis in girls' schooling influenced the shaping of secondary education in Ireland and subsequently in Australia. Following the introduction in Ireland in 1878 of government-sponsored secondary education and the opening of the Royal University in 1879 (with its inclusion of women), the girls at Alexandra College (1861), at St Angela's Ursuline school in Cork, and at the Dominican school in Eccles Street, Dublin, began to compete with boys in the graded examinations set by the university.<sup>108</sup>

Likewise in Australia, the Catholic sisters readily adapted their curricula to the new university public examination system. The University of Sydney (1850) had sought to raise academic standards in schools through a public examination system similar to those established at Oxford in 1857 and at Cambridge in 1858. Thereafter schools offering secondary-level education could prepare students in examinable subjects for the Sydney Junior and Senior public examinations. The examinations were prepared by the University based on the syllabus it had set. Accordingly, the Catholic sisters prepared girls for such examinations as well as for music examinations, thus enabling girls to compete with boys in occupations to which the examinations were expected to lead.

##### 4.11.1 Academic Orientation of Convent Schools

A Catholic school's academic standing in relation to its examination success became increasingly important when government funding for denominational schools was withdrawn on the enactment of the Education Acts in each State between 1872 and 1895. Following those events, the teaching sisters approached examinations with increasing gravity and readiness. Sophie McGrath has noted that after 1870 a strong academic thrust was evident in Mercy convent high schools in Sydney.<sup>109</sup>

New opportunities were presented when the University of Sydney permitted girls to sit for its Junior and Senior Examinations in 1871.<sup>110</sup> In 1876, the University opened these

<sup>107</sup> See Mt Erin, *Exhibition Day Program 1880* reprinted in J. G. O'Connor, ed., "A Brief History of the Founding of the Sacred Heart Presentation Convent, Wagga Wagga," 74. WWPA.

<sup>108</sup> See O'Connor, "The Revolution."

<sup>109</sup> See McGrath, *These Women?*, 78.

<sup>110</sup> Rupert Goodman, *Secondary Education in Queensland, 1860-1960* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1968), 136.

examinations to Queensland students<sup>111</sup> and the Mercy Sisters at All Hallows' in Brisbane accordingly presented five girls for the University Junior in 1879.<sup>112</sup> It seems these were the first convent school candidates so entered in Australia, and one of them was awarded a silver medal for an outstanding pass in French. Until the establishment of a university in Queensland in 1910, All Hallows' had presented girls for both the Sydney and Melbourne matriculation exams.<sup>113</sup> In 1880, the names of candidates successful in the Junior public examination were published also for the newly established Good Samaritan college, Rosebank, in Sydney. In the following year, a pupil of Rosebank became the first girl from a Catholic college to pass the University of Oxford Junior Examination.<sup>114</sup>

In Hobart, immediately upon the Tasmanian Council of Education allowing girls to sit for the public examinations for the Associate of Arts Degree in 1872, girls at St Mary's Presentation convent were presented for these examinations and all secured passes.<sup>115</sup> The Lismore Presentations entered candidates for the 1887 Sydney University examinations soon after establishing their convent high school too. In 1889, Star of the Sea Presentation convent in Elsternwick, Victoria, presented girls for the Melbourne examinations in English, French, Latin, Greek, history, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and geography, and by 1910, over sixty students had passed the examination.<sup>116</sup> The Wagga Wagga Presentation Annals noted that Mother John Byrne, founding superior of both Star of the Sea and Mt Erin, Wagga Wagga,

Being of an enterprising and progressive mind, she at once aimed at grasping the latest and best methods in education and soon Star of the Sea Convent became famous throughout Victoria for its educational successes.<sup>117</sup>

Although the number of girls presented for the public examinations was initially small, convents achieved outstanding success. For example, the Charity Sisters' St Vincent's College at Potts Point in 1885 gained "first place of all Ladies' Schools and Colleges in New South Wales and Queensland" in the Sydney Junior examination.<sup>118</sup> A student from the Sacred Heart College in Launceston gained second place in the First Class standard among

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<sup>111</sup> Barcan, *A History of Australian Education*, 186.

<sup>112</sup> Report of the University of Sydney, 1879, 12-13, cited in Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 23.

<sup>113</sup> *The Age*, December 16, 1899, 24, cited in Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:380. A pass in only five specified subjects was required to obtain matriculation standard at Junior level.

<sup>114</sup> Walsh, *The Good Sams*, 152-152.

<sup>115</sup> Shirley King, "Quietly, Without Fuss: Catholic Religious Sisters in Tasmania," in *Women Faith and Fetes: Essays in the History of Women and the Church in Australia*, ed. Sabine Willis (Melbourne: Dove Communications in association with the Australian Council of Churches, NSW, Commission on Status of Women, 1977), 79-92.

<sup>116</sup> *Australasian Catholic Directory* (hereafter ACD), 1910, 209. See also Presentation Convent, Star of the Sea, Elsternwick, *Annual Concert, Exhibition and Distribution of Prizes Programme*, 1889, 1895, 1899, 1901.

<sup>117</sup> Wagga Presentation Annals, File 16: "Presentation Convent Wagga, Education," quoted in MacGinley, *Roads to Zion*, 166.

<sup>118</sup> ACD, 1888, 8.

twenty-one candidates who passed the Junior Examination of the University of Tasmania in 1891. She was the only girl to obtain a First Class Diploma with outstanding grades in English grammar, history, Latin, French, German, arithmetic, algebra and geometry, and she gained a pass in geography.<sup>119</sup> In 1895, three girls from St Mary's in Hobart achieved honours in English, Latin, German, history, arithmetic, algebra and Euclid in the university examinations.<sup>120</sup> In 1905, a student from the Ursuline college in Armidale obtained the second highest pass in the State in the Sydney University examinations.<sup>121</sup> By 1906, Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr Thomas Carr, who was a strong advocate of the academic education of women, suggested that:

It would be interesting to trace the progress of the movement for the higher education of women ...to the present day when it embraced practically all the elements which were found in the higher education of men.<sup>122</sup>

Clearly girls in convent high schools entered the public examinations with academic ability, as was evidenced in the numerous contemporary newspaper and convent records of school achievements. Accordingly, the Catholic sisters advertised their schools in terms of proven examination success and preparation for matriculation.<sup>123</sup>

The teaching sisters encouraged and assisted the higher education of women in Australia, even though few women were then entering university life. In 1881, women had been admitted entry to Adelaide University in South Australia,<sup>124</sup> ahead of Oxford (1920) and Cambridge (1948), which is reflective of the progressiveness not only of South Australia, but also of the way in which Australia's major institutions, were evolving. Few women, however, enrolled in law at the university since they were not permitted to practice it. The first woman in South Australia to graduate in law after the enactment of the 1911 *Female Law Practitioners Act* was Mary Kitson (later Mary Tenison Woods), a past pupil of St Aloysius' College in Adelaide who began practising law in 1916. Her legal career therefore included several historical firsts for Australian women that led to her appointment as chief of staff at the United Nations Status of Women's Commission in New York in 1951.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>119</sup> *Tasmanian Catholic Standard*, July 1891, cited in MacGinley, *Roads to Zion*, 87.

<sup>120</sup> *Monitor*, December 20, 1895, cited in MacGinley, *Roads to Zion*, 87.

<sup>121</sup> Kneipp, *This Land of Promise*, 47.

<sup>122</sup> Archbishop Carr, Address at the opening ceremony of the Catholic Training College, 1906, cited in Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:382.

<sup>123</sup> The course of studies at St Mary's, Hobart, was advertised with reference to success in the examinations of the University of Tasmania. *The Monitor*, January 15, 1897, cited in MacGinley, *Roads to Zion*, 87.

<sup>124</sup> "Why Study at Adelaide?," last modified November 8, 2011,

<http://www.adelaide.edu.au/student/future/why/study>.

<sup>125</sup> Margaret Press, "Mary Tenison Woods," *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 24 (2003): 10.

The Mercy Sisters at St Aloysius' College reported in 1930 that seven of their past pupils were graduates from Adelaide University; four had Arts degrees and three were lawyers, Mary Kitson among them, and all seven were held up as models for girls to emulate.<sup>126</sup> Other leading South Australian women educated at St Aloysius included Roma Mitchell who graduated as a lawyer in 1934. She was Australia's first woman QC, Judge (Supreme Court), Chancellor of Adelaide University and State Governor (South Australia).<sup>127</sup>

In 1881, the University of Sydney also admitted women to academic courses; however women graduates were not recorded there until 1885 in Arts, 1888 in Science, 1893 in Medicine and 1902 in Law.<sup>128</sup> Mahoney asserts that the Mercy Sisters in Queensland "strongly supported the principle of women's higher education," but they "faced all the opposition that Victorian prejudice could launch against it."<sup>129</sup> In fact one of the first Queensland women to practise medicine was educated at All Hallows' and graduated from the Sydney University in 1905.<sup>130</sup>

Evidently, the significant role of the Catholic teaching sisters in Australia in altering narrow understandings of the purpose of women's education was consistent with their empowerment and transformation traditions. Hence convent girls were taught to be capable and influential women both within and beyond the home.<sup>131</sup>

#### 4.11.2 Maintaining the Holistic Ideal

The more recently founded institutes of women religious – the Mercy, Presentation, Brigidine, Charity, and Good Samaritan Sisters – readily adapted to the pressures of the public examinations and at the same time retained their customary holistic approach to women's education. The Sacred Heart, Dominican, Ursuline and Benedictine Sisters, however, with their older, more established education traditions and strong Continental European influences, did not enter candidates for examinations until around 1893, believing that the holistic method would suffer from such disproportionate emphasis on external examinations.<sup>132</sup>

The Loreto Sisters were equally reluctant to adopt the utilitarian approach to education occasioned by the examinations. In 1902, the superior of Loreto Convent in Osborne, Perth,

<sup>126</sup> McLay, *Women on the Move*, 315.

<sup>127</sup> Press, "Mary Tenison Woods," 9.

<sup>128</sup> Goodman, *Secondary Education*, 136.

<sup>129</sup> Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 76.

<sup>130</sup> Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 76.

<sup>131</sup> The academic thrust of the Mercy schools at Parramatta is explored in McGrath, *These Women?*

<sup>132</sup> It was not until 1893 that the Armidale Ursulines entered their first candidates for the Sydney public examinations, and then 1894 for the Dominicans in West Maitland, then 1910 for the Sacred Heart Sisters at Rose Bay. See MacGinley, *Ancient Tradition*, 190.

advised that public examinations were “inimical to true education if preparation degenerate into mere ‘cram’ and the desire to pass become mere competition.”<sup>133</sup> She further asserted that education “must be adapted to individual needs” – an ideal reflective of the convent education tradition yet forward-looking. Numerous End of Year Prize-Giving reports of convent high schools in the 1890s and early 1900s attest to the female congregations generally eschewing the practice of cramming. *The Daily Advertiser* in 1895 reported that the Presentation Sisters at Mt Erin:

...admit that they are not well versed in the art of “cramming”... Their system consists rather in the training of the pupils’ thinking powers than in the stuffing of the mind with facts... it is unquestionably the only mode to produce educated women, in the true sense of the term.<sup>134</sup>

Accordingly, women educators in private ladies’ colleges who shared the holistic tradition of Continental girls’ education with the Catholic teaching sisters were equally critical of cramming.<sup>135</sup> The Catholic sisters clearly aligned their curriculum with the public examination system without undercutting the breadth and quality of their educational provisions, as school advertisements make clear. Star of the Sea at Elsternwick continued to provide:

All the branches of a superior English education, with French, Latin, Greek, algebra, euclid, physics, physiology, book-keeping; also piano, violin, guitar, mandolin, singing, dancing, calisthenics, painting in oil and water-colours, crayon drawing, etc., all the variations of plain and fancy needlework, cutting-out, dressmaking, and cooking.<sup>136</sup>

In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there developed greater recognition of the need for widespread secondary education, beginning with the introduction of non-compulsory State secondary schools in major centres.<sup>137</sup> During these years, the Catholic sisters registered their convent high schools as secondary schools.

Most convent high schools already provided secondary level education, as has been shown, and thus proved capable of an easy transition towards modern secondary schooling. The sisters readily brought their colleges in line with the national government’s method of educational division by age cohorts, as will be seen.

<sup>133</sup> Loreto Convent, Osborne, annual report, 1902, *The West Australian*, December 17, 1902, 9.

<sup>134</sup> *The Daily Advertiser*, December 14, 1895, clipping, WWPA.

<sup>135</sup> Advertisements for Methodist Ladies’ College, Hawthorn, promised “no cramming.” *The Argus*, January 28, 1902, 3.

<sup>136</sup> Star of the Sea school advertisement, *Advocate*, December 20, 1893, cited in MacGinley, *Roads to Zion*, 168.

<sup>137</sup> Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:333.

## 4.12 COMPREHENSIVENESS OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

Convent high schools in Australia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century existed to serve the interests of women. Their education provided academic, vocational, cultural, social and religious meaning for women. The Loreto Sisters in the early 1900s asserted that education:

must fit girls to take their places in their homes, in society, in the nation, as useful, unselfish, cultured, accomplished, high-minded, retiring women, whose influence, silent and far-reaching, is potent for good.<sup>138</sup>

The Catholic sisters' response to abiding questions about the nature and purpose of women's studies will now be examined.

### 4.12.1 The Accomplishments

According to Theobald, the "accomplishments" curriculum of private ladies' colleges in colonial Australia "sometimes referred specifically to the cultural studies of music, art, and the modern languages, and sometimes to the totality of women's studies." She notes that such institutions "also offered dancing, gymnastics, callisthenics, and crafts...subjects which historians have sometimes assumed were the main focus of the accomplishments curriculum."<sup>139</sup> Although Theobald's study of women's education in 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia does not deal with convent high schools, she has demonstrated that the accomplishments curriculum in private ladies' colleges that were not Catholic provided an education of substance.

That the accomplishments curriculum has been misunderstood by historians is evident from the fact that convent high schools in Australia have been stereotyped as "accomplishment" schools and their curriculum thus trivialized.<sup>140</sup>

A report in Wagga Wagga's *The Daily Advertiser* in 1893 could sum up the educational outcomes of the Presentation Sisters' holistic approach to female education at the Mt Erin convent:

The sisterhood spare no effort to make the instruction given in the school as complete as possible. Not only have the pupils been thoroughly grounded in all the accomplishments required for mixing in society with success, but they have likewise been required to display a proficiency in those solid branches of learning requisite for the full development of their intellectual facilities.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> *The West Australian*, December 17, 1902, 9.

<sup>139</sup> Theobald, *Knowing Women*, 15.

<sup>140</sup> For further treatment, see Marjorie Theobald, "Mere Accomplishments: Melbourne's Early Ladies Schools Reconsidered," *History of Education Review* 13, no.2 (1984), 15-28.

<sup>141</sup> *The Daily Advertiser*, December 16, 1893, clipping, WWPA.

Importantly, in terms of vocational meaning, the accomplishments curriculum enabled women to find work as governesses or teachers. Significantly, the profession of teaching was emerging by the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as an acceptable career option for girls when other professions were still formally closed to women. Indeed many girls who completed their secondary education at Mercy schools in Victoria in that period obtained teaching positions in Catholic and state school systems.<sup>142</sup>

Moreover, the various strands of the convent curricula clearly harmonised with certain feminist principles that sought to “qualify women for the practical purposes of life.”<sup>143</sup> Through the quality and comprehensiveness of this style of education, the teaching sisters, like their contemporaries at other private ladies’ colleges, enabled women to achieve economic independence and move towards political emancipation.

#### 4.12.2 Contemporary Influences - The Woman Suffrage Movement

Catholic sisters were among the first women in Australia to take up the vote. The woman suffrage movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries brought together disparate groups of activists who numbered women in most sectors of Australian society, including among the churches and religious congregations.

Audrey Oldfield recently found that “there appear to have been few Catholic women active in the organisations.”<sup>144</sup> This suggests that while many Catholic women would have signed petitions and attended rallies, the identifying of Catholic women as such in the female suffrage movement has proved difficult. Importantly, Oldfield discovered that Annie Golding, whose life has not been documented at length, was a formidable Catholic leader of the woman suffrage campaign in New South Wales.

Annie and her sisters, Belle Golding and Kate Dwyer, were members of the Womanhood Suffrage League (WSL) of NSW from about 1893 until their Newtown branch was expelled in 1902 for defying the executive council.<sup>145</sup> The Golding sisters subsequently founded the

<sup>142</sup> Maree G. Allen, *The Labourer’s Friends: Sisters of Mercy in Victoria and Tasmania* (North Melbourne: Hargreen, 1989), 118.

<sup>143</sup> Such principles were espoused by Hannah More in *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, (1799), Chap. 13: “The Practical Use of Female Knowledge, with a Sketch of the Female Character, and a Comparative View of the Sexes,” reprinted in *Women in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century: Constructions of Femininity*, ed. Vivian Jones (London: Routledge, 1990), 137.

<sup>144</sup> Audrey Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage: A Gift or Struggle?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 182.

<sup>145</sup> Beverley Kingston, “Golding, Annie Mackenzie (1855-1934),” in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Canberra: National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, 2006-2011), accessed August 15, 2011, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/golding-annie-mackenzie-6416/text10971>.



Women's Progressive Association (WPA) with Annie as president from 1904, and they continued to lead deputations for female suffrage and for equal pay.<sup>146</sup>

The generalisation that Australian Catholics were uniformly against female suffrage is not corroborated by the data.<sup>147</sup> It is true that Catholics, including clergy,<sup>148</sup> were among those opposed to female suffrage; however, numerous editorials and letters to the editors of Catholic newspapers of that period reveal that Australian Catholics were clearly divided on the issue. Queensland Parliamentary debates of the 1890s show that most Catholic Parliamentarians supported womanhood suffrage in the Electors' Bill brought before the Legislative Assembly in that decade.<sup>149</sup> The issue of female suffrage in Queensland was bound up with the contested issue of plural voting which delayed the female vote in that State until 1905.

Very little is known of the Catholic teaching sisters' response to the struggle for women's political emancipation in Australia and throughout the developed world for that matter. New Zealand was the first country to enfranchise women in 1893 and the Catholic sisters there availed of the vote as soon as it was obtained. *The Catholic Press* reported that in one New Zealand town "a polling booth, having been provided for the convent, had forty votes."<sup>150</sup> South Australia was the first Australian colony to grant women the right to vote in 1894. Subsequently, it was noted in a Brisbane paper that the Adelaide Dominican Sisters voted in the governmental elections in 1896, with "the women in full garb filing into the Temperance Hall [to vote] led by the Mother Superior."<sup>151</sup>

The granting of the vote to women in South Australia gave impetus to the movement for federal (national) female suffrage. In fact Australia was a pioneer in granting women the vote and became the second country in the world after New Zealand to legislate for womanhood suffrage in 1901.<sup>152</sup> Australian women (who were not aboriginal) first voted at the Federal

<sup>146</sup> On the Golding sisters, see Kate Deverall, "They Did Not Know Their Place: the Politics of Annie Golding and Kate Dwyer," *Labour History* 87 (2004), <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/lab/87/deverall.html>.

<sup>147</sup> Vida Goldstein in *Women's Sphere*, November 1900, claimed that Catholics were against the vote for women, cited in Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage*, 182.

<sup>148</sup> *The Catholic Press*, April 5, 1902. In this report, Bishop Doyle of Lismore remarked that a "sensible woman" would not vote and risk "serious injury to herself and to the race."<sup>148</sup>

<sup>149</sup> Queensland Parliament, *Official Record of the Debates of the Legislative Council and of the Legislative Assembly during the Second Session of the Twelfth Parliament, 15 June-16 December 1897*, vol. 77 (Brisbane: Queensland Government Printer [hereafter QGP], 1894-1921), 222. Catholic parliamentarians Mr Keogh, Mr Leahy, Mr Fogarty, Mr McDonnell, and Mr Fitzgerald supported female suffrage. Mr T. J. Byrne, a Catholic, was initially against womanhood suffrage, but then supported it as Queensland Premier in 1898.

<sup>150</sup> *The Catholic Press*, August 24, 1901, 18.

<sup>151</sup> *The Age*, May 9, 1896.

<sup>152</sup> Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage*, 60.

election of 1903. In that year, Mother Mary MacKillop, foundress of the Sisters of St Joseph, sent a circular to all her sisters urging them to register to vote:

It is a duty on us all to vote, and for this reason all must have their names on the Electoral Rolls...See to this at once...keep your voting secret...<sup>153</sup>

It is important to note that voting was not compulsory in Australia until the mid-1920s, yet it was availed of by the above-mentioned Catholic sisters. In fact the Australian Protestant Defence Association which formed in 1902 was alarmed that ‘nuns’ would vote in the impending federal election. It feared that Catholic women including “every nun, sister and other inmate of every convent in the State” would augment considerably the so-called ‘Catholic vote.’<sup>154</sup> On the contrary, MacKillop had advised her sisters that “Every so-called Catholic [candidate] is not the best man,” for enacting needed social reforms.<sup>155</sup>

Interestingly, the Catholic sisters voted in the first State and Federal elections in Australia in the face of the prevailing criticism that female suffrage would “unsex” women. The influential Sydney-based weekly magazine, *The Bulletin* (1880-2008), which was strongly nationalist, anti-clerical and masculist, played its role in portraying suffragists as unwomanly and unrefined. A record of objections raised in the Queensland Parliament in the 1890s against women’s suffrage neatly encapsulates myths about women at that time:

...first, that women did not want a vote; second that they would be insulted at the poll; third that they would be made unwomanly at election times; fourth that they would be misled by claptrap of designing men.<sup>156</sup>

A number of leading Catholic clergy including Cardinal Patrick Moran (1830-1911) in Sydney strongly advocated female suffrage. In 1901, *The Catholic Press* noted that “the woman suffrage movement has had the warm support of Cardinal Moran.”<sup>157</sup> In response to reports that many Catholic women refused to vote, Fr Fitzgerald (OFM) wrote a lengthy essay in 1903 entitled “Women’s Suffrage from a Catholic Viewpoint” in which he stated:

It will be found that the unwillingness of Catholic women to vote is based on prejudice originating in much conventionality and that their reasons for abstaining are more imaginary than real...saintly women [have] achieved great things by bringing their great influence and learning to beat social or religious abuses. This they could not have done had they allowed false sensitivities to restrain their endeavours.<sup>158</sup>

<sup>153</sup> Mother Mary MacKillop, Letter, 16 July 1903, quoted in Sheila McCreanor, ed., *Mary MacKillop on Mission to Her Last Breath: Correspondence about the Foundations of the Sisters of St Joseph in Aotearoa New Zealand and Mary’s Final Years 1881-1909* (North Sydney: Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, 2009).

<sup>154</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 19, 1902, 3.

<sup>155</sup> M Mary MacKillop, Letter, 16 July 1903.

<sup>156</sup> As listed by Mr Powers (Member of Legislative Assembly) who advocated women’s suffrage. Queensland Parliament, *Official Record of the Debates of the Legislative Council and of the Legislative Assembly during the Second Session of the Eleventh Parliament, 17 July-7 December 1894*, vol. 71 (Brisbane: QGP, 1894-1921), 716.

<sup>157</sup> *The Catholic Press*, August 24, 1901, 18.

<sup>158</sup> *The Age*, August 1, 1903.

Religious women who voted at the Parliamentary elections had clearly challenged conventionality. Fitzgerald's article continued to advise:

Catholic women have a great mission in this age of democracy – to be custodians of virtue, the upholders of religion, the models of Christian life, the light of the home, the leader of society and, lastly, the makers of the laws which will eliminate evil, pressure the venerated ideals of the past and foster growth of a truly Christian nation.

This vision of Christian womanhood was at one with the Catholic sisters' transformational ideals. Annie Golding (1855-1934), who was a prominent Catholic feminist, teacher and activist of the labour movement in New South Wales (NSW) from the 1890s to early 1930s, had also appropriated that vision. Golding presented a paper at the Second Australasian Catholic Congress in Melbourne, Victoria, in 1904, entitled "The Evolution of Women and their Possibilities," in which she stated:

The great advance of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the industrial and intellectual position of women needed security to ensure its permanence. What could give this security? Only one thing – the vote. Recognising this, a world-wide agitation was set on foot. Four States of America have granted it. In Europe it is slowly gaining ground. In democratic Australia it is an accomplished fact...It only remains for Victoria and Queensland to do the same. Surely they will not place the stigma on their sisters of being less worthy, less fit to receive political emancipation than their sisters in the other States. The interests of women demand it.<sup>159</sup>

At that time Victoria had not yet granted women a State vote and was the last State to do so in 1908, after Queensland enfranchised women in 1905.<sup>160</sup>

It is important to note that Cardinal Moran had instigated the first Australasian Catholic Congress which was held in Sydney in 1900, and that he was the driving force behind the Congresses of 1904 and 1909.<sup>161</sup> More than half the papers presented at the three Congresses addressed contemporary social and educational questions. These Congresses were influential and generated considerable interest nationally. *The Age* in Brisbane saw itself "as the organ of the Catholic community"<sup>162</sup> and published the full program of the first Congress in 1900.<sup>163</sup> Resolutions adopted at the third Congress in 1909 were reported in both Catholic and secular newspapers across the country.<sup>164</sup> At the conclusion of the 1904 Congress, Archbishop Thomas Carr of Melbourne expected that the published Congress Proceedings would have an

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<sup>159</sup> Annie Golding, "The Evolution of Women and their Possibilities," in *Proceedings of the Second Australasian Catholic Congress, Cathedral Hall, Melbourne, 1904* (Melbourne: St Patrick's Cathedral, 1904), 563.

<sup>160</sup> John McCulloch, *The Suffragists: 100 Years of Women's Suffrage in Queensland* (Rockhampton, Qld: Central Queensland University Press, 2005), xi.

<sup>161</sup> *Proceedings of the First Australasian Catholic Congress, St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, 1900* (Sydney: St Mary's Cathedral, 1900), vii. A fourth Congress did not eventuate after Cardinal Moran's death in 1911.

<sup>162</sup> *The Age*, November 3, 1900.

<sup>163</sup> *The Age*, September 1, 1900.

<sup>164</sup> For a typical example, see *The Mercury*, October 4, 1909.

“instructive” influence on Australian Catholics.<sup>165</sup> Clearly, Cardinal Moran had provided a platform for Annie Golding’s vision of emancipated womanhood through the vehicle of the Australasian Catholic Congress in 1904, and again at the Congress in 1909, as will be seen.

Women religious readily exercised their right to vote in New Zealand and Australia, and thus led by example, quietly and without fanfare. Their example confronted popular claims that voting would blight women’s innate virtue. In fact the Catholic sisters showed that women’s political emancipation was in harmony with the ideal of cultured, enlightened, and responsible Catholic womanhood. Golding’s writings on the far-reaching influence of enfranchised women would have resonated with the Catholic sisters. Her paper at the Australasian Catholic Congress in 1904 instructed:

Enfranchised women of Australia, rise to your responsibilities, to your potentialities...go forward, never resting, never looking back, but working on until Australia demonstrates to the world what a living force for good enlightened, enfranchised women may become, and thus may cause older nations to shake off musty, conservative traditions that fetter progress....Then...they will emerge into the glorious light of prosperity, peace and freedom.<sup>166</sup>

#### 4.12.3 Domestic Science

Hellinckx et al. have noted that domestic science education in convent schools around the world has not been the subject of systematic studies.<sup>167</sup> The following analysis will demonstrate that the Catholic sisters in convent high schools in Australia were part of the broad movement of women educators and activists who pressed for the inclusion of domestic science education in girls’ secondary schools in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

These women included Janet Lady Clarke (Melbourne), Rose Scott (Sydney), Annie Golding (Sydney) and Eliza Fewings (Brisbane) together with members of the National Council for Women, the Women Teachers’ Association, and the Women’s Progressive Association. In fact Mother Gonzaga Barry wrote an essay on Australian women’s education in 1890, entitled “A Sensible School for Girls”, in which she proposed a “truly comprehensive university” which would encompass an infants’ school, a university, and a domestic college where “the whole child is educated.”<sup>168</sup> She stated that the domestic college should stand “on an equal footing” with the university. M Gonzaga’s all-embracing ‘sensible school’ clearly adhered to the holistic tradition of Catholic women’s education. It also instances how women religious in

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<sup>165</sup> *Proceedings of the Second Australasian Catholic Congress, 1904*, vi.

<sup>166</sup> Golding, “The Evolution of Women,” 564.

<sup>167</sup> Hellinckx, Simon and Depaepe, *The Forgotten Contribution*, 23.

<sup>168</sup> M Gonzaga Barry, “A Sensible School for Girls,” in *Eucalyptus Blossoms*, December 1890, excerpt in Clark, *Loreto*, 61.

Australia adapted the Continental convent school model to the changing needs of Australian women. Many aspects of M Gonzaga's 'sensible school' were adopted at Loreto colleges in Australia including Normanhurst and Mary's Mount.<sup>169</sup>

M Gonzaga was influenced by the activism of the Arts and Crafts movement which had emerged in the British Isles in the 1860s as an anti-industrial movement.<sup>170</sup> The movement which had spread across Europe aimed to recover traditional handicrafts and creativity that had been lost to machine production. Sloyd, which is a Swedish word meaning domestic, manual and artistic work, was pioneered in Australia by artisans and educators, including M Gonzaga who introduced a Sloyd room at Loreto Mary's Mount in 1889. Her writings in the school's magazine, *Eucalyptus Blossoms*, reveal that the Sloyd room contained a printing press, a washing machine, a cooking range, and a sewing machine, with equipment for wood-carving and house-painting.<sup>171</sup>

Domestic science was considered important to the comprehensiveness of women's studies at Mary's Mount. M Gonzaga wrote:

those arts which contribute to happy homemaking are of chief importance...home is woman's realm, and there the wise, lovable and well-educated woman reigns supreme...one of our clever accomplished pupils [said to me]...there was nothing she was so grateful for as having learned to make brown bread!<sup>172</sup>

Marjorie Theobald found that Miss Eliza Ann Fewings, headmistress of Brisbane Girls' Grammar School from 1896 to 1899, encountered resistance from the School Board at her intention to modify the curriculum to include domestic and recreational subjects such as music, dancing, cookery, millinery and sport. Theobald concluded that in the mid-1890s domestic education for girls "presented itself under the banner of reform," and that Fewings, far from being anachronistic, as some historians have suggested, was in fact innovative.<sup>173</sup> Some private girls' schools, like Sydney's Presbyterian Ladies' College, had succeeded in redefining and offering domestic economy as a branch of science in the 1890s.<sup>174</sup> This had the effect of raising the status of the subject in the eyes of the Protestant middle-class.

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<sup>169</sup> View "Gonzaga Barry," Loreto Normanhurst, accessed August 14, 2011, <http://www.loretonh.nsw.edu.au/faiht/ourheritage/Gonzaga.html>.

<sup>170</sup> Clark, *Loreto*, 64.

<sup>171</sup> M Gonzaga Barry, editorial of *Eucalyptus Blossoms*, 1889, excerpt in Clark, *Loreto*, 64.

<sup>172</sup> *Eucalyptus Blossoms*, May 24, 1908, cited in Loreto Normanhurst, "Gonzaga Barry."

<sup>173</sup> Theobald, *Knowing Women*, 104. Fewings was accused of academic incompetence by the Board's trustees and was dismissed in 1899.

<sup>174</sup> See *Presbyterian Ladies' College Prospectus, 1891*, reprinted in Anita Selzer, *Educating Women in Australia: From the Convict Era to the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 99.

Annie Golding, then president of the Women's Progressive Association (WPA) from 1904, together with other women's organisations of NSW had petitioned for the establishment of a Domestic Science College at Sydney University at that time. Her advocacy of domestic education would have been known to Catholic sisters across Australia. Golding presented a paper entitled "The Industrial and Social Condition of Women in the Commonwealth," at the Third Australasian Catholic Congress which was held in Sydney in 1909.<sup>175</sup> In her paper, Golding called for a Domestic Science College at the Sydney University which would raise the status of domestic work and education "to a more dignified" level.<sup>176</sup> She lamented that the University Reform Bill, then before the Legislative Assembly of NSW, had made provision for a Chair of Veterinary Science but not a Chair of Domestic Science, which she noted was "one of the important reforms advocated" by the WPA.

Golding argued that a Chair in Domestic Science would evince "more capable and intelligent interest in the domestic sphere" and "result in greater scientific research work or investigation in food constituents."<sup>177</sup> She reasoned:

Though highly appreciating the need for a Chair of Veterinary Science, as a woman, I think there is even more need for a Chair of Domestic Science, as the care and production of cattle cannot be quite so momentous to the welfare of a nation as the improvement of its race.<sup>178</sup>

Golding pointed to the New Zealand University and also universities in America as examples of where domestic teaching was "raised to a science" on the grounds that "everything that improves the health of the nation is deemed worthy of notice."<sup>179</sup>

At the 1911 Catholic Educational Conference of New South Wales, the Brigidine Sisters, also prescient in their time, had called for the inclusion of cooking and domestic science "at all girls' schools in Australia."<sup>180</sup> In similar vein, representatives of the Education Congress in Victoria in 1912 pressed for the introduction of domestic education or house-craft in the State curricula for girls.<sup>181</sup> The Dominican Sisters, however, with their centuries-old teaching tradition had wished to retain the amount of time devoted to academic subjects and thought that domestic classes would better serve mid-teen girls who had already received a general

<sup>175</sup> Annie Golding, "The Industrial and Social Condition of Women in the Commonwealth," *Proceedings of the Third Australasian Catholic Congress, St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, 1909* (Sydney: William Brooks, 1909), 287-294.

<sup>176</sup> Golding, "The Industrial and Social Condition," 290.

<sup>177</sup> Golding, "The Industrial and Social Condition," 291.

<sup>178</sup> Golding, "The Industrial and Social Condition," 291.

<sup>179</sup> Golding, "The Industrial and Social Condition," 291.

<sup>180</sup> *Catholic Educational Conference of New South Wales, 17-20 January, 1911* (Sydney: William Brooks, 1911), 35.

<sup>181</sup> Kyle, *Her Natural Destiny*, 118.

education “before entering on domestic training.”<sup>182</sup> In fact the West Maitland Dominican Sisters opened a school for commercial studies and domestic economy at St Mary’s Priory in 1934, and catered for pupils at the school as well as adult townspeople.<sup>183</sup>

Further north, the Queensland Women’s Electoral League (QWEL), which lobbied for women’s equality before the law, also campaigned for a chair of Domestic Science at an Australian university.<sup>184</sup> When home science was eventually introduced at Brisbane Girls’ Grammar School in 1937, the principal, Miss Kathleen Lilley,<sup>185</sup> then described it as an:

...interesting and useful branch of work [which had] been neglected for too long in favour of subjects quite remote from the sphere of women’s lives.<sup>186</sup>

Training middle-class girls in household skills had by 1937 gained wide acceptance in Australia, especially since women’s traditional work such as weaving, baking and sewing, was being increasingly performed outside the home.

Clearly, the domestic science movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries had a greater depth than is recognised. Raising women’s work to an “honoured position” was an aim shared by women activists and women educators alike, particularly by the Catholic teaching sisters whose role in the domestic science movement has yet to be fully explored or appreciated. Interestingly, the women’s craft revolution of the present period has seen feminists, in countries like Australia, espouse craft through radical activism. This early 21<sup>st</sup> century movement attempts to reclaim traditional needlecraft as a platform for women’s artistic creativity and empowerment. The ‘crafters’ use their medium for often radical social comment on the well-being of women, the environment and society in general.<sup>187</sup>

In sum, the inclusion of domestic classes in the evolving convent curricula was clearly an issue of vocational importance. It paralleled the sisters’ provision of vocational education in their earlier European experience, especially in the free schools they had opened there in conjunction with their convent day and boarding schools.

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<sup>182</sup> *Catholic Educational Conference of New South Wales, 1911*, 35.

<sup>183</sup> See MacGinley, *Ancient Tradition*, 238.

<sup>184</sup> QWEL Papers, Oxley Library, OM71-47/1, quoted in McCulloch, *The Suffragists*, 21.

<sup>185</sup> Kathleen was the grand-daughter of Sir Charles Lilley, founding trustee of Brisbane Girls’ Grammar in 1875.

<sup>186</sup> *The Courier Mail*, December 11, 1937.

<sup>187</sup> For example, as at 2011, the organisation named Revolutionary Craft Circle in Melbourne was a radical feminist social action group that used cross-stitch patterns for social criticism.

#### 4.12.4 A Common Music Tradition

Music was given a prominent place in the curricula of most convent high schools in Australia. The European convent music tradition that the Catholic teaching sisters shared in common will now be examined. It is important to note that the music tradition and consequent contribution of the Catholic sisters to Australian social and cultural life have received little scholarly attention.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the new teaching nuns in Western Europe promoted music as a profession; they formed musical ensembles, composed music, encouraged musical performance and employed notable musicians to train novices and student boarders.<sup>188</sup> Their music curriculum was “not merely devotional, but also in touch with worldly cultural life,”<sup>189</sup> structured to prepare upper-class girls for the salons and the court, and also to provide music and dance to day students. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Catholic sisters transported Europe’s convent musical culture to the antipodes and sought to achieve acculturation in the ‘New World.’<sup>190</sup> In Australia, the sisters devotedly retained many elements of their shared music tradition. They produced music, promoted musical performance, and employed lay musicians as teachers. They also prepared music students for the competitive external music examinations of the Associated Board of the Royal Academy and Royal College of Music (Trinity College), London.

The sisters included music as an essential component of their school curriculum in Australia, particularly since music fees sustained convent economies. In 1872, the Mercy convent at Wyton in Warrnambool, Victoria, charged a music fee of £2 in addition to the boarding fee.<sup>191</sup> Other enrichment subjects or ‘extras’ such as singing, drawing and flower making attracted a lower fee of £1. A recent thesis by Janice Garaty on the Mercy Sisters’ Holy Cross College in Sydney demonstrated that income from music assured that school’s continuity, particularly during the Great Depression of the 1930s.<sup>192</sup>

Convent school establishments in Australian towns and regional centres also became important musical and cultural centres that attracted fee-paying students of all denominations. Protestant girls at schools like All Hallows’ readily availed of the educational and musical

<sup>188</sup> For an overview of recent studies on convent music in 17<sup>th</sup> century Italy, see Evangelisti, *Nuns*, 116-119.

<sup>189</sup> Evangelisti, *Nuns*, 119, 120.

<sup>190</sup> On the ‘civilising mission’ of French sisters, see Rogers, *From the Salon*, 227 and Curtis, *Civilising Habits*.

<sup>191</sup> Allen, *The Labourer’s Friends*, 102. Additional fees enabled the Wyton sisters to extend the convent building to house orphaned and abandoned children.

<sup>192</sup> Garaty, “Holy Cross College,” 294.



training offered by the sisters.<sup>193</sup> The popular demand for music meant that most girls at convent high schools studied it. In Queensland music was “the passion of the colony” as wrote Mother Vincent Whitty.<sup>194</sup> The sisters also provided music lessons before and after school to outside pupils, mainly boys and girls from government schools, as well as young adults.

Conventual women transcended sectarian divisions through their educational, cultural and social work.<sup>195</sup> Although religious bigotry was an aspect of colonial life, convent musical culture was clearly appreciated in Australian communities. When the Mercy Sisters at All Hallows’ announced the school’s first public bazaar in 1867, *The Brisbane Courier* strongly urged community support for the sisters, claiming: “the good done by them...has won the respect and admiration of all classes and creeds.”<sup>196</sup> *The Queenslander* subsequently reported that the bazaar was opened by Governor Bowen and had attracted residents from Brisbane as well as “the North of the colony, New South Wales, Tasmania and New Zealand.”<sup>197</sup> It mentioned the high standard of music presented:

...the young ladies ...played a variety of pleasing selections on the harmonium and pianoforte in a really admirable manner. The excellent time which they all kept was remarked by almost every visitor... The young lady who presided over the harmonium especially distinguished herself...The Sisters of Mercy are to be congratulated on the gratifying results...

Through music the Catholic sisters made significant contributions to local nation building. For example, the Mercy Sisters were integral to the developing town of Brisbane. Sr Mary Cecilia who helped establish All Hallows’ musical prowess in its foundational years became renowned in Brisbane for her musical ability. In January 1868, she travelled to Sydney at Bishop Quinn’s request to prepare the main orchestral item for the civic concert to welcome Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, to New South Wales.<sup>198</sup> Soon afterwards in March, All Hallows’ school orchestra was invited to present the opening piece for a similar public concert in Brisbane in honour of the Prince. The students played Rossini’s Overture to *Tancredi*.<sup>199</sup>

<sup>193</sup> Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 13.

<sup>194</sup> M Vincent Whitty, Letter to Dublin Mercy convent (ca.1860s), quoted in O’Donoghue, *Mother Vincent*, 35.

<sup>195</sup> In Queensland especially, collaboration was necessary to withstand the hazards of the harsh environment. On the cooperation of Church and State in Queensland since 1859, see C. P. Hanlon, “From Quinnsland to Q150” (Aquinas Lecture presented at the Francis Rush Centre, Brisbane, December 3, 2008).

<sup>196</sup> *The Brisbane Courier*, May 11, 1867, 7.

<sup>197</sup> *The Queenslander*, October 5, 1867.

<sup>198</sup> Through this civic and cultural event, the sisters seem to have transcended the discord between Sr Cecilia and Bishop Quinn at that time. See MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope*, 129.

<sup>199</sup> O’Donoghue, *Mother Vincent*, 62.

Convent openings and fundraising bazaars, school concerts and exhibitions were important social and cultural events in the life of local Australian communities, uniting various sections of society – students and their families, local residents and invited guests.<sup>200</sup> In 1895, the *Wagga Wagga Daily Advertiser* reported that the prize-giving celebrations at Mt Erin were “enjoyable social functions, looked forward to with pleasure” and that “invitations usually include representations of all denominations in the community and are very largely availed of.”<sup>201</sup> Civic and Church leaders frequently attended convent high school concerts and prize-giving ceremonies. For example, at the Perth Mercy convent, Governor Charles Fitzgerald’s wife, Lady Fitzgerald, distributed the end-of-year prizes during the 1850s.<sup>202</sup> In Queensland in the 1860s, Governor George Bowen and his wife, Lady Diamantina, regularly attended cultural events at All Hallows’. Similarly, in 1899, the Mayor of Armidale, Alderman J D Fitzgerald, presided over the presentation of certificates at the Ursuline convent high school.<sup>203</sup> Women in convent high schools in colonial Australia can therefore readily be seen as active agents who effectively promoted musical performance.

Professor Arthur Somervell, a Royal College of Music examiner in the late 1890s, noted that the musical tradition and training which was developed in convent high schools “was far superior” to that in any other school in Australia.<sup>204</sup> Convent school establishments were indeed a prominent force in shaping Australian cultural life along familiar European lines. So important did the people of north Queensland view the opening of St Monica’s convent in Cairns in 1914 that special train services were arranged to take those in outlying areas to the public ceremony.<sup>205</sup> The distinction between religious and civic ceremonies on such occasions tended to be blurred. The official opening of the Cairns’ convent marked a significant historical moment for the district and was given extensive coverage in the *Cairns Post*. Mayor Ald. T. Dillon presented a vote of thanks to Archbishop Duhig who gave the opening address. In his address, Duhig defined the educational work of the Catholic sisters in Queensland as transformational:

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<sup>200</sup> On convent bazaars during the 1890s, see Beverley Kingston, “Faith and Fetes, Women and History of the Churches in Australia,” in *Women Faith and Fetes: Essays in the History of Women and the Church in Australia*, ed. Sabine Willis (Melbourne: Dove Communications in association with the Australian Council of Churches, NSW, Commission on Status of Women, 1977), 20-27.

<sup>201</sup> *Daily Advertiser*, December 14, 1895.

<sup>202</sup> Allen, *The Labourer’s Friends*, 17.

<sup>203</sup> Kneipp, *This Land of Promise*, 47-48.

<sup>204</sup> Quoted in the annual report of Fr McCarthy, inspector of Catholic schools Archdiocese of Melbourne, 1900, to the Archbishop. *The Argus*, December 8, 1900, 6.

<sup>205</sup> *Cairns Post*, March 19, 1914, 1.

...wherever we have erected convents the whole of the public has noticed the perfect and speedy transformation among the young people of the town.<sup>206</sup>

Duhig's triumphalist rhetoric aside, many communities, particularly in Queensland, clearly perceived 'the nuns' as promoters of culture and morality and their influence as transformational.<sup>207</sup> When St Monica's convent opened in 1912, numerous government school children and young adults availed themselves of the musical training provided therein by the Mercy Sisters outside school hours.<sup>208</sup> The cultural contribution of the teaching sisters to nation-building was readily recognised by many pioneering communities.

#### 4.12.4.1 High Standard of Musical Training

Thus music flourished in Australian convent high schools. Each year, large numbers of pupils from convent music centres were successfully prepared for music examinations and many received awards. They were entered for the competitive external music examinations of the Associated Board of the Royal Academy of Music and Royal College of Music (Trinity College), London, from the elementary division to the advanced grade, and afterwards on to the teachers' examination. Students at convent music centres from 1897 were also presented for the examinations of the Universities of Melbourne and Adelaide, and the Sydney Conservatorium from 1916, under the direction of the Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB).

Among Australia's pioneering teaching sisters of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were many accomplished musicians, including Vincent Whitty, foundress of the Queensland Mercy Sisters (1861), and Gonzaga Barry, pioneer leader of the Australian province of the Loreto institute (1875). In the late 1890s, Mother Peter Leeson of the Loreto Osborne convent, Perth, established the first schools orchestra in Western Australia.<sup>209</sup> By 1900, Parramatta Mercy sister Stanislaus White had established "a distinctive school of violin teaching" at Out Lady's Mercy Convent High School (OLMC).<sup>210</sup> Most teaching sisters invested in their musical education. In the 1890s, Sr Stanislaus White studied under Rivers Alpress, a renowned violin teacher from the Royal Academy of Music, London.<sup>211</sup> The Adelaide Mercy Sisters at St Aloysius High School

<sup>206</sup> Archbishop Duhig, Occasional address given at the opening of St Monica's Convent in Cairns in March 1914, *Cairns Post*, March 23, 1914, 8.

<sup>207</sup> Sectarian feeling was less pronounced in Queensland than in New South Wales and Victoria. See Michael A. Endicott, *The Augustinians in Far North Queensland 1883-1941* (Brookvale, NSW: Augustinian Historical Commission, 1988), 135; see also O'Donoghue, *Mother Vincent*, 142.

<sup>208</sup> Cairns Annals of the Sisters of Mercy, cited in Susan Mary Tobin, *Catholic Education in Queensland* (Brisbane: Conference of Catholic Education, Qld, 1987), 5:5.

<sup>209</sup> Clark, *Loreto*, 89.

<sup>210</sup> Cyril Monk, violin examiner from the Conservatorium of Music (ca.1940), quoted in McGrath, *These Women?*, 67.

<sup>211</sup> McGrath, *These Women?*, 66.

employed specialist tutors from the Elder Conservatorium to enable them to gain music qualifications.<sup>212</sup> When the Ursulines introduced the Virgil Clavier system for teaching the piano at their Armidale convent high school in 1908, two of the sisters undertook a course under Mr Virgil during his visit to Australia at that time.<sup>213</sup>

Some sisters obtained their Licentiate of the Associated Board (LAB) and Licentiate of Trinity College London (LTCL). The Licentiate diploma in music was the highest distinction in music and the highest music teaching qualification awarded at that time. In the 1930s, Mother Lua Byrne, Music mistress at Loreto High School, Toorak, obtained her Licentiate in violin and cello.<sup>214</sup> Most teaching sisters, however, had received their qualifications at convent high schools prior to entering religious life. For example, Cecilia Macken of the Parramatta convent had been the first recipient of the All-Ireland prize for piano playing in the 1890s.<sup>215</sup> Srs Oliver Dalton, Gerald Dalton, Céline Taylor and Damian Duncombe of All Hallows' convent in Brisbane obtained their Licentiates while they were pupils at the school in the 1910s and 1920s.<sup>216</sup> Sr Damian also received the Broadwood Medal for first place in Queensland among candidates for this diploma.

French convent musical culture was transported to foreign lands directly from France by institutes like the *Sacré Coeur* Sisters. Ingrid Sykes has noted that in 1903, the Sacred Heart Sisters at Rose Bay, Sydney, imported a Théodore Puget organ that was made in Toulouse, and that in 1905, the Sacred Heart convent in Glen Iris, Melbourne, acquired a Belgian Merklin-Schutze organ from the *Sacré Coeur* convent in Bordeaux.<sup>217</sup> This suggests that the Sacred Heart Sisters may have taught organ to promising students in Australia. Moreover, they preserved the convent musical culture of France and at the same time embraced innovative developments in musical instruments such as the organ for enhancing their production of sacred music.

#### 4.12.4.2 Music Examination Success

Enriching subjects in 19<sup>th</sup> century convent high schools in Australia have generally been defined in decorative terms; however, such branding fails to acknowledge the teaching sisters' promotion of music as a serious subject for study. One need only examine the extensive

<sup>212</sup> McLay, *Women on the Move*, 87.

<sup>213</sup> Kneipp, *This Land of Promise*, 48.

<sup>214</sup> "Obituary, Leonora Lua Byrne IBVM (08/07/1903-11/02/2008)," accessed September, 2011, Loreto.org.au/Our-Story/Loreto-Archives. Mother Lua Byrne became an AMEB examiner in the 1960s.

<sup>215</sup> McGrath, *These Women?*, 66.

<sup>216</sup> Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 125-126.

<sup>217</sup> Ingrid J. Sykes, "The Globalisation of French Sound: French Convents in Australia," Papers from the George Rudé Seminar, vol. 1, 2005, in *French History and Civilisation*, eds. Ian Collier, Helen Davies, and Julie Kalman (Melbourne: George Rudé Society, 2005), 97-103.

newspaper records of music examination results for convent high schools across Australia to recognise the high standards that were aspired to and achieved by the sisters from the outset. For instance, in 1896, the Presentations at St Mary's College, Hobart, prepared twelve pupils for the Trinity College exams; "ten passed, three securing honours."<sup>218</sup> Records show that in the 1910s, pupils from Star of the Sea Presentation convent, Melbourne, gained the LTCL.<sup>219</sup> At Mt Erin Presentation convent Wagga Wagga, four pupils in 1907 were awarded Licentiates from the Sydney College of Music.<sup>220</sup> The musical foundations of Our Lady's College, Longreach, were set by its founding sisters from Mt Erin. At Our Lady's:

Exceedingly numerous were the passes in music, practical and theoretical, in connection with the Sydney College of Music, the London College of Music, Trinity College and the Royal Academy, while not a few won for themselves distinction in the various grades.<sup>221</sup>

Pupils of convent high schools were frequent recipients of the University Medal (the highest award) in 'Theory of Music' at the London intermediate University examinations. Pearlie Walsh, a pupil of the Good Samaritan convent high school in Pitt Street, Sydney, won the Medal in 1896.<sup>222</sup> In 1911, the medal was awarded to a pupil of the Poor Clare Sisters at Our Lady's High School, Waverley, (now St Clare's College) where twenty-eight students gained distinguished results in the music exams that year.<sup>223</sup>

At Loreto Convent High School, Osborne, Perth, all fourteen candidates for the Royal College of Music in 1902 were successful and two gained distinctions. Of the seven candidates presented for the theoretical exam of the Associated Board, six passed and four received distinctions. According to *The West Australian*, Mr J. P. Waddington, an examiner of the Associated Board, "gave great praise to the careful work of the sisters" and of the "uniform excellence of the pupils."<sup>224</sup> In 1904, Mary Jowett, a pupil of Loreto convent in Claremont, received the LAB.<sup>225</sup> Furthermore, McLay's research on the Mercy Sisters in Western Australia, particularly at the convent in Coolgardie and St Brigid's, West Perth, revealed "a very large number of fellowships, licentiates, diplomas, scholarships and prizes from Trinity College, London and the Australian Music Board."<sup>226</sup>

<sup>218</sup> School advertisement for St Mary's, Hobart, in *The Mercury*, January 9, 1897, 3.

<sup>219</sup> Star of the Sea, Elsternwick, *Distribution of Prizes Programme*, 1914. WWPA.

<sup>220</sup> *The Mt Erin Record*, 1907. WWPA.

<sup>221</sup> Mt Erin Presentation Convent, *Souvenir of Golden Jubilee, Sacred Heart Presentation Convent, Wagga Wagga, 1874-1924*, WWPA.

<sup>222</sup> Walsh, *The Good Sams*, 152.

<sup>223</sup> MacGinley, *A Lamp Lit*, 86.

<sup>224</sup> *The West Australian*, December 17, 1902, 9.

<sup>225</sup> *The West Australian*, August 17, 1904, 9.

<sup>226</sup> McLay, *Women Out of Their Sphere*, 148.

In 1926, *The Brisbane Courier* recorded that the four Licentiates awarded in Queensland for the Trinity College examinations were won by pupils at convent high schools, these being All Hallows', Lourdes Hill College, Stuartholme and the Ursuline Convent, Dutton Park.<sup>227</sup> Records of the Good Samaritan Sisters at Lourdes Hill, Hawthorne, show that of the six LAB certificates awarded in Queensland in 1931, five were won by pupils from Lourdes Hill.<sup>228</sup> A Lourdes Hill pupil, Alma O'Dea, was the first Queenslander to win the Dame Nellie Melba scholarship at the Conservatorium of Melbourne in 1924.<sup>229</sup> The Mercy convents in Sydney were renowned for repeatedly winning the annual AMEB Shield for the highest grading in those examinations. Over the twenty-two year period from 1929 to 1952, the Parramatta congregation and associated branch music schools were awarded the shield nineteen times.<sup>230</sup>

Significantly, music provided a profession for many convent-trained women in Australia. The acclaimed soprano soloist Gertrude Johnson received her early musical training at the Presentation convent Windsor. In 1915, Johnson studied under Nellie Melba at Melba's new women's singing school at the Albert Street Conservatorium, East Melbourne. She later founded the National Theatre in Melbourne.<sup>231</sup> Miss Stella Power who was known in the early 1900s as "the Little Melba," was educated at the Vacluse convent Mt St Joseph in Richmond, Victoria, by the Faithful Companions of Jesus (FCJ). According to *The Register*, "it was discovered by the nuns in the convent that her talent lay in her voice."<sup>232</sup> In discovering and nurturing student talent the sisters clearly fostered the teaching of music by young women and enabled their pursuit of musical careers.

In 1910, Miss Power was one of eight Vacluse pupils to obtain honours in the University of Melbourne music examinations.<sup>233</sup> Her music teacher, Sr Caroline Lenz, had obtained her Licentiate from Trinity College, London, in 1908.<sup>234</sup> She secured a scholarship to the Albert Street Conservatorium and later toured America with Nellie Melba. In 1919, she made her debut in the Royal Albert-hall, London.<sup>235</sup> Past pupils of St Aloysius convent high school in Adelaide, Kathleen O'Dea, Eileen Sayers and Patricia Howard, won the Elder scholarship at the South Australian Conservatorium to study for three years at the Royal College of Music,

<sup>227</sup> *The Brisbane Courier*, March 8, 1926, 19.

<sup>228</sup> Leonie D'Arcy, "History of Lourdes Hill," *Brisbane Catholic Historical Society Proceedings* 7 (2000): 97.

<sup>229</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 20, 1924, 14.

<sup>230</sup> See McGrath, *These Women?*, 68.

<sup>231</sup> Therese Radic, "Johnson, Gertrude Emily (1894-1973)," in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Canberra: National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, 2006-2011), accessed August 9, 2011, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/johnson-gertrude-emily-10629/text18887>.

<sup>232</sup> *The Register*, Adelaide, October 29, 1924, 15.

<sup>233</sup> *The Argus*, October 27, 1910, 8.

<sup>234</sup> *The Argus*, December 5, 1908, 21.

<sup>235</sup> *The Mercury*, June 1, 1923, 12.

London, in 1912, 1939 and the 1940s respectively.<sup>236</sup> Each of these girls went on to establish a notable singing career. Margherita Grandi completed her secondary schooling at St Mary's Presentation College in Hobart in 1910 and went on to become an internationally renowned soprano in the 1930s. Having learnt foreign languages at school she was able to give operatic recitals in both French and Italian.<sup>237</sup> In Brisbane, Lourdes Hill pupil Daphne Cockburn won a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music, London, in 1933, and became an internationally acclaimed pianist.<sup>238</sup>

The early provision of music in Catholic and private ladies' colleges laid the basis for its accreditation as a subject in secondary schools in Australia. Janice Garaty has noted the contribution of Parramatta Mercy sister, Paschal Hession, in the promotion of music in New South Wales from a half-subject to a full subject for the Leaving Certificate from 1934.<sup>239</sup> Sr Paschal, in her role as Catholic representative for music on the Board of Secondary School Studies in New South Wales from 1939 to 1969, was also instrumental in raising the status of music in Australian education.

Indeed the profound cultural impact of women religious and their convent high schools on pioneering communities, especially in country towns, across Australia has yet to be fully acknowledged. The Catholic teaching sisters were integral to nation-building and to forming an Australian cultural identity and a musical culture derived from European precedents. The extensive European tradition of 'cultured education' in convent and private ladies' schools diminished somewhat with the early twentieth century introduction of prescribed external syllabuses and public examinations. Music retained its importance in the curriculum of most Catholic secondary colleges in Australia over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the case study that follows exemplifies.

#### 4.12.5 Foreign Language Education

The Frenchness of convent high schools in Australia had European precedents, particularly in Ireland which had depended heavily on the French Church during the Penal Era.<sup>240</sup> The inclusion of the French language in convent curricula reflected the continuing French influence in girls' education. For example, convent school advertisements in the 1870s referred to proficiency in French conversation as a "most necessary branch of a lady's

<sup>236</sup> Allen, *The Labourer's Friend*, 321.

<sup>237</sup> *The Mercury*, June 10, 1939, 8.

<sup>238</sup> D'Arcy, "History of Lourdes Hill," 97.

<sup>239</sup> Garaty, 'Holy Cross College,' 292.

<sup>240</sup> In the 1870s, the Cork Ursulines engaged a French Ursuline, Mère Clotilde of the Convent of Saint Saulve, near Valenciennes, to live with them and teach French for two years. See Clarke, *The Ursulines in Cork*, 115.

education.”<sup>241</sup> In fact at a number of Australian convent schools, the sisters conversed in French at recess times and students said their prayers in French.<sup>242</sup> These practices continued in some schools until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Exhibition and concert programs reveal the extent of this French influence. A report of the scholastic prizes distributed at St Mary’s College, Hobart, in 1875 stated that capable girls expanded their French by memorising the French Catechism.<sup>243</sup> Moreover, extant concert programmes of Star of the Sea, Elsternwick, reveal that the “*mademoiselles*” (young ladies) performed French operettas at their annual concerts throughout the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>244</sup> Other convent high schools, like the Ursuline College in Armidale, staged French plays.<sup>245</sup>

The school motto of the Mercy Sisters’ All Hallows’ School in Brisbane, *Dieu et Devoir* (God and Duty), was formulated in 1911 and underscores the primacy of French traditions in a convent school. The influence of French spirituality in Presentation schools was evidenced by the emphasis on personal devotion to the humanity of Christ and to Mary. Nano Nagle, from her experience in France, was particularly devoted to the Eucharist, the Sacred Heart, the Passion of Christ, and to Mary the Mother of God.<sup>246</sup> In penal Ireland, women in elite circles mastered French in order to read the most influential spiritual texts of the day, which in the 19<sup>th</sup> century also reached Australia from France. The Presentation Sisters, like other institutes, brought French spiritual texts to Australia for daily meditation.<sup>247</sup>

Besides French, one or more other foreign languages were usually included in the curriculum of convent schools, as has been noted. Some convents offered Latin, Greek, German or Italian, depending on the teaching expertise available in a particular year. In fact Latin, which was offered in convent schools like All Hallows’ in the 1890s, remained a prerequisite for the professions that were still generally confined to men.<sup>248</sup> A report on the high standard of education imparted by the Presentation Sisters at Mt Erin in 1895 noted that “several of the

<sup>241</sup> *Catholic Herald and Monthly Summary* January 1870, quoted in Burley, “None More Anonymous?,” 24.

<sup>242</sup> Burley, “None More Anonymous?,” 184.

<sup>243</sup> St Mary’s College Hobart, Prize-giving report (1875), reprinted in *The Mercury* December 24, 1875, 1.

<sup>244</sup> In 1886 the “*mademoiselles*” at Star of the Sea performed Luigi Bordèse’s operetta *Le Miracle des Rose*; and in 1888 they performed a scene from *Les Enfants d’Edourd IV*. See Star of the Sea, Elsternwick, *Annual Concert, Exhibition and Distribution of Prizes Programme*, 1886 and 1888, and also 1889, 1895 and 1899.

<sup>245</sup> Kneipp, *This Land of Promise*, 45.

<sup>246</sup> Presentation Constitutions (1805), chaps. 9 and 10 are given to these devotions. Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Constitutions of the Sisters of the Presentation of Our Blessed Lady* (Rome: Sacra Congregatio de Religiosis, 1947), Veech Library, Catholic Institute of Sydney.

<sup>247</sup> The Collections of the Wagga Presentation Sisters contain numerous 19<sup>th</sup> century French spiritual texts.

<sup>248</sup> On All Hallows’ School, see Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 76.



nuns were themselves educated on the continent of Europe. French, German, and Italian are spoken by them in their native purity.”<sup>249</sup>

#### 4.13 THE CATHOLIC TEACHING SISTERS’ CONTRIBUTION TO THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF TEACHING IN AUSTRALIA

Hellinckx et al. have highlighted that the professional training of the Catholic teaching sisters overall has received little attention.<sup>250</sup> The following brief analysis illustrates the transforming influence of the Catholic sisters in Australia in developing professional standards for teacher-training that placed them in the vanguard of developments in teacher education.

In the period following the Education Acts (1872-1895), each State Department of Public Instruction provided pre-service courses for trainee teachers.<sup>251</sup> Some teacher applicants gained scholarships to the Teachers’ Training College while others trained under the pupil-teacher system at approved government schools.<sup>252</sup> The latter system mirrored the pupil-teacher system which had long since been developed in European convent day and boarding schools for the professional training of religious women teachers, as has been seen.<sup>253</sup>

The Central Catholic Teachers Training College (CCTC), established in 1906 in Melbourne by Archbishop Carr, was staffed by the Loreto Sisters<sup>254</sup> and received mainly young lay women. Madge O’Rourke who wished to join the Presentation Sisters in Longreach was among the first lay students enrolled at the Loreto-run CCTC. She completed her two-year teaching certification course there in 1909. Several Queensland Presentation Sisters instead obtained teaching qualifications through the Mercy Sisters’ pupil-teacher training program, itself officially recognised by the Queensland Government.<sup>255</sup> The Mercy and Brigidine Sisters later opened training centres for their own Sisters, and may have taken lay women as well, but not members of other congregations. The Victorian Presentation Sisters eventually established a teacher-training centre, O’Neill College, in Elsternwick in Melbourne in 1926.

<sup>249</sup> *The Daily Advertiser*, December 14, 1895, clipping, WWPA.

<sup>250</sup> See Hellinckx, Simon and Depaepe, *The Forgotten Contribution*, 22.

<sup>251</sup> See I. S. Turner, “The Professional Preparation of Teachers in Australia,” in *Australian Teachers from Colonial Schoolmasters to Militant Professionals*, ed. A. D. Spaul (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1977), 100-117.

From 1850, training was provided in model schools, though the older pupil-teacher mode of training continued.

<sup>252</sup> Teachers’ colleges were established in Adelaide (1876), Melbourne (1889) and Sydney (1906). The University of Queensland Act (1909) provided teacher-training in connection with the University. See Goodman, *Secondary Education*, 240-241.

<sup>253</sup> The training provided to pupil-teachers in the English and Irish convents was regulated and examined under the National Board systems.

<sup>254</sup> See Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:434.

<sup>255</sup> Sr Moira Creede, past pupil (1935-36), teacher (1945-61) and principal of St Rita’s College (1961-71), interviewed by the author, Clayfield, Brisbane, March 13, 2002, (interview transcripts and recordings are in the author’s possession, hereafter cited in footnotes as AP). Sr Moira recalled that Srs Bernadette Hayman, Imelda O’Sullivan, Margaret Mary McKenna, Dolores Dwyer and Teresita Ahearn trained under the Mercy program. (St Rita’s College hereafter cited in footnotes as SRC).

In Victoria, most institutes of women religious registered their training colleges with the Council of Education which carried out regular inspections and registered graduates.

In 1895, educationist Barbara Bell came to Australia from Dublin at the invitation of Mother Gonzaga Barry of Loreto Mary's Mount, Ballarat, to develop courses for a diploma in education at the new CCTC. Bell was educated by the Dominican nuns in Dublin, had taught with the Ursulines in Holland, and gained her teaching qualifications from the Teachers' Training Syndicate at Cambridge, England, in 1895. In Australia, she provided training courses on teaching methods and school organisation, not only to the Loreto Sisters, but also to the Mercy and Presentation Sisters and Faithful Companions of Jesus from 1901 to 1910.<sup>256</sup>

Clearly, many congregations invested substantially in the professional training of their teachers. In 1918, the Loreto Sisters opened St Mary's Hall at Melbourne University as a residential college for women completing their Diploma of Education. This enabled the Catholic sisters to enrol as fee-paying boarders at a time when few Australian women undertook university study. Similarly, the Society of the Sacred Heart founded Sancta Sophia College at the University of Sydney in 1926, as well as Duchesne College at the University of Queensland in 1937, as will be seen.<sup>257</sup> In Melbourne, leading Presentation educator and founding director of O'Neill College, Mother M Peter Fitzgerald, was among the earlier religious sisters to avail themselves of university education. She completed her Bachelor of Arts degree and Diploma of Education at the University of Melbourne.<sup>258</sup> In Sydney, the Good Samaritan and Dominican Sisters were among the first to reside at Sancta Sophia College while completing university degrees.<sup>259</sup> Of the twenty-seven students residing at Sancta Sophia in its opening year, seven were Dominican Sisters.<sup>260</sup>

It is important to note that although most teachers in government secondary schools in Australia were not tertiary educated in the 1940s,<sup>261</sup> convent high schools had university graduates among their teaching personnel from the 1920s. Clearly, the Catholic teaching sisters' acquisition of academic qualifications contributed significantly to the

<sup>256</sup> See Ann R. Shorten, "Barbara Bell (1870-1957)," in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Canberra: National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, 2006-2011), accessed August 9, 2011, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/bell-barbara-5189/text8725>.

<sup>257</sup> Williams, *The Society of the Sacred Heart*, 210.

<sup>258</sup> Kane, *Adventure in Faith*, 121-22.

<sup>259</sup> Mary Dominica McEwan, *A Living Stream: A History of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, 1857-1924* (Sydney: Good Samaritan Sisters, 1989), 118; MacGinley, *Ancient Tradition*, 223, fn. 106.

<sup>260</sup> At the Catholic Teachers' Conference in Sydney in 1922, the directress of the Dominican training school in the West Maitland convent, Sr Borgia Dimond, herself a graduate of Sydney University as a lay woman, gave a critique of educational methods, including Froebel and Montessori. At that time, the Dominican Sisters hosted conferences for teachers of the diocese. MacGinley, *Ancient Tradition*, 211.

<sup>261</sup> Turner, "The Professional Preparation of Teachers," 111.

professionalisation of teaching in Australia while paralleling the initiatives of women religious in Europe.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrated that the convent high school project in 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia embodied the traditions of empowerment and transformation in the long history of Catholic women's education. It also proposed that the similarities in the style and curricula of convent high schools and other private ladies colleges in Australia reflect a common education tradition of French origin. Moreover, it examined the agency of the Catholic teaching sisters in making educational provision for young colonial women where none had existed before. This chapter viewed the convent high school project in Australia through the perspective offered by social historian, Rebecca Rogers, who has noted that in 19<sup>th</sup> century convent schools in France, "access to knowledge for girls and access to authority for women teachers could, and did, at times lead to forms of emancipation and an ability to criticize and challenge prevailing gender norms."<sup>262</sup> Likewise, this chapter demonstrated that the work of the Catholic sisters in pioneering a system of secondary girls' education in Australia helped broaden prevailing understandings of the purpose of women's education and contributed to women's enfranchisement.

Up to this point, this thesis has shown that it was on the French Ursuline model that the Australian convent high school was established. The convent high school tradition provides the broad context for examining the development of the modern Catholic girls' college in Australia. The remaining chapters of this thesis contain the case study on St Rita's College, Clayfield. The coming chapter will address the transition from convent high school to modern secondary girls' school that occurred in Australia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It will show that the traditions of transformation and empowerment are reflected in the early story of St Rita's College.

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<sup>262</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 11.

***PART THREE***

***THE CASE STUDY***

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **A NEW CONVENT HIGH SCHOOL - ST RITA'S COLLEGE, CLAYFIELD: THE EARLY YEARS, 1926-1938**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will examine the foundation and early development of St Rita's College, Clayfield, within the specific contexts of adaptation and transition. It will explore how the Catholic teaching sisters in Brisbane in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century adapted their proven convent high school model to the requirements of modern secondary schooling. It will also highlight the convent high school traditions of empowerment and transformation that were embedded in the aims of most Catholic girls' secondary colleges at that time, and will use St Rita's College as an illustrative case study. Next it will demonstrate how these traditions are exemplified in the story of the Queensland Presentation Sisters whose teaching vow enshrined the education of girls as the congregation's primary apostolic work. This chapter will accordingly investigate the broader context that determined how St Rita's College was planned, what it sought to achieve, and how it responded to contemporary questions about both womanhood and the secondary education of girls. Furthermore, this chapter will demonstrate that the transforming agency of Mother Ursula Kennedy assured the continuance of St Rita's despite the financial strain of its foundation during the period of the Great Depression.

#### **5.1 ADAPTING THE CONVENT HIGH SCHOOL TO THE PUBLIC**

##### **EXAMINATION SYSTEM – THE QUEENSLAND STORY**

In Queensland as in other Australian States, the Catholic teaching sisters adopted and adapted the European model of convent education to changing educational pressures. Growing democratisation and the pragmatic demands of increasing social and industrial complexity dictated a new differentiation between primary and secondary schooling that was based on age level, rather as formerly on social class. It was during this significant period of transition from Continental-style convent education to modern secondary schooling that in 1926 the Longreach Presentation Sisters led by Mothers Ursula Kennedy and Patrick Madden founded St Rita's College in Brisbane. Around 1910, State governments in Australia entered the field of secondary education as relative latecomers compared with the Catholic teaching sisters who were already providing for the further education of girls, as has been seen.

The demand for government funded secondary education, however, remained relatively low until after World War II when the idea of a broadly educated population was conceived in terms of national and economic prosperity. In Queensland, government secondary schools

were established only in the larger centres. Six such schools opened in 1912 soon after the establishment of the University of Queensland in 1910. Each of these secondary schools offered a four-year course in commercial and domestic studies that was assessed at two successive levels by the University's public examinations.<sup>1</sup> Some high schools were associated with technical colleges and placed emphasis on technical subjects, and some towns added 'secondary tops' to their existing primary schools. In Brisbane, the secondary classes of the Central Technical College merged with a new high school in 1921 to form the Brisbane State High School.<sup>2</sup> No further expansion of the Queensland secondary school system occurred then until 1937 when a new high school appeared in Ayr.<sup>3</sup> Thus the provision of secondary schools for girls' further education in the State was left to private operators, the most numerous being the Catholic sisters who were leading providers in the field. Beginning with All Hallows' Mercy Convent in Brisbane in 1863, the Catholic teaching sisters pioneered girls' secondary education in Queensland and established secondary schools in Brisbane and regional areas where none had existed before.

By 1920, Catholic teaching sisters across Australia had adapted their convent high schools to the emerging secondary school culture and to the academic rigour of public examinations.<sup>4</sup> These changes occurred at a time when education beyond the Junior level was generally considered unnecessary, especially for girls.<sup>5</sup> Rupert Goodman, historian of secondary education in Queensland asserted that:

Girls were still not regarded as having the same place in high school education as boys...The State believed it had a duty to make some provision for the education of girls beyond the age of fourteen, but that education was to fit them for duty in the home.<sup>6</sup>

Although secondary education leading to university qualifications and the professions remained largely the privilege of boys from affluent families, the Catholic sisters generally complied with the matriculation pre-requisites of the universities, as has been seen. Such compliance was not only required but became essential once women could be accepted into universities. Most female congregations progressed seamlessly towards the new structures required, with the exception of the Benedictine nuns at Subiaco, Rydalmere, who in 1921 returned to full monastic enclosure in keeping with their solemn vows. Their decision led to

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<sup>1</sup> Goodman, *Secondary Education*, 237.

<sup>2</sup> Greg Logan and Eddie Clarke, *State Education in Queensland, A Brief History: Monographs on the History of Education in Queensland*, no.2 (Brisbane: Department of Education Queensland, 1984), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Goodman, *Secondary Education*, 237.

<sup>4</sup> See Barbaro, "Women Religious and their Convent High Schools," 1-21.

<sup>5</sup> Goodman, *Secondary Education*, 6. After the 1860 Grammar Schools Act, only a limited number of government scholarships became available, and only twelve were granted between 1865 and 1873.

<sup>6</sup> Goodman, *Secondary Education*, 23.

the closure of Subiaco at the end of that year.<sup>7</sup> Most other institutes, however, succeeded in balancing their traditions with the requirements of an examination age, as has been shown. For example, the Armidale Ursulines, resisted a narrowing emphasis on preparation for examinations, but at the same time “philosophically accepted the new dimension which public examinations entailed.”<sup>8</sup>

## 5.2 SPREAD OF CATHOLIC GIRLS’ SECONDARY COLLEGES IN BRISBANE

During the episcopacies of James Quinn (1860-81) and Robert Dunne (1882-1917), Catholic schools in Brisbane were conducted by only two religious institutes, the Mercy Sisters at All Hallows’ and the Irish Christian Brothers. By 1900, however, four Catholic female congregations were conducting schools in Queensland - the Mercy, Good Samaritan, Presentation and Josephite Sisters, all in the recently formed Rockhampton diocese (1882), with Mercy Sisters already there in various centres. The Mercy Sisters from Dublin came to Brisbane in 1861 and soon spread to other areas. The Sisters of St Joseph (Josephites) went to South Brisbane in 1869 to staff St Mary’s parish school,<sup>9</sup> but the congregation left the colony in 1880 after well-documented difficulties with Bishop James Quinn.<sup>10</sup> The Josephites did return to Queensland in 1900 at the invitation of Bishop John Cani of Rockhampton.<sup>11</sup>

A succession of female teaching institutes came to Brisbane after the Apostolic Delegate in Australia, Cardinal Bonaventura Cerretti, visited the archdiocese in 1915 and recommended further diversity.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, new religious congregations arrived there between 1915 and 1929, beginning with the Sisters of St Joseph (1915), the Good Samaritan Sisters (1916), the Society of the Sacred Heart (1917), the Ursulines (1919), Presentations (1924), Charity (1925), Loreto (1927) and Brigidine Sisters (1929). The introduction of new communities of women religious to Brisbane led to the diversification of the Catholic school system and brought to an end the Mercy Sisters’ dominance in Catholic education.

In order to reconstruct the Catholic school system in Brisbane, as was recommended by Cerretti, James Duhig, then co-adjutor to Archbishop Robert Dunne, first approached the teaching sisters he had known in his former diocese of Rockhampton. Annals of the Longreach Presentation convent reveal that as early as 1914 Duhig called upon the Longreach

<sup>7</sup> Fitz-Walter, “Benedictinism Encountered,” 51.

<sup>8</sup> Kneipp, *This Land of Promise*, 75.

<sup>9</sup> Maggie Boyle, “The Story of St Mary’s, South Brisbane,” *Proceedings of Brisbane Catholic Historical Society* 10 (2006): 91.

<sup>10</sup> See McKenna, *With Grateful Hearts*.

<sup>11</sup> Margaret McKenna, “James Quinn and the Josephite Philosophy of Education,” *Proceedings of Brisbane Catholic Historical Society* 7 (2000): 46. The Rockhampton diocese was founded in 1882 after Quinn’s death.

<sup>12</sup> T. P. Boland, *James Duhig* (Brisbane: Queensland University Press, 1986), 138-139.

sisters, stating “Brisbane awaits the community. Come when you will, there’s a welcome for you.”<sup>13</sup> Duhig had St Agatha’s primary school at Clayfield in mind as the sisters’ destination; however it took him a further ten years to complete the required parish centre there.<sup>14</sup> In the meantime, Duhig unexpectedly offered the Longreach sisters St Joan of Arc school at Herston, where they established the congregation’s first Brisbane foundation in July 1924.<sup>15</sup>

With each foundation in Brisbane, the Catholic teaching sisters, with the exception of the Josephites, opened a convent high school and in addition agreed to staff the local parish primary school. The Good Samaritan Sisters, known to Duhig from their foundation in Charters Towers in the Rockhampton diocese, accepted his offer of a property which he had purchased in 1914 and named “Lourdes Hill.”<sup>16</sup> This commanding property was perched above the banks of the Brisbane River at Hawthorne Road. The sisters opened Lourdes Hill College as a convent day and boarding school in 1916 and agreed also to conduct Sts Peter and Paul’s parish school at Bulimba. Lourdes Hill soon became one of Brisbane’s foremost girls’ secondary schools.

The Sacred Heart Sisters arrived in Brisbane in 1917 and staffed the Annerley parish school in a preparatory, non-permanent measure until they established Stuartholme at Toowong in 1920 as a convent boarding school in the traditional French style. The original home, on a striking hilltop overlooking Brisbane, was formerly owned by a relation of Mother Janet Stuart, Superior General of the Order from 1911 to 1914.<sup>17</sup> Also in 1917, the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart arrived in Brisbane, and at Duhig’s request staffed the Corinda parish school from 1919, as well as a Junior boarding school for boys which was relocated to Whinstanes in 1927. Then in 1941 they opened Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College, Corinda, a convent day and boarding school which operated until 1972.<sup>18</sup>

Ursulines from Armidale moved to Brisbane on their own initiative in 1919. They had approached Duhig about the possibility of establishing a Branch House in Brisbane where they could open a convent high school.<sup>19</sup> The women purchased a property at Dutton Park near St Ita’s parish school which they had agreed to staff. The sisters adapted their enclosure

<sup>13</sup> From a handwritten note by James Duhig signed in an autograph book on August 31, 1914, during a visit to the Longreach convent. Queensland Presentation Congregation Archives (hereafter cited in footnotes as QPA).

<sup>14</sup> Sr Evangelist Murtagh, notes in “Exercise Book” (hereafter cited as EB), 22-3. QPA.

<sup>15</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, August 23, 1973. The Herston community comprised M Patrick Madden (superior) and Srs Cecilia Hayes and Aquinas McReady.

<sup>16</sup> D’Arcy, “History of Lourdes Hill,” 90.

<sup>17</sup> Williams, *The Society of the Sacred Heart*, 210.

<sup>18</sup> Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane, *Brisbane West Deanery Newsletter*, September, 2011, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Annals of the Ursuline Convent, Armidale, 1917, cited in Mary Joan Ord, *A Bridge and A Resting-Place: The Ursulines at Dutton Park, 1919-1980* (Toowoomba, 1981), 3.



rule so they could make the daily “ten minutes’ walk” along Gladstone Road to the school.<sup>20</sup> In 1924, the Order purchased “Duporth” at Oxley, formerly a private boarding school for girls that was established in 1887 and conducted until 1895 by Mrs Janet O’Connor, an Englishwoman previously associated with the Brisbane Girls’ Grammar School.<sup>21</sup> The Oxley school was then conducted by her two daughters until 1920. When the Ursulines opened their new college in 1925, they retained the name ‘Duporth’, and it was the Order’s first convent day and boarding school in Queensland.<sup>22</sup> The Ursulines then opened St Ita’s convent day school at Dutton Park in 1932. Finally, in 1957 this became St Ursula’s College, South Brisbane, expanded to accommodate increasing enrolments, particularly when girls transferred there from Duporth on its closure at the end of that same year.<sup>23</sup>

In 1925, the first Brisbane foundation of the Sisters of Charity was made at Ashgrove, and in 1927 the sisters commenced a convent high school there, later named Mt St Michael's College.<sup>24</sup> Not long after, the Loreto Sisters purchased, at Duhig’s suggestion, a large old colonial home, “Kimendine,” at Coorparoo in 1927, and there opened Loreto College as a convent day and boarding school the next year.<sup>25</sup> Also around that time, the Brigidine Sisters from Sydney purchased an elegant home at Indooroopilly and established Brigidine College in 1929, again as a convent day and boarding school.<sup>26</sup>

Significantly, almost all of the above congregations made decisions regarding the purchase of properties for establishing fee-paying European-style convent schools on the self-supporting model which enabled the sisters also to conduct the local parish school. However, the Catholic Church’s recognised acquisition of prestigious properties in Brisbane is often attributed to Archbishop Duhig’s eye for prime real estate. Until now, Duhig’s legacy has overshadowed that of the Catholic teaching sisters who incurred substantial debts to purchase generously proportioned homes suitable for convent high schools. Such homes were usually located on expensive holdings or on prominent hills where only the wealthy could afford to live. The sisters’ financial burdens borne in establishing women’s educational institutions have often been overlooked in histories of Catholic education in Australia.

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<sup>20</sup> Kneipp, *This Land of Promise*, 69. The Duporth Ursulines also modified their rules in order to accept daily transport from a local family to travel to Corinda Church. See Tobin, *Catholic Education in Queensland*, 3:36.

<sup>21</sup> Tobin, *Catholic Education*, 3:43.

<sup>22</sup> Kneipp, *This Land of Promise*, 73.

<sup>23</sup> Kneipp, *This Land of Promise*, 70.

<sup>24</sup> That was in 1941 when a purpose-built school was erected. See Tobin, *Catholic Education*, 3:39.

<sup>25</sup> Clark, *Loreto*, 136. Clark’s book is the first full-length published history of Loreto in Australia.

<sup>26</sup> Brigidine Annals, Indooroopilly, excerpt in *The Brigidine Story*, ca.1930s, Brigidine College Archives.

### 5.3 WHO WERE THE FOUNDING SISTERS OF ST RITA'S, CLAYFIELD?

The stature of the Catholic teaching sisters who established congregational secondary colleges in Brisbane, as elsewhere in Australia, has been reduced by the lack of scholarly attention given to their educational initiatives and traditions. However, when Archbishop Duhig officially welcomed the Presentation Sisters to St Agatha's parish centre at Clayfield in 1925, his occasional address paid tribute to their transforming educational work:

The sisters are no strangers to me. I know their work and their worth...the children entrusted to these ladies for their education will be admirably trained – physically, mentally, and morally. My first meeting with the Presentation Sisters was just over nineteen years ago, soon after I was appointed Bishop of Rockhampton. The pleasure of welcoming them here today is enhanced by the fact that the accomplished head of one of their best schools in Central Queensland is to be mistress in charge of the school here.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, Mother Patrick Madden mentioned above as the “mistress in charge” of St Agatha's parish school, together with Mother Ursula Kennedy, established both the Clayfield convent and St Rita's College. Little is known about the early teaching sisters at St Rita's beyond the recollections of Presentation Sisters, former students and admirers, and limited descriptions drawn from convent annals and obituaries. Rosa MacGinley's Presentation history, *A Place of Springs*, offers a valuable biography of M Ursula Kennedy.<sup>28</sup> Other material, however, is too sparse to provide full texture for the stories of these women. As noted previously, M Ursula's pioneering provision of secondary education in Central Western Queensland is scarcely mentioned in published histories of education in Queensland.

#### 5.3.1 Mothers Ursula Kennedy (Alice) and Patrick Madden (Mary)

Records indicate that Alice Kennedy and Mary Madden were born one month apart in 1876. Although their worlds were vastly different – Alice grew up in country Victoria and Mary in Ireland - both were brought up in the tradition of Irish Catholicism. Their lives followed paths that converged in 1895 at the Presentation novitiate at Mt Erin in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales. The two were among five pioneering sisters who established the Congregation in Queensland at Longreach in 1900. They planned the Brisbane foundations at Herston (1924) and Clayfield (1925) and built St Rita's secondary college from the ground up. In the years between 1912 and 1960, the leadership of the Queensland Presentation congregation alternated between them. The duo enjoyed an enduring friendship which strengthened their religious and professional lives in the areas of girls' education, school administration and congregational leadership.

<sup>27</sup>*The Catholic Advocate*, January 29, 1925.

<sup>28</sup> See MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*.

In 1926, the *Brisbane Courier* reported the official opening on October 31 of the Presentation Sisters' new day and boarding school, St Rita's College, Clayfield. Archbishop Duhig gave the occasional address. The school's two founding sisters, Mothers Ursula Kennedy and Patrick Madden, remained unnamed, however, in newspaper reports of the opening day. Both the *Brisbane Courier* and the Catholic newspaper, *The Age*, simply referred to M Patrick as "the mistress in charge" and to M Ursula as "the Mother Superior of the Presentation Order," terms borrowed from Duhig's opening address.<sup>29</sup> The sisters' invisibility is so notable that the reports convey the impression they were absent altogether from the events. By contrast, every male civic dignitary and the nineteen metropolitan clergy and religious brothers who attended St Rita's opening ceremony were meticulously listed by *The Age* for the public record.<sup>30</sup> It is doubtful whether, in that period, such omissions were recognised as affecting the recording of women's history.

In living out their ideal of self-renunciation, Catholic sisters generally avoided public attention, and this reduced the likelihood of their being represented as key participants in Queensland's educational history. Their male counterparts, usually clergy, officiated at school openings and prize-giving days and would address the assembled community on the sisters' behalf. Thus in the period before the Second Vatican Council, the substantive role of women religious in institution-building was seldom recorded from the sisters' perspective. Sisters' stories remained untold and were thus submerged in the narratives of Australian Church and broader educational histories. On the other hand, the Catholic teaching sisters were generally too preoccupied with the exigencies of the period and with managing schools to record their achievements at length.

As with other solemn-vow institutes, the Presentation Sisters' enclosure rule led them to shun publicity, which explains why the congregation<sup>31</sup> remained relatively unknown in Queensland for the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Presentations' traditional black habit also contributed to the sisters' anonymity. Congregational historian Sr Raphael Consedine referred to the women's individual identities being obscured:

The black-habited women [in Ireland] must have seemed indistinguishable to the priests who addressed them, yet beneath each veil decorously lowered in the presence of the

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<sup>29</sup> *The Age*, November 6, 1926, 10, and the *Brisbane Courier*, November 1, 1926.

<sup>30</sup> *The Age*, November 6, 1926, 10.

<sup>31</sup> The Presentation congregation was a solemn-vow order from 1805-1910 and then declared a simple-vow congregation, but the practical living of enclosure remained in many aspects of the sisters' lives.

visitor, were personalities as different as Manchester was different from Newfoundland.<sup>32</sup>

Marjorie Theobald's valuable insight that "women experience and recall their lives as narrative"<sup>33</sup> empowers the present author to piece together, often in narrative form, the story of the founding sisters of St Rita's, Clayfield. The following biographical sketches of Mothers Ursula Kennedy and Patrick Madden provide snapshots of who they were, what they achieved, what influences shaped their lives, and how they in turn influenced the communities they served in Central Western Queensland and in Clayfield, Brisbane. In order to answer the above questions the sisters' stories had to be recovered and interpreted within the wider history of Queensland education.

### 5.3.2 Alice Kennedy (Mother Ursula)

Alice Anastasia Kennedy was born in Daylesford, Victoria, on January 21, 1876, the youngest daughter of ten children. Her father, Laurence, migrated to Australia from County Tipperary, Ireland, in the 1830s, and joined the émigré community on the Victorian goldfields. Alice's mother, Mary Agnes, née Cummins, was born to Irish immigrants in Geelong, Victoria.<sup>34</sup> Alice was educated at the Presentation Holy Cross Convent High School in Daylesford where the familiar Ursuline-based syllabus included:

...all the branches of a superior English education together with French, Latin, euclid, algebra, book-keeping, botany and physiology...<sup>35</sup>

By the 1890s, the Presentations at Holy Cross, Daylesford, were successfully preparing students for the University of Melbourne examinations, even though at that time matriculation was widely considered an unnecessary qualification for women. Alice Kennedy, one of the few girls in Victoria that year to sit for the University Matriculation examinations gained a pass.<sup>36</sup> Alice's influential teacher, Mother Alphonsus (Jane) Southwell, who was educated in France, had done outstanding educational work at Star of the Sea, Elsternwick. Alice would have experienced a broad cultural program at Holy Cross, which in 1892 included the usual array of:

vocal music, piano, violin, guitar, zither, banjo, mandolin etc. as well as painting in oil and water colours, and crayon drawing, together with all the varieties of plain and fancy needlework and cutting-out.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Consedine, *Listening Journey*, 272. These were the locations of the two earliest overseas Presentation foundations.

<sup>33</sup> Theobald, *Knowing Women*, 179.

<sup>34</sup> See MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 90-99.

<sup>35</sup> School advertisement for Holy Cross Presentation Convent, Daylesford, *The Advocate*, March, 1892, reprinted in Kathleen Dunlop Kane, *Adventure in Faith: The Presentation Sisters in Victoria* (Melbourne: Congregation of the PBVM, Victoria, 1974), 80.

<sup>36</sup> MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 101, fn. 20.

<sup>37</sup> Advertisement, Holy Cross Convent, Daylesford, March, 1892, reprinted in Kane, *Adventure in Faith*, 80.

Not long after completing her schooling at Holy Cross, Alice Kennedy entered the Presentation novitiate at Mt Erin, Wagga Wagga, in 1895, and there met her novitiate companion Mary Madden who would become her life-long friend and colleague.

### 5.3.3 Mary Madden (Mother Patrick)

Mary Teresa Madden was born in County Galway, Ireland, on February 29, 1876. She may have attended the Presentation convent school in Galway City. In 1892, at the age of sixteen, Mary departed Ireland and joined the Presentation Order at the Mt Erin novitiate in Wagga Wagga. It seems she followed her aunt, Agnes Burke, who entered the Mt Erin convent from Galway eight years earlier. Young Irish aspirants like Mary embarked upon missionary journeys to the antipodes with little prospect of returning home. Mary may have found inspiration in Nano Nagle's declaration:

If I could be of service in saving souls in any part of the globe, I would willingly do all in my power.<sup>38</sup>

Pauline Fitz-Walter's study of women religious in Australia from 1840 to 1910 recognises that "evangelical witness seemed to spell out the sisters' total commitment" to education.<sup>39</sup> All too often, however, this personal faith dimension is overlooked in Australian historiography, as previously noted.

The recollection of Augustinian priest, Maurice O'Connor, of the departure from Ireland of twenty young girls bound for the Presentation convent in Perth in the 1950s may shed light on Mary's experience of departure sixty years earlier:

When the time came to board... all were affected by the wailing and the weeping of the mothers of the young girls as they hugged and kissed the daughters whom they would not see again... Their families had gathered to bid them farewell, not just for ten years, but for all the years of a lifetime.<sup>40</sup>

Mary Madden responded to the call of Australian bishops who following the Education Acts (1872-1893) systematically sought religious congregations to staff parish schools and establish convent high schools. Fogarty described the earlier mid-19<sup>th</sup> century migration of Irish religious sisters to Australia as a "stream," but called the 1890s migration "a veritable flood."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Consedine, *Listening Journey*, 271-72.

<sup>39</sup> Pauline Fitz-Walter, "Commitment to Education: Its Influence on the Lifestyles of Religious Women in Australia from 1840-1910," *Australasian Catholic Record* 54 (1977): 354.

<sup>40</sup> Maurice O'Connor, *Never a Dull Moment* (Brookvale: Augustinian Press, 1997), 11.

<sup>41</sup> Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:268.

Around 1897, Mary Madden and Alice Kennedy completed their novitiate training at Mt Erin under Mother Agatha Collins.<sup>42</sup> They belonged to the burgeoning conventual movement among religious women within the Australian Catholic Church that was dedicated to teaching, and to progressing girls' education, and to assisting the work of nation-building and of Christianising the colony. Indeed the total number of teaching sisters increased markedly in Australia from 815 in 1880 to 5,081 in 1910.<sup>43</sup> There were significantly fewer male congregations in Australia at that time. In the 1880s, there were thirty institutes of women religious in Australia compared with four of the Brothers and three of priests.<sup>44</sup>

Religious life clearly empowered women and permitted them entry into a world of teaching, service and leadership that was not readily accessible to most women at the time. Rebecca Rogers has demonstrated that historically, institutes of female religious in France were "run like businesses, offering professional training and providing women with a sense of professional identity."<sup>45</sup> Similarly in Australia, natural leaders emerged as superiors of convents and schools. Moreover, each convent required a bursar, a mistress of novices, teachers, an 'instructress of adults', a council of 'discreets' to advise on community affairs, as well as women who would undertake domestic duties and those who could make convents places of counsel and comfort. Thus, as Burley's research confirms, convent communities and convent high schools provided challenging opportunities for female agency, autonomy and leadership.<sup>46</sup>

## **5.4 MOTHERS URSULA KENNEDY AND PATRICK MADDEN**

### **5.4.1 Pioneering Girls' Secondary Education in Central Western Queensland –**

#### **Our Lady's College, Longreach - Replica of Mt Erin, Wagga Wagga**

Bishop Joseph Higgins of Rockhampton invited the Mt Erin sisters to Longreach in 1900 on the basis of Mt Erin's outstanding educational reputation within the Riverina district and beyond. Sr Paul (Mary Jane) Fay, one of the five founding sisters from Kildare, Ireland, to establish Mt Erin in 1874, is remembered as having engendered the school's high academic and musical standards.<sup>47</sup> Sr Paul was educated and trained as a teacher at the renowned Georges Hill Presentation convent, which provided a carefully planned and well-respected system for trainee teachers. She then taught at the Dublin Model School before entering the

<sup>42</sup> MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 58.

<sup>43</sup> Fitz-Walter, "Commitment," 355.

<sup>44</sup> Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:272.

<sup>45</sup> Rogers, *From the Salon*, 286, fn. 34.

<sup>46</sup> For further treatment, see Stephanie Burley, "Past Principals: The Public Pervasive Presence of Powerful Women in the Church in South Australia, 1880-1925," *Paedagogica Historica* 5 (1999): 267.

<sup>47</sup> Bernard T. Dowd and Sheila E. Tearle, *Centenary- Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Wagga Wagga, NSW, 1874-1974* (Sydney: Sisters of the PBVM, 1973), 9.

Kildare convent in 1869.<sup>48</sup> As mistress of novices at Mt Erin she trained the teaching sisters who would soon establish Mt Erin's educational reputation. In 1890, the *Wagga Wagga Express* accounted for Mt Erin's popularity in terms of the European style 'superior' education it imparted:

...every available space...every vacancy had been filled up. This would seem to prove that so far as the surrounding districts are concerned...affection centres around the Sacred Heart on Mt Erin....The system of training which the sisters adopt must be in tune and touch with the spirit of the age in all that constitutes the essentials of a superior education.<sup>49</sup>

The Mt Erin convent is of particular significance to the history of St Rita's, Clayfield, because the style and quality of education at Mt Erin were replicated by the Presentation Sisters at Our Lady's, Longreach, and again at St Rita's, Clayfield.

Mother Agatha Collins led the pioneering party from Mt Erin to Longreach in 1900. The group with her comprised Alice Kennedy (Sr Ursula) and Mary Madden (Sr Patrick), as noted both recently professed, and Srs Alphonsus Burke and Francis Hayes.<sup>50</sup> The women journeyed by rail from Wagga Wagga to Sydney and then by sea to Rockhampton where they boarded the train for Longreach. Their land journey covered hundreds of kilometres in hot, dusty, primitive conditions. Convent records note that initially the sisters could not find Longreach on any map available to them.<sup>51</sup>

In the customary way that Catholic sisters supported one another in raw pioneering conditions, the Mercy Sisters had the five Presentation women lodge with them in both Brisbane and Rockhampton, and others met the five at the train at Barcaldine with refreshments before the group went on to Longreach.<sup>52</sup> Clearly, the Catholic sisterhoods perceived themselves as part of an overall movement of educators and nation-builders. The *esprit de corps* of the various female congregations undoubtedly contributed to the success of the conventual movement in Australia. Sr Moira Creede of the Queensland Presentation Congregation attested to the Presentation Sisters' striving beyond "the narrow idea" of belonging to one particular congregation to participation in a wider movement of women religious teachers.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Kane, *Adventure in Faith*, 108.

<sup>49</sup> *Wagga Wagga Express*, December 20, 1890, cutting, WWPA.

<sup>50</sup> "Mission to Longreach, Queensland, 1900," 27, handwritten notes in WWPA.

<sup>51</sup> Handwritten notes in WWPA.

<sup>52</sup> On the *esprit de corps* of the female congregations in Victoria, see Kane, *Adventure in Faith*, 32.

<sup>53</sup> Creede, interview, Brisbane, March 13, 2002, AP.

Dressed in heavy black serge, the five Presentation Sisters from Wagga Wagga arrived in Longreach as temperatures reached 115 degrees Fahrenheit. The convent annalist reflected that:

Pioneering has little of the glamour that so many tales would have us believe of it – the heat of fierce western summers, the scarcity of drinking water, the hordes of flies, as well as the general lack of most of the common amenities of civilisation.<sup>54</sup>

The Catholic and secular press reported with interest the arrival of Catholic nuns in Longreach on February 13, 1900. The account by Dean McElhinney, which originally appeared in *The Longreach Leader* in 1900, was reprinted in a 1950 edition of the newspaper to mark the golden jubilee of the sisters' arrival in the West. McElhinney's original report noted that four marshals supervised the procession that was led by the town band followed by the Friendly Societies in regalia. Then came the buggies which carried the bishop, sisters and committee, and then the children, parishioners and general public.<sup>55</sup> The 1950 article stated:

The arrival of these sisters was something new to the West. We all wanted to see just what manner of woman would come out here and pioneer their Order.<sup>56</sup>

Another account highlighted the sisters being welcomed by people of all denominations:

Any effort at gauging the pleasure which the arrival of the sisters gave...would be out of place. In fact, the non-Catholic sections were so much in evidence on the occasion that a stranger might have been pardoned for imagining that the whole community belonged to the Ancient Faith.<sup>57</sup>

The Longreach Presentation Sisters opened Our Lady's College in February 1902. The convent establishment was a virtual replica of Mt Erin, from its novitiate and school curriculum to architectural plan, except that it was built in wood and not brick as Mt Erin was. The desire to maintain revered traditions explains why convents, such as Subiaco in Sydney, were built as replicas of the more renowned establishments from which they derived. Accordingly, the new Longreach convent was built in the same Tudor style as at Mt Erin. The Mt Erin building, in common with other 19<sup>th</sup> century colleges, conveyed the solid strength of pedagogical and faith traditions valued by the teaching sisters. Its design resembled that of a grand and attractive home and was not that of an archetypical 19<sup>th</sup> century English school with its factory-like structure. The solidity of the impressive convent was carefully balanced by its elegant symmetry. Graceful verandahs on two levels spanned the facade of the building and linked an impressive main entrance and central staircase to semi-octagonal wings of the building. Lace-like iron balustrades and arches above the verandahs

<sup>54</sup> Annals of the Longreach Presentation Sisters cited in MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 49.

<sup>55</sup> *The Longreach Leader*, March 17, 1950, cutting, WWPA.

<sup>56</sup> *The Longreach Leader*, March 17, 1950, cutting, WWPA.

<sup>57</sup> Files from the *Western Champion*, quoted in *The Longreach Leader*, March 17, 1950, cutting, WWPA.



permitted unrestricted breezes and enabled views of the surrounding gardens and local area (See Figure 1).

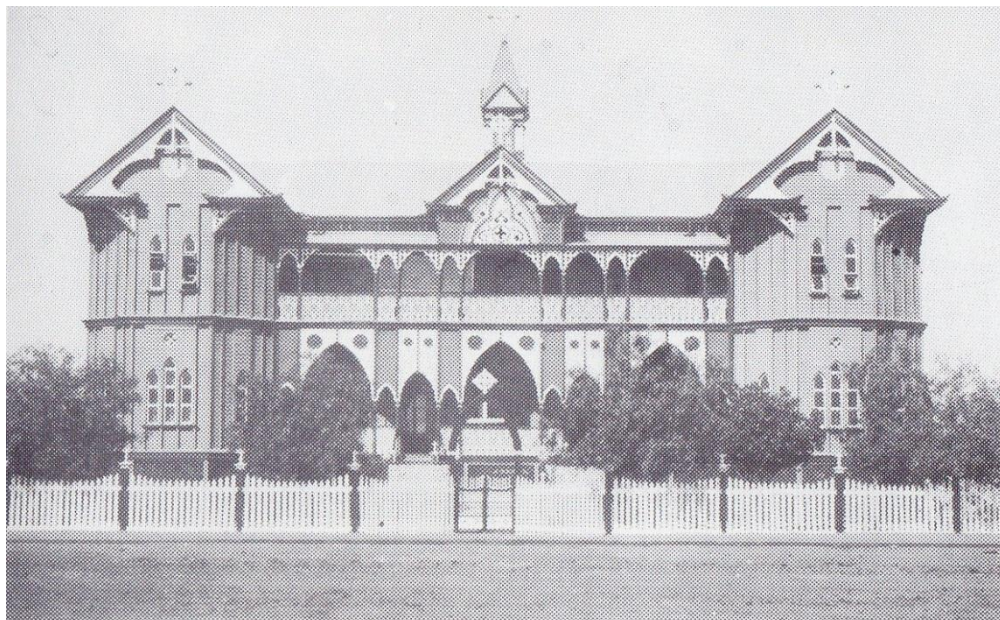
**Figure 1:** Comparison of Architectural Design of Mt Erin Presentation Convent, Wagga Wagga, and Our Lady's Presentation Convent, Longreach.

Mt Erin Convent, Wagga Wagga, 1876



Source: O'Connor, J G. ed. "A Brief History of the Founding of the Sacred Heart Presentation Convent, Wagga Wagga" (booklet, Sydney, 1881), 82. Copy in WWPA.

Our Lady's College, Longreach, 1902



Source: MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 61.

Figure 1 highlights the similarities in the design of the Wagga Wagga and Longreach Presentation convents. It also underscores the scale of building works overseen by the Catholic teaching sisters.

After visiting the Mt Erin convent in the 1890s, Michael Davitt, the famous Irish nationalist and parliamentarian, wrote a journalistic piece that countered the stereotype of convents as formidable buildings that imprisoned nuns and their students and denied them sunshine or contact with the outside world. He wrote:

The [convent] building stands on a small hill overlooking the town, river, and plain, and is one of the finest in Wagga. It was bathed in sunshine as we entered its hospitable doors. One comes away after going through the institution with the feeling that a life of sunshine is also the lot of the Irish sisters and of their bright and fortunate pupils.

...The ordinary non-Catholic notion about convents is one suggesting a prison-like domicile of women weary of life, or who, in moments of religious fervour, have thoughtlessly decided upon a vocation of cheerless self-denial. This does not square in any way with the impression, which has remained on my mind...<sup>58</sup>

Mother John (Frances Josephine) Byrne, founding superior of both Star of the Sea and Holy Cross in Victoria, as well as Mt Erin, in Wagga Wagga, had overseen the design and construction of the Mt Erin convent and high school.<sup>59</sup> Extant photographs of M John Byrne with building plans in hand underscore the role that she and other convent leaders played as institution-builders in frontier societies (See Figure 2).<sup>60</sup> With her father an architect, Mother John Byrne's familiarity with building styles undoubtedly enhanced the design of the Mt Erin convent. M Agatha Collins who was mother superior in Longreach until 1906 certainly envisaged that Our Lady's College would match Mt Erin in all respects.

Figure 1 (above) and Figure 2 (below) make clear that these women had a strong sense of their own autonomy. The Catholic teaching sisters came to towns like Wagga Wagga and Longreach on their own terms and built convent school establishments on the proven European model of Catholic girls' schooling. Furthermore, they drew considerable support from local families whose generous donations helped finance such building projects. Clearly, these women were far more autonomous than how they have been portrayed by mainstream histories.

<sup>58</sup> Michael Davitt, *Life and Progress in Australasia* (London: Methuen, 1898), 176. Mitchell Library, Sydney.

<sup>59</sup> M John Byrne was born in Dublin and was schooled at the Dominican convent in Drogheda. On the founding sisters of Mt Erin see Fox, *In This Land*, 4, 5.

<sup>60</sup> M John Byrne earned a reputation as a builder at Wagga Wagga and subsequently at Elsternwick (1883) and Daylesford (1892). Kane, *Adventure in Faith*, 57.

**Figure 2:** Institution-building - Mother John Byrne, displaying building plans.



Source: Wagga Wagga Presentation Archives.

#### **5.4.2 M Ursula – Transformational Work in Longreach**

At Our Lady's, Longreach, Mother Ursula Kennedy was mistress of novices between 1902 and 1906, and bursar between 1906 and 1912. She was elected superior of the convent and head of Our Lady's high school in 1912. Accordingly, M Ursula had guided the newly founded Longreach Presentation community through its initial difficulties. She soon earned a reputation as both an impressive educator and visionary leader. Under her leadership of Our Lady's College, the school followed the familiar Presentation syllabus, but adapted the cultural, vocational and academic strands to the requirements of public examinations.

Following the opening of the University of Queensland, Mother Ursula prepared three students for the Junior university examination in 1912.<sup>61</sup> Two of her students, Edith Manning and Clara Murtagh (later Sr Evangelist), were successful.<sup>62</sup> But the vocational strand remained important and a commercial course was offered at the school and also separately to

<sup>61</sup> The Queensland University examination was based on that of Sydney University.

<sup>62</sup> MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 86.

local boys and girls in after school hours. This initiative by the sisters enabled local youth to gain employment in the growing town's businesses.<sup>63</sup>

Valuable glimpses into Mother Ursula's approach to education are gained from perceptions of the sisters and former students. Sr Moira Creede was principal of St Rita's between 1961 and 1971 and recalled that "M Ursula was a big woman in every way - big of frame, big of heart and very big of mind, and very far seeing for those days."<sup>64</sup> Guilford Young, appointed auxiliary bishop, Canberra-Goulburn diocese, 1948, then Co-adjutor Archbishop of Hobart, 1954, attended the Presentation Convent in Longreach as a boy in the 1920s. He recalled that M Ursula's classroom was a place where imagination was fired and learning encouraged:

Her mind was most clear and acute. She always gave you the impression of a wide world completely outside the very limited domain in which our minds moved in Longreach....I have never met a better educator than Mother Ursula.<sup>65</sup>

According to Sr Rosa MacGinley, the younger sisters in Longreach "never failed to be impressed by the thoroughness of M Ursula's knowledge, whether in Latin, geography or many aspects of general culture."<sup>66</sup>

#### **5.4.3 Mothers Patrick and Ursula - Emerald and Yeppoon**

In order to expand the educational work of the Queensland Presentation Sisters, M Patrick Madden led a small group to Emerald to establish a convent school community in 1902. Emerald was the centre of a large pastoral district directly west of Rockhampton and had become an important regional railway depot. The sisters responded to Bishop Higgins' request to consider a second foundation in Queensland at Emerald. M Patrick was appointed superior of the Emerald community which comprised also Srs Francis Hayes and Angela Crowe.<sup>67</sup> In a tribute to M Patrick in 1946, Archbishop James Duhig referred to the school inspectors' reports during her years as convent superior and head of St Patrick's school:

The part played by Mother M Patrick in the development of the congregation has always been a large one. In my first year as Bishop of Rockhampton, I was told by a school inspector that the convent school at Emerald, founded and ruled by Mother M Patrick, was the most outstanding school of Central Queensland...<sup>68</sup>

Mothers Ursula and Patrick opened a third Presentation convent in Queensland at the small seaside town of Yeppoon in 1917.<sup>69</sup> The two women had purchased land there in the previous

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<sup>63</sup> Special classes in dressmaking were also available.

<sup>64</sup> Creede, interview, Brisbane, March 13, 2002, AP.

<sup>65</sup> Transcript of an interview of Archbishop Guilford Young by Sr Rosa MacGinley in 1974, QPA.

<sup>66</sup> MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 97.

<sup>67</sup> On the Emerald foundation see MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 78.

<sup>68</sup> Recollections of Archbishop Duhig on the occasion of M Patrick's golden jubilee on January 8, 1946, cited in MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 88.

<sup>69</sup> It was envisaged that the Yeppoon convent would also serve as a holiday residence for the Longreach sisters.

year to lay the foundation for a convent boarding school which was named St Ursula's and opened in 1918.<sup>70</sup> In his occasional address, Bishop Joseph Shiel of Rockhampton (1913-31) referred to the contribution that the sisters would soon make to the development of Yeppoon through their educational establishment:

The people of Yeppoon must rejoice. It shows faith in the stability and suitability of the place. It means business, for there will not only be the little permanent community of nuns, but as well increasing numbers of boarders, drawn by the attraction of the fine new convent and the salubrious climate. Besides, [it] will undoubtedly attract families to establish their homes in this place...<sup>71</sup>

The Yeppoon sisters' contribution to the town's development was clearly significant. As in Longreach, they offered evening classes in commercial studies that enabled young adults to secure employment or establish a family business in the yet undeveloped town. Moreover, St Ursula's became a leading educational institution for girls in Central Queensland.

Mother Ursula oversaw the operation of convent and college and the debt on the Yeppoon property was liquidated in due course. In the pragmatic Ursuline pattern, the sisters became self-supporting through tuition and boarding fees and also through supportive networks established with the surrounding community. For example, the congregation received a donation of half the purchase price of the land at Yeppoon from one local Catholic family.<sup>72</sup> Of the mutuality that existed between the Presentation Sisters and their respective communities at Longreach and Emerald, Bishop Shiel observed:

The sisters have established themselves firmly in the hearts and affection of the people of the West and why? Because they have learned to appreciate their beautiful, gentle characters and because they have learned by experience to appreciate the grand, refined and thorough education they impart to their children...The sisters have been remarkably successful both at Longreach and Emerald.<sup>73</sup>

St Ursula's was registered as a secondary school in 1920, and in 1922 the first Junior University class with four members was formed - two scholarship holders and two boarders.<sup>74</sup>

Mothers Ursula and Patrick extended the Presentation Sisters' educational mission from Central Queensland to Brisbane in 1924. The Brisbane sisters chose to remain within the metropolitan area where the population was growing, rather than move into the northern area of the State from where they received occasional invitations. For example, annals of the Clayfield convent note that in 1938 the two Mothers received a joint request from Bishop Hayes (Rockhampton) and Fr Bannan (parish priest of Bundaberg) to open a parish school in

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<sup>70</sup> EB, 20. QPA.

<sup>71</sup> *Daily Record*, Rockhampton, January 22, 1917, cited in MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 110.

<sup>72</sup> MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 106.

<sup>73</sup> *Daily Record*, January 22, 1917; MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 110.

<sup>74</sup> MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 124.



Bundaberg, but after inspecting the site the sisters “decided to wait until the population of the suburb warranted a Catholic school.”<sup>75</sup> Invitations also came from further north, in the Mackay area, but these were also declined.

By 1960, Mothers Ursula and Patrick had established ten primary schools in Brisbane and four major secondary colleges in Queensland – Our Lady’s, Longreach (1902), St Ursula’s, Yeppoon (1918), St Rita’s, Clayfield (1926), and Rosary College at Murgon (1943). The story of the Presentation Sisters at Clayfield unfolds below and reveals the aspirations and achievements of the sisters in progressing women’s education in Brisbane.

### 5.5 CLAYFIELD - ACQUIRING A CONVENT

At the opening of St Agatha’s parish centre at Clayfield in April 1925, Archbishop James Duhig announced that “the next great work of the parish” would be “the building of a convent for the nuns.”<sup>76</sup> Yet by mid-1926 no such provision had been made. Women religious making new foundations in Australia generally accepted makeshift accommodation, often from local clergy, until a convent became available.<sup>77</sup> Accordingly, Fr Frank O’Connell, the first pastor at Clayfield, offered his presbytery for the Presentations’ temporary occupation in 1925. His gesture marked the beginning of a supportive and enduring friendship between Fr O’Connell and the sisters.

When Stanley Hall, an expansive home adjoining St Agatha’s school, was advertised for sale in mid-1926, Mothers Ursula and Patrick immediately informed Archbishop Duhig and Fr O’Connell of their intention to purchase the property for the purposes of a convent and high school.<sup>78</sup> According to one account, the younger sisters had stood at the boundary of St Agatha’s property earlier that year and “cast medals of St Joseph over the fence in the hope that Stanley Hall would come up for sale.”<sup>79</sup>

Stanley Hall was set on almost five acres of hilltop land which fronted Enderley Road and commanded magnificent views of Moreton Bay and the surrounding district. The suburb of Clayfield had grown apace since the 1880s following extensions of the railway line from Albion to Sandgate and from Eagle Junction to Ascot.<sup>80</sup> Clayfield attracted professionals such as doctors and lawyers who built large homes along its tree-lined streets. Stanley Hall, built in

<sup>75</sup> EB, 28-9. QPA. A parish school in Bundaberg was eventually opened in 1959.

<sup>76</sup> *The Catholic Advocate*, April 9, 1925.

<sup>77</sup> Catholic sisters in Ireland customarily accepted whatever accommodation was available when making new foundations. See Clear, *Nuns*, 72.

<sup>78</sup> EB, 23. QPA.

<sup>79</sup> Sr Patricia McCarthy, past pupil of SRC (1934-36) and former superior of St Rita’s Convent, interviewed by the author, Herston, Brisbane, March 5, 2002, AP.

<sup>80</sup> Hector Holthouse, *Illustrated History of Brisbane* (Frenchs Forest, NSW: Reed, 1982), 19.

1885 by produce merchant Mr John W. Forth, was at the time owned by Florence and Edward Goddard Blume whose lucrative grazing properties included Bexley Station outside Longreach.<sup>81</sup>

The Clayfield Presentation Sisters purchased Stanley Hall for £22,000, an enormous, but in hindsight, realistic sum in view of the escalating property values of the prosperous mid-decade. By comparison, the Ursulines in 1924 paid £6,000 for Duporth which included forty-five acres of bushland.<sup>82</sup> Mothers Ursula and Patrick signed a loan agreement with the Bank of New South Wales (now Westpac) conditional upon securing a guarantor. Their long-time friends from Emerald, the Martin brothers, now well-established pastoralists, obliged.<sup>83</sup> Fred Martin, whose daughter Rita, a former pupil of St Ursula's in Yeppoon, had recently entered the Presentation congregation, donated the generous sum of £1,000 as a deposit on the loan. To give an idea of monetary values, the Commonwealth basic wage was approximately £200 per year in 1921.<sup>84</sup>

The certificate of title for Stanley Hall, dated 25 August 1926, bore the names of Alice Kennedy and Mary Madden.<sup>85</sup> This document has emblematic value, in that St Rita's College was directly acquired by women for the education of women, and at a time when women seldom engaged in property transactions on such a scale. Furthermore, male and female religious institutes in Brisbane usually purchased property through the Archbishop as their representative. This perhaps explains why *The Age* reporter erred in reporting that St Rita's was "one of the finest sites that our far-seeing Archbishop has yet acquired for religious purposes."<sup>86</sup>

Similar assumptions have contributed to a dominant theme in Australian history that situates the Church hierarchy at the forefront of the Catholic education project. Consequently, the agency and enterprise of the Catholic teaching sisters has remained under-estimated. Catholic sisters in fact sustained the Australian parochial school system through their income-earning convent high schools which they established with little financial assistance from their

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<sup>81</sup> It is possible that the Clayfield sisters had known the Blumes in Longreach. For a history of Stanley Hall, see Barbaro, *Acorn to Oak*, 16-17.

<sup>82</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, July 4, 1924, cited in Assumpta Griffin and Agnes McDermott, *A Seed is Sown: Memoirs of Ursuline Convent Duporth, Queensland* (Fairfield, Bright Printers, 1982), 16.

<sup>83</sup> EB, 23. QPA. The four Martin brothers, Joe, Fred, Bill and George had acquired the fine grazing property, "Glendairewell" outside Emerald in 1902.

<sup>84</sup> See Barbaro, *Acorn to Oak*, 24.

<sup>85</sup> Certificate of Title of Stanley Hall, in SRC College Archives (hereafter cited in footnotes as SRCA).

<sup>86</sup> *The Age*, November 6, 1926, 10.

bishops.<sup>87</sup> For example, Duhig had strongly advised the Presentation Sisters to purchase Stanley Hall, but he did not contribute towards their acquiring it.

Stanley Hall, with its spacious rooms and architectural features that included an entrance hall and wide verandahs, offered a peaceful and homely setting for boarders and day students. The bedrooms boasted balconies and fireplaces, and there were offices, kitchens, a dining room, and morning, drawing and billiard rooms, as well as a tower from which to view the surrounding district.<sup>88</sup> Most congregations rapidly converted such homes with the aid of local parish communities. One of St Agatha's first past pupils, Elaine Broad, née O'Mara, recalled how the Clayfield parishioners helped Mother Ursula and Sr Angela Murtagh convert the drawing room of Stanley Hall into the main classroom, and the billiard room into the chapel.<sup>89</sup> She remarked that "the nuns would never have got through without the ladies of the parish" who helped them repair and clean the ageing building.<sup>90</sup>

### 5.5.1 Naming the New College

A myth has been perpetuated among St Rita's past pupils that the college was named after Sr Rita (Philomena) Martin whose father had paid the bank deposit for Stanley Hall.<sup>91</sup> However, convent records indicate that following the canonisation of Rita of Cascia in 1900, devotion to the new Augustinian saint became strong in Queensland Presentation convents, as it did also in other Catholic communities.<sup>92</sup> At St Ursula's in Yeppoon in 1924, Sr Imelda Turner had in fact named her classroom after St Rita. By 1926 when the Longreach sisters chose St Rita as the patroness of their new college in Brisbane, devotion to the saint was already part of their daily prayer life.

Moreover, the Catholic story of St Rita, the dauntless woman of the 14<sup>th</sup> century who patiently reconciled two feuding families in order to enter the Cascia Augustinian monastery, may have resonated with the Clayfield sisters' own history, as involving perseverance and

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<sup>87</sup> See Mary Xaverius O'Donoghue, "The Sisters of Mercy," in *Soldiers of the Service: Some Early Queensland Educators and Their Schools*, eds. Greg Logan and Tom Watson (Brisbane: History of Queensland Education Society, Education Department Queensland, 1992).

<sup>88</sup> The Blumes often viewed the horse races at Eagle Farm from the tower. F. E. Lord, "Brisbane's Historic Homes - Stanley Hall," *Queenslander*, November 20, 1930, 37.

<sup>89</sup> Elaine Broad, née O'Mara, past pupil of SRC (1926-33) interviewed by the author, Clayfield, Brisbane, February 26, 2002, AP.

<sup>90</sup> Elaine Broad recalled that boys from St Agatha's school helped remove the nails and tacks that had held the carpets and linoleum to the timber floorboards. Clayfield Convent Annals (hereafter cited in footnotes as CCA) 2: 38. These annals (2 vols) were written by M Evangelist Murtagh.

<sup>91</sup> Dorothy McCormack, née Mackie, past pupil of SRC (1927-37) interviewed by the author, Brisbane, September 18, 2002, AP.

<sup>92</sup> Letter Sr Evangelist Murtagh to Sr Rosa MacGinley, July 21, 1977. Original with Sr Rosa, Brisbane.



hope.<sup>93</sup> A devotional narrative tells of a single rose that appeared in Rita's garden at the time of her death as symbolic of hope in desperate situations. Thus, the Clayfield sisters, who were ever hopeful of easing the bank debt that would weigh heavily on them for many decades, brought their college into being under the name and patronage of St Rita.

### **5.6 A NEW CONVENT HIGH SCHOOL, ST RITA'S COLLEGE (1926)**

The Presentation Sisters opened St Rita's College as a fee-paying day and boarding school for girls on September 27, 1926, scarcely two months after they purchased Stanley Hall. Fourteen students aged from six to fifteen attended the first day; boys were enrolled up to Year Three. By the end of that year total numbers had increased to thirty. At the beginning of 1927, St Rita's began to take fee-paying boarders from various parts of Queensland.<sup>94</sup> Enrolments were small but remained steady for years to come.

Although the Catholic sisters adopted new secondary school structures, most continued the provision of primary classes in their colleges, as has been seen. This was in keeping with their Ursuline-inspired system of education which encompassed all the years of a girl's formation from the age of five to seventeen. Such an all-embracing educational ideal continued to define Catholic girls' schooling in Australia. Furthermore, primary level students comprised the majority of school enrolments in Australia at that time. Thus the Catholic sisters retaining fee-paying primary classes in their colleges across Australia was a pragmatic response both to their need to earn income, and to the needs of middle-class families who sought a less utilitarian education than what was provided by general elementary schooling at that time. Accordingly, in the Clayfield parish, there were two separate Catholic schools that enrolled primary level children. At St Rita's, primary-age children received an enriching education that included music and elementary French for which they paid a higher weekly fee of two shillings per week compared with sixpence at the parish school, St Agatha's.<sup>95</sup>

#### **5.6.1 Convent High School to Registered Secondary College**

M Ursula's immediate task at Clayfield was to apply to the Department of Public Instruction for registration of St Rita's as a secondary school at which the holders of State scholarships (those students who passed the examination in the final year of primary school), could be enrolled.<sup>96</sup> With financial assistance to any approved school guaranteed, the Presentation

<sup>93</sup> On Rita of Cascia, see Anna Barbaro, "St Rita" in *One Mind, One Heart, Villanova: Its Story and Traditions*, ed. Kevin Ryan (Brisbane: Augustinian Historical Commission, 1998), 54. See also Barbaro, *Acorn to Oak*, 27.

<sup>94</sup> CCA 2: 63.

<sup>95</sup> Patricia Hickey, ed., *The First Eighty Years: St Agatha's Parish Clayfield* (Brisbane: St Agatha's Parish, Clayfield, 1998) One shilling was the equivalent of twelve pence.

<sup>96</sup> Logan and Clarke, *State Education*, 6.

Sisters, like other congregations, readily sought registration of their convent high schools.<sup>97</sup> The Department of Instruction granted approval on the basis of at least one teacher having received training in secondary education. At St Rita's, Sr Bernadette (Catherine) Hayman met this requirement, having taught in the Mt Morgan area before entering the congregation in 1922. She held the highest qualifications available through the government training system at a time when Queensland secondary teachers normally received minimal training and did not sit for the annual teachers' examinations.<sup>98</sup> Mt Morgan, then an important gold-mining centre, had an early State high school, a rarity in Queensland at the time. Convent annals indicate that between 1926 and 1927, Srs Angela, Bernadette and Brendan received training in secondary subjects from a Mr Hughes.<sup>99</sup> St Rita's approval as a secondary school was accordingly granted on August 24, 1927. This brought the college into line with the government system of having students prepared for the Junior and Senior examinations of the University.<sup>100</sup>

### 5.6.2 Defining St Rita's College

Convent School advertisements of the period shed light on how the Catholic sisters defined Catholic girls' education and how they responded to the needs and expectations of their clientele. St Rita's College was first advertised in *The Catholic Advocate* in 1927 as a "Superior Boarding and High School for Girls,"<sup>101</sup> depicting the familiar fee-paying education that attracted a predominantly middle-class clientele. In that advertisement, a large photograph of Stanley Hall presented the building's elegant architectural style and stately dimensions suggesting the values of refined society. The home, originally designed by the firm Oakden, Addison and Kemp, was modified for educational purposes, and resembled other "solid, durable and dignified" high calibre schools of the period.<sup>102</sup> School advertisements frequently highlighted the "healthy situation" of convent boarding schools and their spacious, well-lit and ventilated environments for children's learning and development.<sup>103</sup> Accordingly, St Rita's first school advertisement emphasised the expansive grounds and sporting facilities:

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<sup>97</sup> CCA 2: 42.

<sup>98</sup> Sr Bernadette taught music at SRC until her transfer to St Ursula's, Yeppoon, in 1934. Obituary, Sr Bernadette Hayman (1898-1991), CCA 2: 42.

<sup>99</sup> CCA 2: 42.

<sup>100</sup> Department of Public Instruction, Letter to Mother Ursula Kennedy, 4 August 1927. CCA 2: 43. QPA.

<sup>101</sup> *The Catholic Advocate*, August 4, 1927, 8.

<sup>102</sup> Brisbane architect, James Cowlshaw, who designed the Brisbane Grammar school on Gregory Terrace in 1879, referred to his design as solid, durable and dignified. See Pamela Barnett, *Images of a School: Art and Architecture as Symbols of Ideals at Brisbane Grammar School 1869-1989* (Brisbane: Brisbane Grammar School, 1989), 20.

<sup>103</sup> A report on the extensions to St Ursula's, Armidale, noted that "there is not a dark passage in the whole of the new building...Light has been cunningly trapped and although there are many windows, they are so designed to prevent cold draughts." *Freeman's Journal*, June 8, 1939, cited in Kneipp, *This Land of Promise*, 87.

This school is built on one of the beautiful hills in Clayfield in an exceptionally healthy situation. The spacious grounds are well laid out and contain tennis and basketball courts for both boarding and day pupils.<sup>104</sup>

Furthermore, the sense of homeliness accompanying the holistic care of children by ‘maternal’ teachers in convent boarding schools stood in contrast to the utilitarian and overcrowded government primary schools that were considered unhygienic or socially unacceptable by the middle-class, who tended to avoid them. From a sample of school advertisements published in *The Age* for various convent day and boarding schools in and around Brisbane in 1928, the Mercy Sisters at All Hallows’ promised “advantages conducive to the health of pupils,” and at St Anne’s Technical School the sisters assured prospective families of “every attention to comfort.” Likewise, the Good Samaritan convent boarding school in Nambour emphasised “a healthy position” as did the Mercies at St Joseph’s in Helidon who also assured an environment free of “dust and noise.”<sup>105</sup>

### 5.6.3 St Rita’s First Curriculum

St Rita’s advertised curriculum in 1927 typified the convent curricula which traditionally incorporated academic, vocational and cultural subjects, comprising:<sup>106</sup>

...all the branches of a superior English education as well as the French and Latin languages, freehand and pastel drawing, plain and artistic needlework, class singing and calisthenics. Pupils are prepared for the University, commercial, music and elocution examinations.<sup>107</sup>

As has already been noted, the term ‘superior English education’ referred to the curriculum of select high schools, as distinct from elementary schools.<sup>108</sup> The academic strand of St Rita’s curriculum fulfilled public examination requirements while vocational subjects which included commercial art, typing, shorthand and needlework, prepared girls for employment.<sup>109</sup> In the traditional convent high school pattern, boarders were offered enrichment subjects that attracted additional fees. Such cultural offerings included drawing and singing, as well as piano, violin and elocution. Christian doctrine followed a demanding diocesan syllabus and was examined by the Diocesan Inspector of Schools.<sup>110</sup> Although domestic science was offered to girls in government high schools it was not available at St Rita’s until the mid-

<sup>104</sup> *The Catholic Advocate*, August 4, 1927, 8.

<sup>105</sup> See advertisements for All Hallows’ Convent School, St Anne’s Technical School, Good Samaritan Convent Boarding School, Nambour, and St Joseph’s Mercy Convent School, Helidon, as a sample, in *The Age*, December 20, 1928, 10.

<sup>106</sup> Goodman, *Secondary Education*, 134.

<sup>107</sup> *The Catholic Advocate*, August 4, 1927, 8.

<sup>108</sup> Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:349.

<sup>109</sup> With the small number of enrolments in 1927, there was no commercial stream as such. CCA 2: 30.

<sup>110</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 5, 1929. At that time the Diocesan Inspector was Rev V. Cleary, later the first Rector of the Queensland Provincial Seminary opened at Banyo in 1941.

1940s, due to the continuing small number of overall enrolments and the cost of the facilities required.

### 5.7 ST RITA'S EARLY TEACHERS (1926-1938)

In St Rita's opening year, Mother Patrick Madden conducted the secondary classes while Sr Angela (Norah) Murtagh taught primary students and prepared candidates for the scholarship examination.<sup>111</sup> Sr Angela, a gifted teacher, was a former pupil of Our Lady's in Longreach.<sup>112</sup> In 1914, shortly after the opening of the University of Queensland, Sr Angela successfully sat for the Junior university examination.<sup>113</sup> Then a young Irish sister, Sr Marie Therese (Christine) Corcoran, began teaching the Sub-Junior class in 1928. She had come to Queensland as a young postulant from Galway in 1926. Past pupils remember her as a literary-minded teacher whose lessons, while complying with examination requirements, were interesting and enjoyable.<sup>114</sup> She set high standards in language education that would later distinguish St Rita's, as will be seen.

Mother Aloysius (Kathleen Ann) Ryan was community superior and head of St Rita's College for periods that spanned more than two decades. This was between 1933 and 1957, a time of immense educational change.<sup>115</sup> M Aloysius was pivotal in assuring the continuance of the college through the Depression, World War II and the post-war years. She is remembered as a skilful communicator who maintained high scholastic standards, and by introducing physical education effected curricular change.<sup>116</sup> She served as superior of several convent school communities during much of her sixty-four years in religious life, this suggesting a vocation to extraordinary educational leadership.

Sr Imelda (Elsie Turner) joined the teaching staff at St Rita's in 1933. She grew up in Arrilalah in Central Western Queensland and attended Our Lady's in Longreach where she passed the Junior Public examination with marked success before entering the congregation in

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<sup>111</sup> Sr Angela conducted Sub-Junior and Junior Latin lessons after school and commercial classes until 1937.

<sup>112</sup> Sr Angela grew up in the Rockhampton area, and was later well-known as the superior of the Emerald convent. She entered the Presentation congregation in Longreach in 1915, and is remembered for her skillful calligraphy and art works on satin and silk. MacGinley, discussion, Brisbane, March 2009.

<sup>113</sup> Obituary, Sr Angela Murtagh, QPA.

<sup>114</sup> Sr Assumpta O'Flynn, past pupil (1930-37) and teacher at SRC (1966 to early 1980s), interviewed by the author, Clayfield, Brisbane, October 30, 2001, AP. Sr Assumpta recalled that Sr Marie Therese provided "excellent notes" on the English syllabus which included the study of Shakespeare's plays and Walter Scott's novels.

<sup>115</sup> M Aloysius was born in Gulgong, New South Wales, and had taught at Our Lady's Longreach and at St Patrick's Emerald, and had been superior and head of school at St Ursula's, Yeppoon, before coming to SRC. She would later teach at the Manly and Herston schools, and was then elected to the leadership council of the Queensland Presentation Congregation. For further, see Barbaro, *Acorn to Oak*, 47.

<sup>116</sup> Glynne Liddy, née Gibbons, past pupil of SRC (1945-55) in discussion with the author, Brisbane, April 2006. See also obituary, M Aloysius Ryan, QPA.

1920.<sup>117</sup> Sr Imelda came to St Rita's from St Ursula's, Yeppoon, where she already had a reputation for exacting standards, evidenced by her record of not one failure over nine years of preparing candidates for the Junior public examinations.<sup>118</sup> She expected no less from her Sub-Junior and Junior classes at St Rita's, and successfully presented four candidates for the Junior examinations in 1933. Her sudden death from an unspecified illness in 1934 shook the small school community. A replacement was difficult to find, not least because of Sr Imelda's teaching expertise, but also because of the scarcity of secondary teachers in the Brisbane Presentation community. Consequently, Miss Enid Burbeck was employed to teach classes in arithmetic, geometry, algebra, history, geography, English and French, but not in Latin or religion. She did not teach religion because she was not a Catholic.<sup>119</sup>

## 5.8 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS

The Longreach Presentation Sisters at Our Lady's College followed the pupil-teacher system of the Kildare Presentation convent in Ireland. It was from Kildare that the original Mt Erin community at Wagga Wagga was constituted. As a consequence, St Rita's, Clayfield, also inherited the pupil-teacher system of the Kildare convent since most of St Rita's early teachers were trained in Longreach by M Ursula Kennedy. These were M Aloysius Ryan (Catherine) who assisted M Patrick in the foundational years and was superior herself on later occasions; Sr Ignatius (Gertrude) Kelly, who was the school's first music teacher; Sr Anita (Sarah) Quinn, originally from Galway, Ireland; and Srs Francesca (Esme) McKenzie and Carmel (Kathleen) Edwards both of whom completed their teacher-training at St Rita's in its opening year.<sup>120</sup> M Ursula Kennedy is remembered as a teacher educator who "sought to broaden horizons and instill a love of literature and history, insisting upon accurate, well-mastered work."<sup>121</sup>

The Queensland Presentations did not sit for the Department of Instruction's pupil-teacher examinations on account of their enclosure. Instead, they studied the Department's examination papers and had State inspectors report on their teaching, which enabled them to keep abreast of curricular and pedagogical developments.<sup>122</sup> Convent records indicate however, that pupils at Our Lady's, Longreach, were encouraged to take the teaching examinations. As early as 1916, the Longreach sisters successfully prepared three girls for the

<sup>117</sup> Sr Imelda travelled to Brisbane in January 1925 to help staff St Agatha's primary school in a temporary appointment until Sr Bernadette Hayman became available after her profession in February of that year.

<sup>118</sup> CCA 2: 65.

<sup>119</sup> Creede, and O'Flynn, interviews, AP.

<sup>120</sup> Obituary, Sr Anita Quinn, QPA. Sr Anita was a qualified National School teacher before leaving Ireland.

<sup>121</sup> MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 145-46.

<sup>122</sup> Until some years ago, these papers had remained in the Longreach convent library and are now lost. MacGinley, discussion, Brisbane, March 2009.

Examination of Teachers of Small Schools, and one student, Frances Smith, gained one of the six highest passes in the State.<sup>123</sup> From 1920, teacher applicants in Queensland were generally restricted to those with an approved pass at the University Junior Public Examination.

At St Rita's, the scholastic calibre of the early teaching staff was high relative to the times, since the educational limit for most women then was mid-secondary level.<sup>124</sup> When Archbishop James Duhig remarked in the mid-1930s that "there was something invigorating about the general tone of St Rita's,"<sup>125</sup> he was referring to the impetus among the sisters to gain university qualifications. He noted:

Many were preparing for University degrees, and in the very near future all the teachers on the staff would possess these degrees.<sup>126</sup>

By the 1940s, several Presentation Sisters at St Rita's had either obtained or were completing University qualifications, exemplifying not only the scholastic aspirations of the Catholic teaching sisters, but also their contribution to the professionalisation of teaching in Australia, as has been seen. Nor did the enclosure rule deter institutes like the Presentations from enrolling in external courses at the University of Queensland. By the 1940s, Sr Veronica Casey at St Rita's had completed her Bachelor of Arts degree and Sr Alphonsus Hogan was enrolled in the Faculty of Arts.<sup>127</sup>

Clearly, the Presentation Sisters at St Rita's, as also at Mt Erin and at Our Lady's, Longreach, aspired to high educational standards, not least to secure a competitive edge in an age of public examinations.

## 5.9 CURRICULUM INNOVATIONS – SPORT

From the early 1900s, physical culture, team sports and drills that were popular in boys' colleges were instituted in most convent high schools in Australia to enable women's holistic formation. This innovation in girls' education challenged the accepted view that sport was a masculine endeavour. Dancing and the usual games of the playground had been the only physical exercise in convent schools up to that time. School advertisements and annual reports show that the sisters responded to prevailing concerns about the place of sport in girls' schooling. In 1928, All Hallows' emphasised that "sports of all kinds are specially organised and supervised."<sup>128</sup> St Rita's annual report for 1933 assured parents of the value of physical

<sup>123</sup> Our Lady's College Longreach, End of Year Program, 1916, cited in MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 138.

<sup>124</sup> Goodman, *Secondary Education*, 293.

<sup>125</sup> *The Catholic Advocate*, December 17, 1936.

<sup>126</sup> *The Catholic Advocate*, December 17, 1936.

<sup>127</sup> Creede, interview, Brisbane, March 13, 2002, AP; CCA 2: 116.

<sup>128</sup> *The Age*, December 20, 1928, 10.

education in promoting wellbeing, social awareness and community spirit. Mother Aloysius Ryan endorsed women's sport as a means to "a spirit of enthusiasm and friendly rivalry among the girls," and to:<sup>129</sup>

...secure the healthy tone of the body and brain so necessary to the welfare of the advanced students as well as to the children of the lower grades.<sup>130</sup>

St Rita's 1933 annual report listed the expanding range of physical activities at the college. The list included "basketball, tennis, vigoro, captain ball and the old fashioned games of rounders and skipping, callisthenics and eurythmics."<sup>131</sup> Callisthenics involved exercises using poles, rods, bars and bells, and eurythmics involved graceful movements that were performed to classical music. Eurythmics was introduced in most Catholic girls' colleges in Queensland in the 1920s.<sup>132</sup> The Presentation Sisters at St Ursula's, Yeppoon, underwent formal training in eurythmics and in turn instructed the sisters at St Rita's in the needed routines. The position of sports mistress had not been introduced at most Catholic girls' colleges in the 1930s. Hence, St Rita's first physical education teacher was former army captain, Mr Campbell-Burns.<sup>133</sup> He was also employed as a sports teacher at All Hallows' School from 1935 to 1938.<sup>134</sup>

St Rita's annual reports demonstrate that the sisters advanced sport as an essential component of girls' education, regardless of the demands made on the school time-table by the public examinations:

Time is found for sport, which serves the two-fold purpose of relaxation, and of promoting a spirit of 'give and take' so essential in the more serious affairs of later life.<sup>135</sup>

A sports day was introduced at St Rita's in 1929. Newspaper reports and sports day programs reveal that two teams contested the games of vigoro, captain ball and tennis<sup>136</sup> for pennants and trophies that had been donated by parents or friends.<sup>137</sup> Prizes were also awarded for sprints of forty, sixty and eighty yards for relays and for novelty events such as three-legged races.<sup>138</sup> Friendly inter-school athletics competitions involving sprints and ball games between

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<sup>129</sup> SRC annual report, 1933 SRCA.

<sup>130</sup> SRC annual report, 1933.

<sup>131</sup> SRC annual report, 1933.

<sup>132</sup> Tobin, *Catholic Education in Queensland*, 5:29.

<sup>133</sup> Sr Patricia McCarthy recalled that Mr Campbell-Burns's drill call of 'one, two, three, four,' could be heard from anywhere in the school as students discharged their routines with military exactness. Interview, Brisbane, March 5, 2002, AP.

<sup>134</sup> Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 185.

<sup>135</sup> SRC annual report, 1946; *The Catholic Leader*, December 12, 1946, 10.

<sup>136</sup> SRC Program for the Second Annual Sports Meeting, 19 June, 1930, SRCA.

<sup>137</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 12, 1929, 15.

<sup>138</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, June 26, 1930, 29.

Catholic girls' schools such as Loreto College and St Rita's were introduced in the 1930s.<sup>139</sup> Such meetings were the forerunners of the inter-school athletics competitions that developed in the 1950s. By then, the weekly physical culture lesson at most Catholic girls' schools had changed to a weekly sports afternoon<sup>140</sup> allowing more time for training.

Basketball emerged as a popular sport for girls in the late 1930s. St Rita's records show that friendly basketball matches were organised with Lourdes Hill, Duporth and All Hallow's.<sup>141</sup> Swimming had not yet developed as an inter-school sport, since in the 1930s only All Hallows' and Lourdes Hill had swimming pools.<sup>142</sup> It was not until the late 1950s that St Rita's was able to raise sufficient funds to build a pool.

In 1936, the Queensland Catholic Lawn Tennis Association began the annual Secondary Girls' Schools' Tennis Competition. Among the donated trophies was the Archbishop Duhig Shield, awarded to the winning 'A' grade team. Teams were entered from Loreto, Stuartholme, Duporth, Lourdes Hill, All Hallows', Brigidine College, and St Rita's.<sup>143</sup> St Rita's won the Archbishop's Shield in 'A' grade tennis in 1937 and this win stirred school pride in many of the students.<sup>144</sup> Catholic newspapers described St Rita's tennis teams as a "force to be reckoned with," affirming St Rita's developing standing among Catholic girls' secondary colleges.<sup>145</sup>

The introduction of physical education in convent high schools gradually tempered the confined convent environment. As girls began to engage in sport, uniforms became less restrictive. Clothes that reflected monastic propriety and confined movement were progressively replaced with more practical styles that permitted a physical liberation for women. Clearly, such outcomes instance the empowerment ideals of colleges like St Rita's that endeavoured to broaden women's identities and options through an all-encompassing and broadening education.

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<sup>139</sup> Memoir, Sr Assumpta O'Flynn.

<sup>140</sup> Tobin, *Catholic Education*, 5:32.

<sup>141</sup> SRC annual report, 1938.

<sup>142</sup> D'Arcy, "History of Lourdes Hill," 90-111.

<sup>143</sup> In the first year of competition, All Hallows' won the Archbishop's Shield in 'A' grade and also the 'B' grade contest. In the second year, St Rita's won the 'A' grade and Stuartholme the 'B' grade. St Rita's team comprised Billie Reid (captain), Pat Smith, Audrey Dobbins and Sheila O'Flynn (later Sr Assumpta). *The Catholic Advocate*, November 18, 1937, 21.

<sup>144</sup> *The Catholic Advocate*, November 18, 1937, 21.

<sup>145</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, November 24, 1938.



## 5.10 FORMING SOCIALLY AWARE CHRISTIAN WOMEN

St Rita's past pupils recall that Catholic faith was inculcated into their student lives. Australian religious historian Edmund Campion suggests that Catholic schools passed on the faith through "sights, smells, sounds, solidarity, long before it was recognised as dogma."<sup>146</sup> The array of Catholic iconography at St Rita's included statues of Mary and pictures of the Sacred Heart, classroom altars and crucifixes, and the distinctive black habits worn by the sisters. While classrooms at St Ursula's in Yeppoon were named after saints, this reflecting a French convent school tradition from the 17<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>147</sup> St Rita's did not retain this older custom since as a college it belonged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century emergence of secondary schools. Students at St Rita's were prepared for the sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion in a manner consistent with the climate of faith prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).<sup>148</sup>

The moral tone of convent education remained important to the teaching sisters. Regulations regarding the dress and behaviour required of 'young ladies' reflected current societal standards. What women said, did or wore was generally remarked upon as a matter of public interest. Transgressions by convent school girls would reflect poorly on the 'moral tone' of their school. However, Elaine Broad (past pupil, 1926-1933) recalled that her teachers forgave the occasional indiscretion by students.<sup>149</sup> Girls at St Rita's seldom encountered boys during school hours except on the first Friday of each month when boys from St Columban's, Albion, came to St Agatha's Church for Mass and for the 'Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament.' On such occasions, the body of the congregation was judiciously separated by the centre aisle - girls on one side and boys on the other.<sup>150</sup>

St Agatha's parish priest from 1926 to 1939, Fr Frank O'Connell, proved a loyal friend to the Clayfield sisters during that period of St Rita's early development. Dorothy McCormack, née Mackie, (past pupil, 1927-1937) remembered the camaraderie between Fr O'Connell and St Rita's boarding community, particularly during recreation periods at the convent:

He would sit and talk to us and we would all sing around the piano...we loved him...he smoked a cigar which he had outside with his cuppa and I used to think of home and dad because he also smoked a cigar.<sup>151</sup>

Boarding school numbers at St Rita's were still sufficiently small to permit the above homely scene.

<sup>146</sup> Edmund Campion, *Australian Catholics* (Ringwood, VIC: Penguin, 1988), 146.

<sup>147</sup> See Jeanne de Lestonnac, *Formula for Classes*, chap. 3, reprinted in Soury-Lavergne, *A Pathway*, 357.

<sup>148</sup> Broad, interview, Brisbane, February 26, 2002, AP.

<sup>149</sup> Broad, interview.

<sup>150</sup> McCormack, interview, Brisbane, September 18, 2002, AP.

<sup>151</sup> McCormack, interview.

St Rita's provided daily religious instruction for its girls whereas some boys' schools would spend less time on Christian doctrine in order to focus on matriculation subjects.<sup>152</sup> Oral and written examinations in Christian doctrine that were conducted annually by the Diocesan inspector reflected the style of public exams. McCormack recalled that the sisters at St Rita's placed greater emphasis on forming socially responsible Catholic women than on doctrine. She added:

We were encouraged to care for each other...we really shared so much love and happiness, as well as each other's cares and woes.<sup>153</sup>

St Rita's annual reports emphasised that the spiritual development of women was central to the Presentation education tradition:

It is our greatest endeavour to have it [religious education] permeate the whole of our school life.<sup>154</sup>

McCormack mentioned that the daily prayer rhythm of the boarding school had a lasting influence on her life:

We always said a prayer before class and Grace before meals. We had the Angelus and the Rosary every night after tea before we settled back to our studies. This is something I've done all my life.<sup>155</sup>

The early sisters at St Rita's incorporated Nano Nagle's social ideals into St Rita's school motto, *Virtute Non Verbis*, taken from the Nagle Coat of Arms, *Non Vox sed Votum* – 'not words but deeds.' Sr Assumpta O'Flynn summarised the European tradition of social obligation contained in Nagle's ideals:

Nano Nagle was appalled by the sight of beggars roaming the streets....She found that education was a solution. By educating the children first in religion, and then practically, in giving girls sewing classes, she was very aware of educating the whole person.<sup>156</sup>

Social obligation and religious activism were emphasised in the sodalities that were popular in Catholic Europe, as also in the antipodes, in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>157</sup> When the Presentation Sisters came to St Agatha's Parish, Clayfield, in 1925 they formed the Children of Mary Sodality, known by its French initials, E. de M. (*Enfants de Marie*).<sup>158</sup> Members, initially of post-school age, embraced Marian devotion and imitation. The sodality was progressively introduced to Catholic girls' secondary schools throughout Brisbane, including

<sup>152</sup> St Joseph's College, Nudgee, Visitors' Reports Book, 1916-1928, cited in Boland, *Nudgee*, 121.

<sup>153</sup> McCormack, interview.

<sup>154</sup> SRC annual report, 1946; *The Catholic Leader*, December 12, 1946, 10.

<sup>155</sup> McCormack, interview, Brisbane, September 18, 2002, AP.

<sup>156</sup> O'Flynn, interview, Brisbane, October 30, 2001, AP.

<sup>157</sup> As demonstrated in Marta Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood, and Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840-1920* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 117.

<sup>158</sup> CCA 2: 127. Sr Anita Quinn was 'spiritual directress' of St Agatha's Children of Mary sodality.

to St Rita's. Distinctive regalia such as medals, blue cloaks and white veils provided a sense of belonging, particularly for boarders among whom the influence was strong. Boys' schools fostered similar reverence for Mary through the Legion of Mary.<sup>159</sup>

The earlier sodalities were to a degree absorbed into the wider Catholic Action movement that ensued from the Fourth Plenary Council of the Australian hierarchy in 1937, held after the emergence of Pius XI's encyclical on the apostleship of the laity. This encyclical impacted on Catholic schools as was noted in the 1937 *School Report for the Archdiocese of Brisbane*. In this report, Brisbane Diocesan Inspector of Schools, Mr W. Kevin Fahey, stressed that Catholic Action was a subject which merited formal study.<sup>160</sup> Catholic secondary colleges like St Rita's, responded to the Church's call for lay ministry and for such Catholic Action groups as the Young Christian Students Movement (YCS), as will be seen in the next chapter.

It is not surprising that convent-educated women in Australia pioneered lay female associations such as the Catholic Women's League in 1914 and The Catholic Women's Social Guild (CWSG) in 1916.<sup>161</sup> These groups enabled lay Catholic women to organise outside the formal structures of the Church where few prospects for female leadership existed. In the pre-Vatican II Church, for instance, women could not serve as liturgical ministers in the Mass. The CWSG, however, provided social and religious leadership opportunities for convent-schooled professional women like Drs Mary Glowry and Eileen Fitzgerald, school inspector Julia Flynn, and pioneer lawyer Anna Brennan, who led the association in its early years. Such leading Catholic women campaigned against the exploitation of female labour and urged trade-union membership and equal pay for women. Edmund Campion has shown that the passive, inert 'women in the home' spirituality promoted by some clergy was quite foreign to the CWSG;<sup>162</sup> however, the movement also had strong supporters among clergy.

The Grail movement which was founded in Holland in 1921 reached Australia in 1936, the USA in 1940, and was subsequently established in many other countries. By the 1950s it had become an international spiritual, cultural and social movement of women, and by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it had developed into an ecumenical association. The Grail movement challenged women to make deep personal and spiritual commitments and to contribute to the

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<sup>159</sup> On such practices at Villanova College, Coorparoo, see Ryan, *One Mind, One Heart*, 46.

<sup>160</sup> "School Report for the Archdiocese of Brisbane – 1937," reprinted in *The Catholic Advocate*, December 30, 1937, 17.

<sup>161</sup> For the emerging dynamic role of Australian Catholic lay women in the 1930s see Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 59-64.

<sup>162</sup> Campion, *Australian Catholics*, 111.

betterment of society overall.<sup>163</sup> In 1935, three Dutch ladies of the Grail visited All Hallows' School in Brisbane and led a training program on Catholic women's leadership.<sup>164</sup> Newspaper records of Grail meetings that were held by past pupils of Catholic girls' colleges in Brisbane in the 1930s<sup>165</sup> shed light on the small clusters of women who perceived themselves as sharing in the work of nation-building through the Christianisation of Australia.<sup>166</sup> Through such associations, religiously inclined women in effect emulated the Catholic sisterhoods whose transforming activism embodied female agency and leadership. Interestingly, these new female associations were introduced in Australia before in the United States of America (USA), which is reflective of the innovative outlook of women and men in Australia in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### 5.11 IMPACT OF THE DEPRESSION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ST RITA'S

St Rita's small school community suffered the effects of the Great Depression to a similar degree that many other Australians did. The strain on already fragile convent economies like that of St Rita's intensified as the Depression deepened. The near decimation of the wheat and pastoral industries had seen rural families struggle to retain their farms, and thus fewer country girls came to board at St Rita's during the 1930s. Clayfield convent annals reveal the gravity of the sisters' financial difficulties at St Rita's:

There was a time when our worried superiors were very seriously thinking of selling the Stanley Hall property.<sup>167</sup>

Mother Gabriel Hogan, who was among St Rita's first students, recalled many occasions when the school community prayed for the continuance of the college.<sup>168</sup> Past pupils recall the mutual dependence that developed between the sisters and school parents. Dorothy McCormack's father, a grazier in Central Queensland, was hard hit by the Depression when the price of wool sold to Britain plummeted to an all-time low. She recalled:

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<sup>163</sup> As of August 17, 2011, the Grail continued to espouse such ideals on its website [www.thegrail.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=48&Itemid=65](http://www.thegrail.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=48&Itemid=65).

<sup>164</sup> Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 182. The Dutch women of the Grail had aimed to establish a university for women in Batavia (now Jakarta).

<sup>165</sup> These notices appeared in most issues of *The Catholic Leader* during the 1930s.

<sup>166</sup> Catherine Bagley from Mackay, who was a prominent member of the Grail in Australia, saw herself as "bringing Christ to Australia." See Grail Movement, Women of Nazareth, *The Call Of The King: Stories of Judith Bouwman, President Of The Grail In Australia Told By The Women Of Nazareth Who Lived And Worked With Her In This Country*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Sydney: Grail Movement, 1941), 59.

<sup>167</sup> CCA 2: 46.

<sup>168</sup> M. Gabriel Hogan, past pupil of SRC (1926-1930) and Mother General of Queensland Presentation Congregation (1960-1978) interviewed by the author, Herston, Brisbane, November 28, 2001, AP.

[Mother Aloysius] was very good to my parents [during] the Depression years. They had five children at school and I'm sure there were concessions given. In return my father was very good to her and to the school. There was closeness there.<sup>169</sup>

The waiving of fees and provision of meals or clothes for students in need was common at convent schools. Importantly, the social history of how Catholic sisters in Australia helped local families before the modern era of government welfare has not been adequately documented. St Rita's student register reveals that school fees were often waived between 1932 and 1935 or "until family situations improved."<sup>170</sup> Furthermore, convents virtually adopted children in dire circumstances, as is reported anecdotally by past pupils and in the annals of various institutes. Amy Sunderland's story is typical. At five years of age, following her mother's death, Amy was brought to the Presentation convent in Longreach to live with the nuns and remained there until the age of eighteen. Amy's young father had necessarily to follow his bush employment. Her training as a musician and pupil-teacher at Our Lady's College enabled her to obtain a position as a governess on a property outside Emerald.<sup>171</sup> She had conducted the convent orchestra and was prepared for higher level music examinations. There were other girls besides Amy who were 'adopted' by Mother Ursula.<sup>172</sup>

During the Depression years, severe governmental restrictions were placed on school building programs and on the supply of educational equipment. Such stringency impacted severely on small schools like St Rita's that failed to compete adequately with well-established colleges in attracting fee-paying students.<sup>173</sup> The Clayfield annalist wrote:

Being thus handicapped, it was impossible to make any improvements or additions to St Rita's which would raise it to the same status as All Hallows', Stuartholme, Lourdes Hill or Loreto. Because of this a few pupils were leaving each year for these other colleges... Consequently the roll call did not reach the one hundred mark until the Depression years were over.<sup>174</sup>

All Hallows' School continued to be seen as the convent girls' school *par excellence* in Queensland. Lourdes Hill was the other sizeable convent school that, as early as 1918, had two extra buildings erected as well as a classroom block and an impressive brick hall in

<sup>169</sup> McCormack, interview, Brisbane, September 18, 2002, AP. The Mackies were graziers adversely affected by the Depression when the price of wool sold to Britain fell to an all-time low.

<sup>170</sup> SRC Student Register between 1932 and 1935 shows no entries in the 'fees charged' column. SRCA.

<sup>171</sup> Amy viewed M Ursula as her adopted mother, see "Obituary of Amy Kathleen Daniels (1912-2004)," in *St Patrick's Parish, Emerald, Newsletter*, September 5, 2004, 1, 3.

<sup>172</sup> Sr Rosa MacGinley recalled that two girls from the Gooch family not only lived at the Presentation convent in Longreach but were taken by the sisters to Yeppoon for the Christmas holidays. Discussion, Brisbane, March 2001.

<sup>173</sup> E. Wyeth, *Education in Queensland*, Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) Series 67 (Melbourne: ACER, 1953), 189.

<sup>174</sup> CCA 2: 46.

Romanesque style.<sup>175</sup> St Rita's large debt prohibited any comparable building work at that time.

In another stringency measure, the number of State scholarships granted to church and grammar schools was reduced at a time when no other form of government funding was available to private schools.<sup>176</sup> A grant was awarded in order of merit to the first thousand students in the State who then could proceed to an approved secondary school, as was the case previously. The remaining students who passed were now permitted however to attend a government high school free of charge.

Throughout the 1930s there were rarely more than four or five girls at St Rita's studying each year for the Junior Public Examination. The college had no upper secondary class and one teacher was sufficient to take the small Junior and Sub-Junior classes.<sup>177</sup> At a time when parents were reluctant to extend their children's education beyond elementary level, Mother Patrick Madden placed weekly school advertisements in *The Catholic Leader* at the end of each year.<sup>178</sup> It appears that despite the exigencies of the period, as well as parental beliefs that secondary education was especially not essential for women, St Rita's continued the Presentation tradition of providing affordable quality education for girls.

## 5.12 SECURING ST RITA'S FUTURE

In his study of Australian Catholic schools, Maurice Ryan acknowledges that the laity, clergy and religious congregations worked collaboratively to implement the main vision and objectives of Catholic education throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>179</sup> The continuity of St Rita's depended particularly on the support of the families of the students and on the wider parish community. St Rita's College in its opening year received £1,000 in subscriptions drawn not only from clergy and other religious congregations, but also from Catholic communities across Australia where the Presentation Sisters had already established schools.<sup>180</sup>

As with most Catholic colleges, the parents at St Rita's carried the burden of revenue-raising. The annual fete was the principal source of the funds that enabled the sisters to remain solvent. On October 1928, 'St Agatha's Grand' fete in aid of St Rita's College raised the

<sup>175</sup> D'Arcy, "History of Lourdes Hill," 90-111.

<sup>176</sup> Wyeth, *Education in Queensland*, 189.

<sup>177</sup> O'Flynn, interview, Brisbane, October 30, 2001, AP.

<sup>178</sup> In 1928, school advertisements for SRC appeared weekly in *The Catholic Leader* on October 11, 18, 25 and on November 8, 15, 22, and 29, and also on December 6, 13, 20.

<sup>179</sup> Ryan, *Echo and Silence*, 228.

<sup>180</sup> *The Age*, November 6, 1926, 10.

generous sum of £1,214/3/11.<sup>181</sup> Subsequent fundraising events at St Rita's were advertised in Catholic newspapers and shed light on the strong parental support at the college during the Depression years.<sup>182</sup> Former students provide valuable insights into the loyalty and involvement of parents. Joan Houghton, née Murphy, (past pupil, 1927-1935) recalled:

Raising money to pay off the debt on St Rita's necessitated much work from parents and friends. Once a year a fete was held in the grounds so the nuns and parents stocked the stalls with jams, jellies, cakes etc...My mother and many others contributed by holding bridge parties in their (in those days) very large houses. We daughters all learnt to wait on forty or fifty tables...<sup>183</sup>

Furthermore, supporters of the college also donated to archdiocesan appeals, in particular Duhig's Holy Name Cathedral project in Fortitude Valley.<sup>184</sup> Constant pressure was applied to families and religious teaching institutes to contribute to this vast building project that was, however, later discontinued. Duhig's biographer, T. J. Boland, refers to the:

...entertainment orgy which filled the year: school concerts and balls, an art union for which the prizes included some of his own more valuable pictures, a Grand Concert, a sacred recital in St Stephen's...<sup>185</sup>

Clayfield's contribution to the Cathedral fund was recorded in *The Catholic Leader* in 1931 coupled with Fr O'Connell's poignant reference to St Rita's strained finances:

It would be a grand thing if the school were larger; the only obstacle [being] the lack of funds. He told His Grace that the contents of an envelope handed to him was a gift to the Holy Name Cathedral with the best wishes from the children of Clayfield.<sup>186</sup>

Among St Rita's supporters was Thomas Charles Beirne, a prominent Brisbane business retailer and philanthropist, whose grandchildren attended the college in the 1930s.<sup>187</sup> T. C. Beirne was a loyal friend of the Archbishop and donated generously to the Cathedral fund. In the main, however, parents of students at St Rita's in those years were not from the wealthier classes associated with the suburb of Clayfield. A record of their occupations provided in the Student Register (1926-1927) repeatedly lists: "traveller, broom maker, builder, merchant, railway worker, hotel keeper, factory manager, operator, electrician, storekeeper, domestic

<sup>181</sup> *The Age*, October 18, 1928, 18. The 'attractions' included 'pony, donkey and billy goat rides' as well as a performance by the Brisbane Municipal Concert Band, and an Italian Folk dance, *The Tarantella*, which had been performed by both St Rita's and St Agatha's students in the previous month at the Children's Display in the Exhibition Grounds for the papal Legate's visit to Brisbane. See *The Age*, September 20, 1928, 24.

<sup>182</sup> Among the fundraising events organised by parents of the school in 1928 were card and bridge nights, a 'social carnival' at the Commercial Rowing Club's boathouse, a dinner dance at Lennon's Hotel, and a 'children's fancy and paper dress ball' at St Columban's Hall. See *The Age*, October 4, 1928, 14.

<sup>183</sup> Joan Houghton, née Murphy, past pupil of SRC (1927-1935), memoir.

<sup>184</sup> Appeals included the Million Shillings Fund and a Pennies Campaign.

<sup>185</sup> Boland, *Duhig*, 233.

<sup>186</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 24, 1931, 13.

<sup>187</sup> Broad, interview, Brisbane, February 26, 2002, AP. T. C. Beirne (1860-1949) was the proprietor of a large Brisbane drapery store in Fortitude Valley, and also Warden of the Council of the University of Queensland from 1928-1941. He largely helped fund the commencement of a functioning law school at the university. See "Beirne legacy continued," *Graduate Contact*, Centenary Edition (Brisbane: University of Queensland, 2010), 36.

duties, factory worker.”<sup>188</sup> Appearing less frequently was: “doctor, solicitor, school teacher, government official, bank manager, chemist, dentist, land agent.”

As the Depression deepened in Central Queensland, the Martin brothers asked the sisters at St Rita’s for release from their obligation as guarantors for the loan on Stanley Hall. Convent Annals reveal that “the debt incurred in the purchase of Stanley Hall was still weighing heavily and little more could be done than meet the interest.”<sup>189</sup> In 1931, Mother Ursula convened a meeting of St Rita’s parents to discuss the school’s crippling financial problems. It was decided that the sisters form a corporation enabling them to operate on a more clearly defined legal basis comparable to that of a business company. Mr Eugene Finn, legal adviser to the Presentation Congregation, arranged the legal registration of ‘The Corporation of the Trustees of the Order of the Sisters of the Presentation.’ The four members chosen to form this body were Mother Ursula Kennedy and Srs Stanislaus O’Rourke, Clare McMahon and Benignus O’Dea.<sup>190</sup>

Economic resilience by the sisters revealed new means of meeting their building needs. For example, in the late 1930s, they obtained government-sponsored work gangs, known as relief workers, to excavate a steep hillside and create three terraced lawns for basketball and tennis courts, at little cost to the school.<sup>191</sup> Thus with customary pragmatism, the sisters at St Rita’s managed to assure the continuance of their college in the face of on-going economic hardship.

### 5.13 SCHOOL STANDING AND EXAMINATION SUCCESS

Parents increasingly judged a school’s academic standing by its success in the public examinations. Thus school life during the 1920s and ‘30s tended to become “grimly competitive.”<sup>192</sup> Archbishop Duhig in 1925 contributed to the competitive milieu in Brisbane Catholic colleges by introducing a prize of twenty pounds to the boy and girl who secured first place among Catholic school candidates for the Senior university examinations and a prize of ten pounds for eminent success in the Junior exams.<sup>193</sup> Having established educational standards equal to those of the grammar or State high schools, Catholic school principals began publishing annual prize lists in Catholic newspapers, not least to promote

<sup>188</sup> St Rita’s College, School Register: 1926-1927. SRCA.

<sup>189</sup> CCA, 2: 46.

<sup>190</sup> CCA, 2: 53-63.

<sup>191</sup> These ‘gangs’ were made up of unemployed men who were paid a minimum wage to build roads and upgrade school grounds. See MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 168.

<sup>192</sup> Goodman, *Secondary Education*, 293-95.

<sup>193</sup> *The Catholic Advocate*, April 9, 1925, 23.



their students' outstanding achievements.<sup>194</sup> By 1939, Catholic colleges had surpassed the grammar schools in preparing Senior students for the public examinations.<sup>195</sup>

Furthermore, Archbishop Duhig ensured that Catholic newspapers would provide extensive coverage of the academic progress of Catholic schools across Brisbane, particularly of those that were newly established, and the secular press followed suit. Detailed reports of St Rita's first annual prize day in 1928 appeared in the *Brisbane Courier* and *The Age*.<sup>196</sup> Both reports noted with interest that enrolments at this school had risen to sixty, doubling the previous year's intake. Particular mention was made of the "many scholarship holders" at St Rita's, which helped "secure students for the ensuing years."<sup>197</sup> Such valuable publicity assured the continuance of fledgling schools like St Rita's.

The Catholic sisters made every use of time, space, resources and personnel to maintain excellence in education. At St Rita's, school hours were lengthened so that public examination classes, which needed to cover all subjects, were conducted from 8.30am to 5pm. During lunch recess and after school, Sr Francesca, who taught at St Agatha's school, gave steno-typing lessons.<sup>198</sup> Additionally, Saturday classes were held for the Junior exam students to practise for the public examinations under examination conditions and using past test papers. With the growing emphasis on both commercial subjects and the university-exam-dominated curriculum, the sisters at St Rita's spent less time on refinements such as social etiquette, decorative art and needlework. Dorothy McCormack recalled from a boarder's perspective the sisters' academic priorities during the 1930s:

We had little afternoon tea parties which we set up about once a year. We'd invite our parents and the very best was out. We did it all so nicely...the nuns were training us to be gentle little ladies. Then we had to forget a lot of those things and get down to the practical nuts and bolts... For instance, as boarders, we used to have party frocks that we used to wear on Saturday night. All those things went out. St Rita's seemed to me to change from a school where there was a little bit of 'finishing' to an academic one.<sup>199</sup>

Some parents in the 1930s and 1940s placed pressure on the sisters to give greater significance to the refinements. In fact several parents withdrew their daughters from St Rita's and sent them to what were considered more traditional and elite convent schools, like

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<sup>194</sup> Tobin, *Catholic Education*, 3:31.

<sup>195</sup> See Table 8 in Goodman, *Secondary Education*, 309.

<sup>196</sup> *The Age*, December 20, 1928, 3; *Brisbane Courier*, December 8, 1928. Each report described the musical and elocutionary performances by students, and the oil paintings and fancy needlework on display, all exemplifying time-honoured skills taught in traditional convent high schools.

<sup>197</sup> SRC annual report, 1928; *The Age*, December 20, 1928, 3; *Brisbane Courier*, December 8, 1928.

<sup>198</sup> O'Flynn, interview, Brisbane, October 30, 2001, AP.

<sup>199</sup> McCormack, interview, Brisbane, September 18, 2002, AP.

Stuartholme at Toowong, which was conducted by the Sacred Heart Sisters.<sup>200</sup> Their action reflected the continuing demand by the middle-class for the refinements of 19<sup>th</sup> century select education. Marjorie Theobald has noted in relation to other private ladies' colleges that there remained a:

...desire on the part of parents and girls to cling to the older accomplishments curriculum, which they carved out of the new offerings with remarkable ingenuity. Even at the most academic of the new schools like Presbyterian Ladies' College in Melbourne, music, painting and modern languages retained their popularity, as individual parents put pressure on the school to modify the prescribed program.<sup>201</sup>

The teaching sisters at St Rita's by contrast remained attuned to the educational and social pressures of the period and adapted their curriculum accordingly. They placed less emphasis on the refinements and focused more on the academic and vocational strands of the convent curriculum as would enable women "to support themselves and those who may depend upon them."<sup>202</sup> However, the continuing emphasis on elocution in the evolving curricula of girls' schools in Australia reflected the traditional importance assigned to English and foreign language conversation (mostly in French, but also in Latin, German and Italian) in the formation of the well-educated 'lady.'<sup>203</sup> Elocution, later known as art of speech, was an examinable subject during the 1920s and 30s. As with most convents, girls at St Rita's were urged to distinguish themselves in the Trinity College Elocution Examinations and various eisteddfodau.<sup>204</sup>

The value of academic subjects was determined by the University according to a scale of perceived importance, with Latin, Greek, and mathematics at the top, followed by English, French, German, chemistry and physics, and then history, geography and the applied sciences.<sup>205</sup> This scale certainly applied in the awarding of Open scholarships to the University. Those seeking university entrance avoided home science B, logic, art, music, art

<sup>200</sup> McCormack, and MacGinley, interviews. Sr Rosa MacGinley recalled that two girls from her Junior class in the 1940s left for such schools; one went to Stuartholme in Toowong and the other to Loreto in Melbourne.

<sup>201</sup> Theobald, *Knowing Women*, 112.

<sup>202</sup> Quote is from Fr John Gallagher's assessment of the education tradition of the Presentation Sisters in an address to the school community in 1891, reprinted in *Wagga Wagga Advertiser*, December 17, 1891.

<sup>203</sup> In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, ability to speak French was a practical requisite for upper-class women, as they often received foreign visitors and also travelled themselves. See Rapley, *The Dévotes*.

<sup>204</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 24, 1931, 13. Helen Gregg gained first place among Brisbane competitors in the 1931 Elocution Examinations of the AMEB. Fay McLean secured second place in Queensland in the Trinity College Elocution Examination, and two students, Carmel Montgomery and Norma McDonald, received honours. In the same year Carmel Montgomery also won first prize in a field of sixty-seven competitors in the Nundah Eisteddfod. In 1931, eleven prizes were awarded to St Rita's students at the Queensland Eisteddfod, two for pianoforte solo, five for recitation and two for spelling, with Norma McDonald gaining first place for recitation. Similar successes were recorded throughout the 1940s. Joan Ward received the highest mark in Queensland for art of speech in 1940. *The Catholic Leader*, October 15, 1931; SRC annual report, 1940; *The Catholic Leader*, December 12, 1940.

<sup>205</sup> Goodman, *Secondary Education*, 309.

of speech, drawing, bookkeeping, surveying, astronomy, and applied mechanics.<sup>206</sup> A negative consequence of such ranking was that the external examination process frequently came to be perceived as the main objective of secondary education. Principals of some private girls' schools, particularly of the Catholic colleges, moved however against this tendency. They argued that the examination system encouraged memorisation and cramming of texts and set formulae to the detriment of education itself, which was diminished by any narrowing of curriculum. The Loreto Sisters in Ballarat, for example, maintained their longstanding view that:

[if a girl] had no other education than what she had obtained by the mere study of textbooks she was not likely to have acquired a taste for intellectual pursuits.<sup>207</sup>

At St Rita's, public examinations were considered important but they were not to overwhelm the students and teachers. Sr Moira Creede, former student of St Rita's during the 1930s, recalled:

[The Presentation approach] strives for the education of the whole person - academically, but also spiritually and morally. It was always a wide idea of education. There was nothing narrow about it....We were always open to progress and ideas in education. There was always the emphasis on what's good for the human person....Nano Nagle's idea of education was revolutionary, because as she said 'I'm not just teaching children the catechism, I'm teaching them all they need to make a good life.'<sup>208</sup>

In balancing examination preparation with the holistic tradition of convent education, the Presentation Sisters at St Rita's encouraged girls to excel in all subjects, whether academic, vocational or cultural. Archbishop Duhig, in 1928, remarked on St Rita's consistent success, not only in the public university examinations, but also "in the domains of musical and commercial work."<sup>209</sup> Such balance remained the case for most convent secondary schools. Their curricula continued to be broad and to cater for all girls, whatever their social class, abilities or aspirations. In her institutional history of the Ursulines in Armidale, Pauline Kneipp affirms that in Ursuline schools in Australia:

...the necessity of preparing students for the economic realities of society tended to diminish but never to supplant the traditional cultural aspects of an Ursuline education.<sup>210</sup>

<sup>206</sup> University of Queensland, *Manual of Public Examinations, 1932-9*, cited in Goodman, *Secondary Education*, 309.

<sup>207</sup> Loreto Abbey, Ballarat, *A Retrospect, Program of Concert and Prize List, 1885*, 9-10, quoted in Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:381.

<sup>208</sup> Creede, interview, Brisbane, March 13, 2002, AP.

<sup>209</sup> Address by Archbishop James Duhig at St Rita's end of year ceremony, 1928, *The Age*, December 20, 1928.

<sup>210</sup> Kneipp, *This Land of Promise*, 90.

In similar fashion, the Sacred Heart Sisters both at Rose Bay, Sydney, and at Stuartholme, Brisbane, faithfully maintained the Order's French traditions and heritage as they aligned their plan of studies with the new government curriculum.<sup>211</sup>

#### 5.14 MAINTAINING THE CONVENT MUSIC TRADITION

During the inter-war years, the rich musical tradition of convent high schools in Australia remained unequalled by government schools, due mainly to the lack of accomplished music teachers outside the convents.<sup>212</sup> The Catholic sisters provided the only music instruction in most Australian regional towns until the 1950s, when qualified private teachers, mostly convent-educated, offered music teaching, usually in their own parlours. A report published in *The Brisbane Courier* in 1928 reveals that the then Queensland Minister of Public Instruction, Mr Thomas Wilson, wished to recruit "competent" music teachers "to conduct and bolster the practice of music and singing for boys and girls" in government schools.<sup>213</sup> He stated that only the convent and private ladies' colleges made adequate provision for music instruction.<sup>214</sup>

In the boys' colleges, music tutors were employed on a part-time basis until the 1970s when music became a Board of Secondary Schools' subject. By contrast, music remained an integral part of the convent curriculum for girls and was valued not only as a source of income for the sisters, but also for enabling girls to find employment as teachers. Convent high schools thus usually had full-time music teachers. For example, Our Lady of Mercy College, Deloraine, in Tasmania, which became recognised nationally for its music program, provided three full-time music teachers in the 1940s while other part-time personnel conducted after-school music teaching.<sup>215</sup>

By the 1920s, the reputation of a convent high school often depended on its success in music education. The older teaching orders like the Ursulines and Dominicans, resisted entering girls for the public examinations, but readily entered the field of competitive music examinations, which were believed to engender excellence.<sup>216</sup> St Rita's, like other convent high schools across Australia, prepared students for the music examinations of the Royal College of Music in London, the Associated Board of the Royal Academy of Music, and

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<sup>211</sup> Williams, *The Society of the Sacred Heart*, 218.

<sup>212</sup> Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 2:297-98.

<sup>213</sup> "School Music: Encouraging the children - Department's Efforts," *The Brisbane Courier*, November 24, 1928, 24.

<sup>214</sup> The report revealed that the Department of Instruction staged a concert at the Brisbane Exhibition Grounds to attract music teachers to government schools. *The Brisbane Courier*, November 24, 1928, 24.

<sup>215</sup> Allen, *The Labourer's Friends*, 196.

<sup>216</sup> See MacGinley, *Ancient Tradition*, 188.

London's Trinity College of Music. When the Australian Music Examination Board (AMEB) was established in 1928 by Mr Sydney May, candidates entering the new college could include given levels of the AMEB grades as subjects for their Junior and Senior university examinations.<sup>217</sup>

At St Rita's, the sisters aimed to attain a musical reputation equal to that of Mt Erin at Wagga Wagga. In St Rita's first year, all except one student passed the elementary and primary examinations of the Associated Board of the Royal Academy of Music.<sup>218</sup> In 1929, when student numbers at St Rita's were still small and there was only one Junior candidate for the public examination, twenty students gained credits and honours in the AMEB examinations for violin, and eleven girls passed the Trinity College Examinations.<sup>219</sup> Over the next decade, St Rita's students were almost always successful in practical and theoretical music examinations in piano and violin, and many received musical honours.<sup>220</sup> A report in 1936 revealed that twenty-seven entrants from St Rita's gained either credit or honour passes, including an unnamed student who came first in Queensland with a pass of ninety-eight per cent.<sup>221</sup>

Like other Catholic sisters in Australia, the Presentations at St Rita's nurtured individual talent and encouraged girls towards successful careers in the performing arts and teaching. A brief summary of the achievements of Eunice Knapp, who was a pupil at St Rita's from 1926 to 1933, illustrates such nurturing. In 1929, Knapp was one of two St Rita's girls to receive honours certificates for the Trinity College examinations, and in 1930 she earned an Associate of the Trinity College of Music Teachers' Diploma (ATCL).<sup>222</sup> She received the Licentiate of Trinity College London (LTCL) in 1932, and gained the prized Licentiate of the Associated Board (LAB) in 1933, securing second highest place in Queensland.<sup>223</sup> In her professional career, Knapp performed with the ABC Wireless Singers and with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra. She was musical director of St Joseph's Christian Brothers' College at Gregory

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<sup>217</sup> CCA 2: 42.

<sup>218</sup> Eunice Knapp, Maud Curry and Joan O'Mara were awarded certificates for the 'school practical higher grade.' *The Catholic Advocate*, August 4, 1927, 16.

<sup>219</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 24, 1931, 13.

<sup>220</sup> St Rita's students were frequently placed first and second in Queensland. See *The Catholic Leader*, December 8, 1932, 25, and December 20, 1934, 38, see also December 19, 1935. Among notable achievements was Margaret Mackie's award of first place in Queensland for a music theory exam in 1935.

<sup>221</sup> *The Catholic Advocate*, December 17, 1936.

<sup>222</sup> St Rita's pupil, Noreen Richards, also gained an honours certificate in 1929. *The Catholic Leader*, December 12, 1929, 15; *The Brisbane Courier*, October 7, 1930, 20.

<sup>223</sup> CCA 2: 47-8. See also SRC annual report, 1933.

Terrace from 1959 to 1969, and in 1995 was awarded the Order of Australia for her services to music.<sup>224</sup>

Outstanding music students such as Eunice Knapp attracted considerable public interest and brought welcome prestige to the school. Many other St Rita's girls distinguished themselves in eisteddfod competitions for pianoforte and singing.<sup>225</sup> For example, in 1933, Elaine O'Mara secured second place in Queensland for Grade II Piano. Elaine later furthered her studies at the Conservatorium of Music in George Street, Brisbane.<sup>226</sup>

St Rita's success in music examinations was a reflection of the sisters' own musical competence. Professional qualifications in music were virtually unobtainable in Brisbane before the establishment of the Conservatorium of Music in 1957, where many Catholic sisters gained the highest qualifications. Prior to that time, the teachers at St Rita's trained at either Mt Erin in Wagga Wagga or at Our Lady's, Longreach, both being renowned for their musical standards. St Rita's first music teacher, Sr Ignatius Kelly, is remembered as an exceptionally gifted singer and musician.<sup>227</sup> She was schooled at Mt Erin and later travelled to Longreach to enter the novitiate there. Before coming to St Rita's she taught at Our Lady's in Longreach and conducted the adult choir of St Brigid's Catholic Church. The latter typified the way in which women religious, through music and the arts, established important social and cultural networks in their local communities. An extant program dated 25 June 1922 reveals that a "Grand Recital of Sacred Classical Music" performed by St Brigid's Choir under Sr Ignatius' direction listed fourteen musical items.<sup>228</sup> As St Rita's first music teacher Sr Ignatius laid the foundations for the school's future musical program. When Sr Ignatius returned to Longreach in 1928, Sr Bernadette Hayman was appointed as St Rita's full-time music teacher in piano, stringed instruments and singing.<sup>229</sup> A small school orchestra was also formed at St Rita's by Mother Patrick Madden, herself an accomplished musician, who had previously conducted the school orchestras at Emerald and Longreach.<sup>230</sup>

### 5.14.1 Nurturing Student Talent

St Rita's students were given many opportunities to perform their elocutionary and musical skills in public, particularly at school concerts, which became a feature of the social and

<sup>224</sup> Obituary, Eunice Wilkes, née Knapp, *The Courier Mail*, December, 1995, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>225</sup> CCA 2: 47-8.

<sup>226</sup> Broad, interview, Brisbane, February 26, 2002, AP.

<sup>227</sup> Sr Rosa MacGinley, past pupil of SRC (1946-49), interviewed by the author, Clayfield, October 4, 2001, AP.

<sup>228</sup> *St Brigid's Choir Concert Programme, June 25, 1922*, QPA.

<sup>229</sup> Obituary, Sr Bernadette Hayman (1898-1991); see also CCA 2: 42.

<sup>230</sup> Obituary, Mother Patrick Madden (1876-1962), QPA.

cultural life of Brisbane.<sup>231</sup> St Rita's concert programs evidence a range of items designed to encourage maximum student participation.<sup>232</sup> These included operettas, such as "Pearl the Fishermid" and "Eureka the Gypsy,"<sup>233</sup> pianoforte duets, violin solos, musical monologues, recitations of literature, choral singing, orchestral pieces and pianoforte solos such as "Lucia de Lammermoor."<sup>234</sup> When it was necessary to have a male part performed, the Clayfield sisters recruited boys from St Columban's College, Albion.<sup>235</sup> There developed a collaborative partnership between the two schools as Brother J O'Shaughnessy, who was St Columban's speech and drama specialist, assisted with St Rita's annual concerts between 1929 and 1932. This collaboration provided a precedent for future joint ventures.<sup>236</sup> In 1932, there were sufficient students at St Rita's for a school choir which debuted at the prize-giving concert and performed "Life's Maytime."<sup>237</sup>

Archbishop Duhig provided further opportunities for displaying the musical credentials of Catholic schools. One past pupil of St Rita's recounted that in the 1930s:

Archbishop Duhig seemed to bring people out a lot to St Rita's and we were always putting on impromptu concerts...in the schoolroom in Stanley Hall.<sup>238</sup>

During Duhig's episcopacy, Irish hymns and songs loomed large in the music programs of most Catholic schools. There was abundant Irish content in the songs learnt at St Rita's, since several of the Clayfield sisters were Irish-born. The celebration of St Patrick's Day by Catholic schools in Brisbane, which tradition predated Duhig, was fervently maintained in his time. Each year Catholic colleges performed in the St Patrick's Day concerts that were held annually by the Hibernian Society in the Brisbane City Hall.<sup>239</sup>

Pauline O'Neill, née Ward, (past pupil, 1930s and '40s) recalled that:

The most important concert of all was the St Patrick's Day concert where St Rita's verse speaking choir performed the "Shandon Bells." We all dressed in long white dresses with a green cord and green ribbon in our hair, and our performance was warmly received by a packed City Hall audience.<sup>240</sup>

<sup>231</sup> CCA 2: 45. St Rita's annual concert was usually held at the Savoy Theatre, Clayfield.

<sup>232</sup> SRC concert programs of the early 1930s, SRCA. St Rita's first concert in 1927 included a duet, "Galop de Concert" performed by A. Murphy and Eunice Knapp and a violin solo, "Choeur des Angels" played by Maude Curry. See *SRC Programme of Concert given by the Pupils of the Presentation Convent Schools - Clayfield, 1927; The Catholic Leader*, December 15, 1927.

<sup>233</sup> *SRC Programme of Concert*, 1932.

<sup>234</sup> *SRC Programme of Concert*, 1931.

<sup>235</sup> Bernard Knapp, brother of Eunice, usually accepted a solo role. In 1931 he appeared in a duet with Carmel Montgomery, and a Gabriel Cosgrove took the leading male role in "The Coach and Four." *The Catholic Leader* December 24, 1931, 13.

<sup>236</sup> CCA 2: 44-5. Br O'Shaughnessy later became a priest.

<sup>237</sup> *SRC Programme of Concert*, 1932.

<sup>238</sup> McCormack, interview, Brisbane, September 18, 2002, AP.

<sup>239</sup> St Rita's and St Agatha's combined to stage St Patrick's Day Concerts at St Agatha's school.

<sup>240</sup> Pauline O'Neill, née Ward, past pupil of SRC (1930s and 1940s), memoir, reprinted in *SRC Annual*, 1996, 65.

The St Patrick's Day concerts not only gave Catholic colleges like St Rita's an occasion to celebrate their Irish heritage, but also an opportunity to display their extensive music programs. Entertainment items were also performed on a large scale for official visitors to the archdiocese. For example, the visit by Australia's first Apostolic Delegate, Cardinal Bonaventura Cerretti, to lay the foundation stone of the proposed Holy Name Cathedral in September 1928 was celebrated in a grand concert at the Brisbane Exhibition Grounds. St Rita's students participated in an Italian dance, *The Tarantella*, to welcome the Italian Cardinal.<sup>241</sup> Then in 1930, concerts were held at numerous Catholic schools to commemorate Duhig's episcopal silver jubilee. The St Rita's concert in December included choral and instrumental performances, and the Irish tap dance in honour of the Irish priest.<sup>242</sup>

On such celebratory occasions it was not difficult for the St Rita's school community to forget day to day troubles. The concerts continued at St Rita's even during the Depression years of the 1930s. In spite of the strain on the sisters due to their large and on-going debt, concert items generally reflected an optimistic mood and celebrated both exuberant, youthful talent and school spirit.

### 5.15 THE VOCATIONAL STRAND - COMMERCIAL STUDIES

The literature available has shown that the Catholic sisters in Australia were alert to women's changing employment aspirations which, by 1920, had broadened beyond the traditional occupations of dressmaker, shop-assistant, domestic servant, nurse, or factory worker to include typist, secretary and clerk.<sup>243</sup> The sisters were aware of increasing employment opportunities for women in the growing commercial and industrial sectors, and they adapted their secondary curriculum to such change. Their students were thus prepared for traditionally male occupations in the above sectors. Ursuline historian Pauline Kneipp found that:

Girls in Ursuline schools were told by the sisters that they would be going out into a world very different from that known by their mothers and that they must be able to earn their living.<sup>244</sup>

In 1922, the principal of St Ursula's, Armidale, wrote:

True to the tradition of our Order to keep in the vanguard of modern education, a new rapid method of shorthand has been introduced.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> *The Age*, September 20, 1928, 24.

<sup>242</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 11, 1930, 36.

<sup>243</sup> Occupations which girls and boys expected to enter between 1917 and 1920 in NSW are helpfully summarised in Table C17 in Kyle, *Her Natural Destiny*, 111.

<sup>244</sup> Kneipp, *This Land of Promise*, 89.

<sup>245</sup> Kneipp, *This Land of Promise*, 82.



By the late 1920s, most convent and other private girls' colleges offered a Junior commercial course as an alternative to the university-driven syllabus, whereas government schools lagged behind in such provision.<sup>246</sup> In 1928, the principal of St Margaret's Anglican School at Clayfield (later Albion and now Ascot) noted a "marked increase in the demand for commercial subjects" and proposed to "develop the commercial side of the school."<sup>247</sup> She also cautioned against narrowing the traditionally broad curriculum of girls' colleges lamenting:

It appears Business Houses prefer to employ those who have a knowledge of commercial subjects, but very little of anything else...the schools themselves could do very little beyond voice a protest.<sup>248</sup>

Vocational training, which had been a central objective of Nano Nagle's educational mission, was now an important component of convent secondary education in Australia. At schools like St Rita's, such training included a commercial course for its pupils, and after-hours' classes for local State school children and local young adults, as provided at Our Lady's, Longreach and St Ursula's, Yeppoon.<sup>249</sup> In 1929, St Rita's commercial program included steno-typing, typewriting, shorthand, bookkeeping, commercial correspondence, pastel drawing, commercial art, oil painting and needlework.<sup>250</sup> From the outset, St Rita's students were prepared for the examinations of The Queensland Shorthand Writers and Bookkeepers' Association,<sup>251</sup> and were encouraged to excel. Each year, many St Rita's students received certificates from Stott and Hoare's Business College in advanced, intermediate and elementary grades in bookkeeping, and they earned many distinctions. For example, in 1929, twelve of the nineteen St Rita's students who received Stott and Hoare certificates gained honours.<sup>252</sup> Then in 1930, a St Rita's pupil, Bessle Egan, received a gold medal for obtaining the highest mark in Queensland in the Senior Typewriting examination.<sup>253</sup>

By comparison, private boys' colleges, including Catholic colleges, were slower to respond to the demand for vocational or technical subjects, and maintained a strictly academic curriculum. In 1922, Brother Patrick Conlon, principal of St Joseph's College, Nudgee,

<sup>246</sup> For further discussion, see Kyle, *Her Natural Destiny*, 75.

<sup>247</sup> St Margaret's School, annual report, 1928, *The Brisbane Courier*, December 8, 1928.

<sup>248</sup> *The Brisbane Courier*, December 8, 1928.

<sup>249</sup> The Ursulines at Dutton Park offered post-primary vocational classes leading to the commercial examinations for local youth not enrolled in the school. See Ord, *A Bridge and A Resting-Place*.

<sup>250</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 12, 1929, 15.

<sup>251</sup> In 1928, Catherine Casey (later Sr Veronica) obtained the highest mark in Queensland in the typewriting examination. Further outstanding results gained by St Rita's students in these examinations were recorded in subsequent years. *The Catholic Advocate*, December 8, 1927, 35; *The Age*, December 20, 1928, 18; *The Catholic Leader*, December 24, 1931, 13, and December 8, 1932, 25.

<sup>252</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 12, 1929, 15.

<sup>253</sup> St Rita's College, *Distribution of Prizes Programme*, 1930. SRCA.

critiqued the narrow academically oriented curriculum of Catholic boys' schools against Edmund Rice's concern for vocational training. Conlon suggested that the introduction of an agricultural science course for boys would benefit those not moving on to professional careers.<sup>254</sup> Several Catholic boys' colleges began to offer agricultural subjects in the 1930s, although most colleges developed as primarily academic, since men on the land felt they could teach their sons land management themselves. The idea of introducing agricultural science at Nudgee was not mooted again until the 1970s.<sup>255</sup>

Some historians suggest that as a consequence of the broader options available in Catholic girls' colleges at the time, fewer girls were presented for examinations compared with boys.<sup>256</sup> However, at convent schools like St Rita's where the curriculum was indeed broad and flexible, academic emphasis did not diminish and was in fact extended. Immediately following St Rita's registration as a secondary school, St Rita's girls were presented for the university examinations in English, mathematics, Latin, French, geography and history, a preparation that required the standard two years in lower secondary for the Junior certificate. Irene Cusack was successfully prepared as St Rita's first candidate for the Junior university examinations in 1928.<sup>257</sup>

In the decade from 1929 to 1939, St Rita's achieved examination success that was notable for a small school. College annual reports indicate that throughout that decade one hundred per cent success in the Junior university examinations was frequently achieved, with almost all candidates obtaining very good results.<sup>258</sup>

Although many girls in Catholic secondary colleges at that time achieved high grades in the Junior public examinations, most were reluctant to enter university and qualify for a profession. In 1928, of the fifteen students from St Rita's who completed the internal college exams for Sub-Junior,<sup>259</sup> only one, Catherine Casey (later Sr Veronica), enrolled for the Junior Examinations in 1929. She passed creditably in all subjects.<sup>260</sup> Employment prospects for women with Junior level qualifications continued to expand in the commercial sector. Accordingly, in 1938, the majority of Junior students at St Rita's were enrolled in the

<sup>254</sup> St Joseph's College, Nudgee, annual report, 1922, cited in Boland, *Nudgee*, 114.

<sup>255</sup> There was a move to establish special agricultural boys' colleges, such as Abergourie near Ingham, which was run by the Christian Brothers; however, Abergourie became predominantly academic, though always retaining a rural dimension. See Boland, *Nudgee*, 114.

<sup>256</sup> Kyle, *Her Natural Destiny*, 78.

<sup>257</sup> CCA, 2: 43

<sup>258</sup> SRC annual reports, 1928-38; *The Catholic Leader*, December 24, 1931, 13, and December 8, 1932, 25, also December 20, 1934, 38; *The Catholic Advocate*, December 17, 1936; *The Courier Mail*, December 7, 1938.

<sup>259</sup> SRC annual report, 1928; *The Age*, December 20, 1928, 18.

<sup>260</sup> CCA, 2: 43.

commercial class and only a few went on to complete Senior.<sup>261</sup> One former pupil recalled that she was strongly encouraged by the sisters to progress on to higher education, but admitted, “I would never have it in my head that a girl would go to university.”<sup>262</sup>

### 5.16 EFFECTING CHANGE – BROADENING WOMEN’S CAREER PATHWAYS

In 1929, Archbishop Duhig’s praise of the Presentation Sisters for making “St Rita’s a home of the arts, refinement and general culture,” typified the prevailing appreciation of convent schools as ‘centres of culture.’<sup>263</sup> While Catholic girls’ schools were indeed centres of culture, as has been seen, they had developed in much more than this single dimension.

The Catholic teaching sisters in the early decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century Australia worked within the social constraints of the times to respond to change and indeed to effect change. In Queensland, the sisters encouraged girls to obtain extension scholarships, which were granted in conjunction with the Junior university examination to any candidate who secured an approved pass. The extension scholarship entitled them to a further two years of free tuition beyond Junior level as day students at an approved secondary school.<sup>264</sup> St Rita’s students who secured these scholarships prior to the opening of the school’s upper secondary department in 1939 would continue their senior studies at other schools. This is of significance to the broader study of women’s education as it clearly indicates that far from being motivated by the need to secure enrolments for St Rita’s, the sisters’ primary concern was in fact to provide girls with access to higher education through extension scholarships. Some institutes like the Presentations in Longreach, charged only the amount available through the scholarship allowance.<sup>265</sup> St Rita’s annual reports in the period from 1932 to 1939 demonstrate that “almost all girls obtained extension scholarships...with the intention of attending the university later.”<sup>266</sup>

Furthermore, the Presentation Sisters at St Rita’s, like other female teaching congregations in Australia, actively encouraged girls to extend their vocational aspirations beyond the traditional area of nursing to the profession of teaching. The St Rita’s curriculum in the 1930s

<sup>261</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 28, 1939.

<sup>262</sup> McCormack, interview, Brisbane, September 18, 2002, AP.

<sup>263</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 12, 1929, 23 and December 8, 1932, 25.

<sup>264</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, January 26, 1939, 16.

<sup>265</sup> MacGinley, *Roads to Sion*, 372, f.n.93.

<sup>266</sup> In 1929, Irene Cusack, who was dux of the college, became the first St Rita’s student to gain an extension scholarship. In 1930 the scholarship was gained by Monica Joyce, and in 1933 by Mary Butterworth. In 1934, all St Rita’s candidates obtained extension scholarships and one student was admitted to the State Teachers’ Training College. This was repeated into the late 1930s with Margery Percival, Joan Ross and Edith Smith winning extension scholarships in 1939. See *The Catholic Leader*, December 12, 1929, 15 and December 8, 1932, 25, also December 20, 1934, 38 and January 26, 1939, 14. See also SRC *Distribution of Prizes Programme*, 1930 and 1933, SRCA.

reflected this goal and provided the pre-requisite subjects for a second class teacher's certificate; these included Latin, history, geometry, algebra, arithmetic and geography. Some girls carved out successful teaching careers in the government school system, while others joined the Presentation congregation.

The Church's longstanding belief that teaching provided an appropriate apostolic vocation for women influenced many girls to enter the religious institute in which they had trained as pupil-teachers. From among the small first intake of students at St Rita's in 1926, five girls entered the Longreach novitiate in the early 1930s. They were Gertrude Hogan (Sr Gabriel), who was later elected Mother General of the Presentation Sisters in Queensland, and later again Mother President of the Society of Australian Presentation Congregations that was formed in 1958; Catherine Casey (Sr Veronica), who obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree and Diploma of Education by the mid-1940s in order to teach the Senior University Class at St Rita's, and who was appointed convent superior and head of the college in 1958; Eileen Hegarty (Sr Dorothea) who began as a pupil-teacher at St Agatha's and later taught at St Rita's, then became principal of St Ursula's College, Yeppoon; and Srs James and Baptist, who taught at St Rita's between 1932 and 1940.

### **CONCLUSION: CONTINUITY ASSURED – THE NEED FOR EXPANSION**

This chapter demonstrated that the founding sisters of St Rita's College adopted the Ursuline-based system of education that placed equal emphasis on the cultural, vocational and intellectual formation of women. At a glance, St Rita's first curriculum reflected such a holistic education tradition. This chapter countered the idea that convent secondary schools concentrated on training young girls in the accomplishments to the detriment of a useful, balanced and academic education. It demonstrated that St Rita's was indeed a "home of the arts, refinement and general culture," but that the sisters also prepared girls for employment in the fields of nursing, the performing arts, teaching and office work. This chapter revealed that the Clayfield Presentation Sisters, like other teaching sisters in Australia, modernised and adapted their curriculum to the new period of female participation in the workforce that emerged from the 1930s. Such curriculum innovation at colleges like St Rita's, enabled women to enter the traditional male occupations of commerce and business gradually. This chapter gave prominence to significant women in Queensland's educational history, women like Mother Ursula Kennedy, whose work has remained absent from the public records of the period. It also shed light on the enduring and valuable friendships which the Presentation Sisters formed with families and with local clergy in and around Emerald, Longreach and then at Clayfield.

In 1936, ten years after St Rita's small beginnings, the sisters there, though still in debt, planned for additions to the existing school to accommodate growing enrolments, which in 1936 had vacillated between 95 and 103 students.<sup>267</sup> The worst of the Depression had passed but few improvements had been made to the college since its foundation. The number of boarders had increased considerably by 1936 and every available space in Stanley Hall, even the boarders' refectory, was used for classrooms.<sup>268</sup> Convent Annals record that "the time had now come when a suitable modern secondary school was an urgent necessity."<sup>269</sup> The coming chapter will examine how the Presentation Sisters met this challenge.

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<sup>267</sup> SRC annual report, 1936; *The Catholic Advocate*, December 17, 1936.

<sup>268</sup> Broad, interview, Brisbane, February 26, 2002, AP.

<sup>269</sup> CCA, 1: 8.

## CHAPTER SIX

### GAINING PROMINENCE: 1939-1959

#### INTRODUCTION

This chapter will examine the way in which the Presentation Sisters at St Rita's, Clayfield, responded to the immense social-educational changes in Australia in the period between 1939 and 1959, and how convent school traditions were adapted to new educational currents. It will demonstrate that the teaching sisters expanded women's employment options by actively encouraging girls to undertake education beyond middle-secondary level. It will also investigate how the Catholic sisters worked effectively within the social, religious and cultural constraints of their time to achieve their educational goals. This chapter will attempt to narrow the gap between how the teaching sisters in Australia have been perceived and what they actually did in order to progress women's education.

During the Second World War, Australian women entered the manufacturing and commerce fields to fill jobs vacated by servicemen. Then in the decade that followed, women's social and economic horizons continued to expand, albeit gradually, in fields virtually unavailable to them in the past. As industry advanced in Australia, the increasing demand for skilled workers with technical, commercial and higher level qualifications contributed to the rapid expansion of secondary education.<sup>1</sup> After struggling initially, St Rita's College, like most Australian secondary schools, experienced accelerated growth in the post-war years. Accordingly, ambitious building programs were undertaken at such colleges to accommodate increased enrolments and higher student retention to senior level.

#### 6.1 ST RITA'S LEADING WOMEN (1939-1959)

Mother Ursula Kennedy continued to influence St Rita's development throughout the 1940s and '50s. As Congregational Leader of the Queensland Presentations, she oversaw the expansion of St Rita's facilities and curriculum, as well as the professional development of its teachers. Mother Aloysius Ryan, who served several terms as convent superior and head of St Rita's College from 1933 to 1957, helped lead the school community through the financial hardship of the 1930s to the relative stability of the 1950s. Like most female teaching institutes, the Presentation Sisters followed the traditional pattern in which the convent superior also administered the attached college (or convent high school). St Rita's leading teachers during this period, Sr Veronica Casey and Sr Canice Creede, proved particularly

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Barcan, *Sociological Theory*, 66-7.

adaptable to new educational demands. Both were to become principals of the college. From the 1940s onwards, under M Aloysius's administration, Sr Veronica Casey was seen by many parents and the general community as both the leading force and head teacher at the college.

### 6.1.1 Collaboration with Parish Priests

The mutuality between the Clayfield sisters and their local parish and surrounding communities, as well as with Fr Frank O'Connell, and, later, Monsignor John English, typified the collaborative relationships that were to assure the success of the Catholic educational endeavour in Australia. M. R. MacGinley confirms that collaboration in commonly-held objectives "marked the relationship between hierarchy and women's institutes in Australia to a much greater degree than conflict."<sup>2</sup> Fr O'Connell's unexpected death in December 1939 deeply saddened the small and close-knit St Rita's community.<sup>3</sup> The abiding memory of this valued friend, as eulogised by Archbishop Duhig,<sup>4</sup> remains in the oral history of the Clayfield sisters. O'Connell's successor, Dr John English, known to the sisters from when he functioned as relieving priest at St Agatha's in 1932, was appointed to the parish in January 1940.<sup>5</sup> This appointment marked the beginning of a long and valued association with the sisters. At that time, Msgr English was Vicar General of the Brisbane archdiocese and had been Administrator of St Stephen's Cathedral.<sup>6</sup> An esteemed priest from County Tipperary, he was both liked and respected by the St Rita's school community.<sup>7</sup> His having also received the title of Monsignor, conferred on St Rita's a certain prestige and distinction among Catholic secondary colleges, which undoubtedly bolstered the school's social and consequent academic standing in Brisbane.

### 6.2 SCHOOL EXPANSION - ST RITA'S FINANCIAL PLAN (1938)

In 1936, plans were underway to extend St Rita's main school building in answer to the need for more classrooms.<sup>8</sup> The congregation, already heavily in debt, made several financial decisions to enable the extension to proceed.<sup>9</sup> In 1938, M Ursula reached an agreement with the Colonial Mutual Life Insurance Company to relieve the Martin brothers from their obligation as guarantors for the founding loan, since their pastoral properties were hard hit by

<sup>2</sup> MacGinley, "Catholic Women's Religious Institutes in Australia," 104.

<sup>3</sup> Hogan, interview, Brisbane, November 28, 2001, AP.

<sup>4</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, February 24, 1940, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>5</sup> CCA 1: 8; *The Catholic Leader*, January 25, 1940, 17. Msgr English had been rector of St Leo's University College on Wickham Terrace. He also contributed a regular column in *The Catholic Leader* in the 1940s.

<sup>6</sup> Patricia Hickey, ed., *The First Eighty Years: St Agatha's Parish, Clayfield* (Brisbane: St Agatha's Parish, Clayfield, 1998), 19.

<sup>7</sup> Gibbons, discussion, Brisbane, April 2006; *The Catholic Leader*, December 13, 1951, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>8</sup> SRC annual report, 1936.

<sup>9</sup> EB, 84-7, QPA. The sisters' capital debt on the "Stanley Hall" property continued to be a heavy burden, as only the interest could be paid. See also *The Catholic Leader*, February 2, 1939, 17.

the Depression.<sup>10</sup> The agreement involved a life insurance plan for the six youngest sisters in the community, Srs Clement and Canice Creede, Bernard Conneely, Patricia McCarthy, Damien Fadian and Barbara Houlihan, at £2,000 each. Additionally, the congregation agreed to pay £800 annually in lease payments for 25 years, as complete repayment of the loan.<sup>11</sup>

The first significant reduction in St Rita's debt occurred in 1940 when Colonial Mutual accepted the £2,000 insurance policy of Sr Clement (Aina) Creede. Her premature death at the age of twenty was profoundly felt by the congregation, whose only consolation was that Sr Clement, who showed great promise as a teacher and musician, could in death provide a significant endowment to her community.<sup>12</sup>

### 6.3 THE NEW SCHOOL BUILDING (1939)

With a financial plan in hand and a modest donation from St Agatha's parish community, M Aloysius commissioned Mr J. P. Donoghue to draw up architectural plans for a two-storey school in brick (now known as the Kennedy building).<sup>13</sup> Opened on January 29, 1939, the new school comprised six classrooms on two levels, each with sunlit balconies, and a performance stage on the ground level for school concerts and prize-giving ceremonies.<sup>14</sup> There followed an immediate increase in student numbers, a significant turning point for St Rita's growth and expansion.

A kindergarten was also opened to cater for pre-primary age children. Noelene Kyle contends that after 1900, private schools advertised kindergarten classes "to cement their position" in the educational market.<sup>15</sup> However, at St Rita's, as at other Catholic girls' colleges, this kindergarten provision reflected not only the Catholic sisters' pragmatism in securing enrolments, but also their shared Ursuline-based tradition of providing progressive education through all the years of childhood.<sup>16</sup> Kindergartens in Australia were in fact pioneered by the Catholic teaching sisters. Mother Gonzaga Barry opened the first kindergarten in Victoria at the Loreto Mary's Mount convent high school, Ballarat, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> The Mt Erin Presentation Sisters introduced a kindergarten system in Wagga Wagga in 1900.<sup>18</sup> Around this time, from 1901-1904, Barbara Bell was conducting training courses at Presentation convents

<sup>10</sup> This was in response to a request by the Martin family to be released from their liability. EB, 28. QPA.

<sup>11</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, February 2, 1939, 17 and 24. The Clayfield and Yeppeoon properties were mortgaged to the Company to pay around £200 annually towards the interest.

<sup>12</sup> MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 170.

<sup>13</sup> EB, 28. QPA.

<sup>14</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, February 2, 1939, 24.

<sup>15</sup> Kyle, *Her Natural Destiny*, 109.

<sup>16</sup> SRC annual report, 1939; *The Catholic Leader*, December 28, 1939.

<sup>17</sup> Catherine McTigue and Imelda Palmer, "Mary Gonzaga Barry," in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1969), 3:107-108; see also Clark, *Loreto*, 66.

<sup>18</sup> Fox, *In This Land*, 50.



in Victoria, while her sister Mary went to Wagga Wagga in New South Wales at the invitation of Bishop John Gallagher to provide in-service training to the Mt Erin sisters. This included training in kindergarten education.<sup>19</sup> It is of significance that the teaching sisters' kindergarten initiative in Australia appears to have provided the foundation for the modern kindergarten system in many towns like Wagga.

Historians have suggested that convent pre-schooling provided baby-sitting for working women.<sup>20</sup> St Rita's kindergarten, however, mainly contributed to the formation of middle-class girls, since Clayfield parents who availed of this provision at St Rita's were financially comfortable. There were few married middle-class women in paid employment at that time, and working class families generally could not afford to have their children at kindergarten.<sup>21</sup> Some 'free' kindergartens were certainly provided at convents at that time.<sup>22</sup> St Rita's kindergarten was directed by Sr Anita Quinn who had been a qualified teacher in the Irish National School system before entering the Presentation novitiate in Longreach in 1927. She was thus well credentialed, as were many of the sisters already mentioned.<sup>23</sup>

### 6.3.1 Commencement of an Upper Secondary School - 1940

In the late 1930s, the educational progression from primary to secondary school and later to tertiary education or technical college in Australia was regulated by external examinations.<sup>24</sup> Primary schooling in Queensland terminated with the scholarship examination at the end of Grade Seven. Capable students could then progress to a secondary school for two years study towards the Queensland University Junior Public Examination which led to the Senior Public Examination and eligibility for entry to university. The majority of students completed their schooling at the minimum primary school leaving age of fourteen, but increasing numbers undertook the Junior examination, since employers now sought a certificate at this level.<sup>25</sup>

There was no senior class at St Rita's until 1941, which accounts for no recorded entries for the Senior university examinations appearing in either the school's annual reports or newspaper lists prior to that time.<sup>26</sup> Newspaper records reveal that the frequently listed secondary colleges that prepared girls for the Senior examinations in the late 1930s were: All Hallows' Convent, Stuartholme, St Margaret's Anglican School at Clayfield (now Ascot),

<sup>19</sup> See Shorten, "Barbara Bell."

<sup>20</sup> Kyle, *Her Natural Destiny*, 109.

<sup>21</sup> See Barcan, *Sociological Theory*, 88.

<sup>22</sup> M Gonzaga Barry established a free kindergarten in South Melbourne in 1912. See Fogarty, *Catholic Education*, 451.

<sup>23</sup> CCA 2: 108. Sr Anita was also senior dormitory mistress. See also obituary of Sr Mary Anita Quinn, QPA.

<sup>24</sup> Barcan, *Sociological Theory*, 71.

<sup>25</sup> Barcan, *Sociological Theory*, 71.

<sup>26</sup> See SRC annual reports, 1927-41.

Brisbane Girls' Grammar and the Brisbane High School for girls. At St Rita's, it was not until 1940, following the completion of the new school building, that it became possible for the first Sub-senior class to form. This class comprised two students, Mabel Stubberfield (later Sr Immaculata) and Eileen Alexander.<sup>27</sup>

Convent annals reported 1941 as a record year, given the examination successes of St Rita's first Senior candidates, and the success of seven Junior students, the largest number so far presented.<sup>28</sup> At the school's prize-giving ceremony that year, Archbishop Duhig claimed St Rita's "remarkable progress" confirmed that Catholic schools "were equal, if not superior, to anything the State could produce in the way of educational work."<sup>29</sup> He added:

St Rita's has taken its place, and a very honourable place, among the secondary schools of the diocese...and can challenge any school of its class in Australia.<sup>30</sup>

Duhig's effort to showcase Catholic schools at public events, like annual speech nights, was linked to the broader movement for government aid, which had been intensifying at that time.

The large number of girls at St Rita's who completed their schooling at Junior level took the commercial course which enabled them to gain employment as commercial teachers or office workers.<sup>31</sup> The college offered typewriting, shorthand and bookkeeping subjects that were not available in many State secondary schools,<sup>32</sup> this reflecting the Presentation Sisters' responsiveness to change and to the educational demands of their clientele. Although the course was not considered an academic stream, the usual high standards were expected of students, and many achieved outstanding success in the commercial examinations.<sup>33</sup>

#### **6.4 EVACUATION YEAR (1942)**

Australia and the Pacific region were brought into the conflict of World War II following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941. The Queensland Premier, Forgan Smith, had ordered schools in the coastal belt between Thursday Island and Coolangatta not to reopen in January 1942.<sup>34</sup> The year became known as Evacuation Year. Many children were sent to inland boarding schools or other domiciles in a series of evacuations that were

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<sup>27</sup> CCA 2: 109-114.

<sup>28</sup> CCA 2: 114; *The Catholic Leader*, December 11, 1941, 3.

<sup>29</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 12, 1940, 27.

<sup>30</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 11, 1941, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Sr Malachy Mountford taught the commercial stream during that period.

<sup>32</sup> Kyle, *Her Natural Destiny*, 122.

<sup>33</sup> SRC annual report of 1950 indicates that Mary McMahon (later Sr Jacinta) gained first place in Queensland for Stage III Bookkeeping in the Shorthand Writers' Association examination. In the following year, Pauline Baker achieved first place too.

<sup>34</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 11, 1941, 3.

immensely disruptive to schools. In the coastal town of Yeppoon, the Presentation Sisters and students at St Ursula's moved to Longreach and Emerald. In Brisbane, St Rita's boarders and their teachers relocated to the Presentation convent in Murgon.<sup>35</sup> Loreto College, Coorparoo, transferred its boarding school to Glen Innes in northern New South Wales on the former site of the New England Boys' Grammar School.<sup>36</sup> The Sacred Heart Sisters and boarders at Stuartholme were initially sent to Canungra south of Brisbane and then to Southport.<sup>37</sup> The boarders at Lourdes Hill, Hawthorne, moved to the Good Samaritan convent in Gayndah, north-west of Brisbane.<sup>38</sup> The lower secondary and primary boarders at All Hallow's dispersed to Warwick and Stanthorpe in two separate groups, while the upper secondary girls, who were fewer in number, joined Mercy schools in Roma, Dalby and Charleville.<sup>39</sup>

Compulsory school attendance in Brisbane was suspended in this crisis and hours staggered to reduce the number of students at schools at any given time.<sup>40</sup> St Rita's records reveal that day classes continued but attendance was erratic.<sup>41</sup> Many parents feared invasion and kept their daughters at home for long periods.<sup>42</sup>

The annals of the Clayfield convent mention:

Those evacuated from St Rita's went in two contingents. Srs M Rosario and Malachy took the junior boarders by service car to Murgon, and Srs Dolores, Emmanuel and Canice brought the remainder by train.<sup>43</sup>

Solemn-vow institutes observing minor enclosure, like the Presentation Sisters, customarily modified their regulations to enable them to travel in public and reside in rented premises when necessary.<sup>44</sup> Since not all St Rita's evacuees could be accommodated in the Murgon convent, the sisters rented a neighbouring house for the senior girls and two sisters. They obtained permission from the Department of Public Instruction to conduct St Rita's College at Murgon for the duration of the war. Importantly, the local Murgon community later requested the sisters to not disband the secondary school upon returning to Brisbane after the war. The request was granted and the sisters accordingly obtained approval from the Department of

<sup>35</sup> The Presentation congregation established St Joseph's convent in Murgon in 1937. CCA 2: 116.

<sup>36</sup> Loreto College School Magazine, 1945. A copy may be found in Loreto College library, Coorparoo.

<sup>37</sup> "A History of Stuartholme," unpublished booklet, 13. A copy is in Stuartholme library, Toowong.

<sup>38</sup> Mary June Egert née Whittaker, past pupil of Lourdes Hill College (1940-1944), in discussion with the author, April 29, 2007. Students resided at the school there and at the old Palace Theatre in Gayndah.

<sup>39</sup> Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 191-95.

<sup>40</sup> Wyeth, *Education in Queensland*, 195.

<sup>41</sup> See SRC *Student Roll Book* for the years 1939 to 1945. SRCA.

<sup>42</sup> Egert, discussion.

<sup>43</sup> CCA 2: 116-19. Srs Dolores Dwyer, Canice Creede and Malachy Mountford taught the junior and sub-junior classes.

<sup>44</sup> Though their vows were declared simple in 1901, enclosure was still retained in their constitutions, and the tradition held to very strongly.

Instruction to establish a permanent secondary school there under the name of Rosary College.<sup>45</sup> In this way the sisters delivered secondary education to youth in Murgon and the surrounding district.<sup>46</sup>

Annals of the Clayfield Presentation convent reveal that Australian and American officials inspected St Rita's buildings in February 1942 with a view to requisitioning the college, and that, to the sisters' relief, a takeover never eventuated.<sup>47</sup> Other Catholic colleges were less fortunate since Archbishop Duhig had promised the Australian army unreserved use of Catholic convents and boarding schools. For example, Stuartholme was converted into a base hospital and Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School at Whinstanes in Hamilton was used by army personnel.<sup>48</sup> By 1941, eight Catholic boarding colleges outside the city centre were commandeered for military use.<sup>49</sup> The Clayfield Annals also mention the requirement of air raid precautions, such as zigzag trenches, for all Brisbane schools, and that the area in front of Stanley Hall was trenched in 1942 to specifications published in *The Catholic Leader*.<sup>50</sup> Like many other teaching sisters in Brisbane, the Presentations attended air raid and first aid lectures at All Hallows' Convent.<sup>51</sup> Judith Garbett, née McMullen, (past pupil, 1933-1947) recalled the unease among the sisters when the air sirens sounded but how they calmly led students to the trenches:

Sr Marie Therese anxiously paced up and down [beside the trenches], fervently saying the Rosary while scanning the skies.<sup>52</sup>

Garbett recalled how wartime anxiety was relieved on the arrival of American soldiers to be based in Brisbane. The upper level classroom at St Rita's provided a good vantage point for viewing American seaplanes landing on the Brisbane River.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, United States army chaplains often visited Catholic colleges in Brisbane. *The Catholic Leader* recorded a visit to St Rita's by two American army chaplains in 1944.<sup>54</sup>

By the time St Rita's reopened at Clayfield in 1943 student enrolments from kindergarten to Junior had increased to 120. The number of secondary students at St Rita's had not yet

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<sup>45</sup> CCA 2: 119.

<sup>46</sup> Rosary College became "a distinguished music centre" where students frequently gained Diplomas, Licentiates and Associates. See MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 240, fn. 6.

<sup>47</sup> CCA 2: 116-9.

<sup>48</sup> 'A History of Stuartholme,' 13. See also Anna Barbaro, "The Story of Whinstanes," in Ryan, *One Mind, One Heart*, 12.

<sup>49</sup> Duhig later reneged on his offer but the army nonetheless commandeered required schools. See Boland, *Duhig*, 302.

<sup>50</sup> See *The Catholic Leader*, January 29, and February 12, 1942.

<sup>51</sup> "75<sup>th</sup> Celebration Committee" booklet in QPA.

<sup>52</sup> Judith Garbett, née McMullen, memoir, in SRCA.

<sup>53</sup> McMullen, memoir.

<sup>54</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 14, 1944, 9.

reached fifty so was small compared with All Hallows' which in 1943 recorded an enrolment of 622 students.<sup>55</sup> No Senior candidates were recorded at St Rita's between 1943 and 1945 on account of the evacuation, and also because the Junior examination was still widely accepted as the school leaving examination.<sup>56</sup> In 1946, only two girls at St Rita's were expected to undertake Senior, which was comparable to the small Senior numbers at most colleges, including All Hallows'.<sup>57</sup>

## 6.5 MAINTAINING AN ACADEMIC ORIENTATION

Newspaper records of St Rita's academic achievements in 1942 indicate that in spite of the disruptive evacuation to Murgon, fourteen students were prepared for the Junior examination that year. All fourteen candidates gained outstanding results in English which was the principal subject of the examinations. *The Catholic Leader* reported:

Again in a convent high school evacuated to Murgon we note that of fourteen candidates entered for the examination, the English results showed 7 "A's" and 7 "B's". This can only be the result of excellent teaching.<sup>58</sup>

The sisters' capacity to deal with the upheaval of the evacuation highlights the culture of resilience that continued in convents and also the sisters' unwavering focus on maintaining high academic standards. For example, no speech day prizes were given at St Rita's in 1944 due to wartime frugality; however, one report mentions the awarding of a statue of Our Lady to the dux of the college.<sup>59</sup>

### 6.5.1 Importance of Science

Scientific developments during the post-war period in Australia produced a demand for skilled workers in science and technology. There followed a significant shift in school curricula towards science.<sup>60</sup> The revised Queensland science syllabus introduced in the mid-1940s incorporated the traditional physics and chemistry as well as home science. In 1945 at St Rita's, plans were well underway for a new science laboratory and home science classroom and kitchen, as well as for teacher-training towards the revised science syllabus. M Ursula

<sup>55</sup> See "Table of Enrolments, All Hallows' School: 1863-1981," in Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 329.

<sup>56</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, January 28, 1943, 8 and January 27, 1944, 7. In 1943, four St Rita's students were successfully presented for the Junior examination and five again in the following year.

<sup>57</sup> Reminiscences written by Sr Consilia Ring, past pupil (1944-1948) and teacher at SRC (1956-1962), given to the author, Herston, 2001; Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 193. The only two Sub-seniors at SRC in 1945 were Patricia McDonald, a day scholar who pursued a career in dance, and Jule Tanks, a boarder from Longreach who completed a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Queensland.

<sup>58</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, January 28, 1943, 8.

<sup>59</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 14, 1944, 9.

<sup>60</sup> Logan and Clarke, *State Education*, 8.

Kennedy had travelled to Wagga Wagga to observe Mt Erin's science program and facilities for replication at St Rita's.<sup>61</sup>

St Rita's main school building that was erected in 1938 was extended in 1945 to provide these new science facilities and to accommodate increasing enrolments. M Ursula had negotiated with government authorities to waive the wartime ban on private construction. M Ursula, who was now seventy years of age, again became immersed in institution-building, a role few women enjoyed outside the home. She commissioned Archbishop Duhig's nephew, Frank Cullen, as the architect for the extension.<sup>62</sup> Cullen had worked on several Catholic school expansion programs in Brisbane at that time. The extension at St Rita's also included a new kindergarten and dormitory for the secondary boarders.<sup>63</sup> Construction was completed in September 1945 and the revised Queensland syllabus was implemented from the start of the 1946 school year,<sup>64</sup> paralleling developments in other Catholic girls' colleges at that time.<sup>65</sup>

Marjorie Theobald contends that prior to the introduction of physics and chemistry, female enrollees in the matriculation subjects of botany, zoology, physiology and biology were directed to scientific activities such as cataloguing flora and fauna, which had occupied leisured women of the late nineteenth century. She suggests that later:

When science becomes physics and chemistry (abstract, divorced from its human context, associated with mastery of the environment, with economic rewards and success in the public sphere) mysteriously, it is no longer suitable for girls.<sup>66</sup>

Theobald found that in that post-war period:

Women were invited to believe that science itself was gender-specific, that the science laboratory...and even the math's lesson were the domain of men.<sup>67</sup>

How the Catholic sisters in Australia responded to this social bias, without yielding to it, merits attention. While, as Rupert Goodman found, girls generally showed a preference for history and geography,<sup>68</sup> the gradual entry of women into technical and medical fields that previously were virtually unavailable to them did provide the impetus for girls to study science in high school. When All Hallows' implemented the new science syllabus in 1945

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<sup>61</sup> EB, 32. QPA.

<sup>62</sup> CCA 2: 146-47. Cullen's projects during the 1940s are listed in *The Catholic Leader*, September 16, 1954, 9.

<sup>63</sup> CCA 2: 146. Boarders were given a curtained cubicle, a bed, chair and bedside cabinet and a linen bedspread displaying a blue embroidered "S.R.C." monogram.

<sup>64</sup> CCA 2: 146.

<sup>65</sup> The Mercy Sisters at All Hallows' introduced the new syllabus in 1945. *The Age*, February 5, 1916, cited in Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 169.

<sup>66</sup> Marjorie Theobald, "Reflections on History of Female Education" (address given at the Independent Teachers' Federation of Australia Annual Women's Forum, April 1986), reprinted in *Ideas in Education* (August, 1986): 20.

<sup>67</sup> Marjorie Theobald, "Reflections on History," 20.

<sup>68</sup> Goodman, *Secondary Education*, 364.

eight of the eighteen senior students presented for the physics and chemistry examinations were successful, indicating both student interest and solid preparation.<sup>69</sup> The Presentations at St Rita's, with significantly fewer students, presented their first Senior candidate for the physics and chemistry examinations in 1949.<sup>70</sup>

On the evidence of school reports combined with oral and newspaper data, St Rita's teachers actively encouraged girls to study physics and chemistry. Like the Mercies at All Hallows', the Presentations at St Rita's brought notable scientists into their classrooms to dispel the popularised notion that science was for boys.<sup>71</sup> During the Brisbane Science Congress in 1951, Jesuit scientist Daniel O'Connell addressed St Rita's students on the merits of studying science.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, a science prize was added to St Rita's academic awards around that time.<sup>73</sup>

Moreover, St Rita's students were encouraged to emulate past pupils who had undertaken science courses at the university. For example, the school prospectus of 1955 stated:

The modern trend towards science is well catered for by a course in physics and chemistry from Sub-Junior to Senior. Some of our girls have acquired distinction in the field of science, amongst them being Margaret MacGinley, who, after studying for Junior and Senior at St Rita's, gained her science degree at Queensland University in 1954 and was awarded a research scholarship in minerals and oils at the Adelaide University, where she is also part-time lecturer.<sup>74</sup>

The document included photographs that showcased the school's science laboratory with experiments in progress. Girls at All Hallows' were likewise encouraged to emulate past pupils who held science degrees in dentistry, engineering, medicine and biochemistry.<sup>75</sup> Indeed the Mercy and Presentation Sisters, like other female congregations, were clearly alert to developments in science education, and accordingly led girls towards careers in science. Among the first Queensland University graduates from St Rita's to complete a full degree course in science or part thereof were the following past pupils who completed Senior between 1949 and 1957: Margaret MacGinley, Mary Rose MacGinley (later Sr Rosa), Elvera Sesta (later Sr Elvera), Pat Vizzard and Bernadette Fleming (later Sr Bernadette).

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<sup>69</sup> Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 169.

<sup>70</sup> This student was Mary Rose MacGinley. Reminiscences written by Sr Rosa MacGinley, given to the author, February 17, 2003.

<sup>71</sup> Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 215.

<sup>72</sup> Archbishop James Duhig, address given at SRC, November 1951. See *The Catholic Leader*, December 13, 1951, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>73</sup> One of the earliest recipients was Bernice Cleary. SRC annual report, 1952; *The Catholic Leader*, December 18, 1952, 6.

<sup>74</sup> *St Rita's College Prospectus: 1955*, 13. SRCA. An extract from this prospectus is contained in Appendix E.

<sup>75</sup> See Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 215.

Annals of the Clayfield convent mention that the Presentations themselves undertook training in the new science syllabus:

The sisters received assistance, especially with experiments in chemistry and physics, from one of the Christian Brothers at St Columban's College, Albion.<sup>76</sup>

Oral data reveals that both Mr Cornelius O'Keeffe, who taught science at the Brisbane Technical College, and science teacher, Mr Bernard Kane, provided after school training to St Rita's teachers on aspects of the science syllabus.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, convent annals mention that Srs Emmanuel Conneely, Celsus Conroy and Teresita Ahern attended the Technical College to gain qualifications in home science teaching.<sup>78</sup> As has already been noted, the sisters' minor convent enclosure had not impeded their staying abreast of educational trends and obtaining the necessary training to achieve educational excellence.

Although science facilities at Catholic girls' colleges such as All Hallows' and St Rita's during the 1950s were "limited",<sup>79</sup> the sisters nevertheless proved capable of meeting the increased demand for science and of attaining the highest academic results. Importantly, the sisters themselves undertook to teach these subjects when the majority of science teachers in Queensland secondary schools were male.

### 6.5.2 An Academic Thrust

1945 was a watershed year for scholastic achievement at St Rita's. Twelve of the sixteen students presented for the Junior public examination achieved 'A' passes in English, and the remaining four obtained 'B's'. *The Catholic Leader* gave extensive coverage to this achievement and noted the extraordinarily high percentage of 'A' grades awarded in a single Junior class:

In the most important subject, English, a comparatively small school, St Rita's College, scored seventy-eight per cent of 'A' passes.<sup>80</sup>

Fr Patrick McGoldrick, Director of Catholic Education at that time, remarked that St Rita's educational results were worthy of emulation by all teachers in Catholic colleges:

St Rita's Junior students had achieved the most outstanding results in English of all the Catholic secondary schools in Queensland. It is a feature which ought to have the attention of teachers in all Catholic schools.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> CCA 2: 147.

<sup>77</sup> Sr Cathy O'Keeffe, in discussion with the author, Brisbane, February, 2003.

<sup>78</sup> CCA 2: 147-49.

<sup>79</sup> See Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 215.

<sup>80</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, January 24, 1946, 8.

<sup>81</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 12, 1946, 10.



It is interesting to note that of those sixteen outstanding Junior students at St Rita's in 1945, only four moved on to Senior,<sup>82</sup> reflecting the fact that a Junior pass remained the educational level required by most employers. Three of the girls however entered the religious life - Mollie Parker became a Carmelite at Ormiston, and Mary Fanton (Sr Louisa) and Agnes Ring (Sr Consilia) joined the Presentation congregation (Mary after passing the Junior and Agnes two years after completing the Senior examination).<sup>83</sup> Sr Louisa Fanton was for many years principal at various Presentation parish schools. Sr Consilia Ring taught at St Rita's, St Ursula's, Yeppoon and Our Lady's, Longreach, and is remembered as an outstanding speech and drama teacher.<sup>84</sup>

Notwithstanding the central place of religious education in the curricula of convent schools, St Rita's records indicate that success in English remained of "paramount importance" at the college.<sup>85</sup> Like other Catholic schools, St Rita's submitted frequent entries in the various essay competitions such as those sponsored by the Queensland Catholic Readers and Writers<sup>86</sup> and the Xavier Society.<sup>87</sup> In 1947, all members of St Rita's Junior class attained an 'A' grade in the English examination,<sup>88</sup> and again the great majority achieved this in 1949.

*The Catholic Leader* reported:

English is regarded as a subject of outstanding importance. Here is a record that we think stands unequalled and unbeaten in the history of this Junior university examination. St Rita's High School, Clayfield, conducted by the Presentation Sisters had twenty-five successful candidates in the recent Junior examination. The results show that of these twenty-five, twenty-three got an 'A' each in English and the other two a 'B' each.<sup>89</sup>

*The Leader* further noted that St Rita's students, "Misses Hilton and Uhr," achieved 'A' passes in all the Junior exam subjects, describing them as "close competitors for the Byrnes Medal," awarded for the highest Junior pass in a Queensland Catholic school. The report stated that in previous years this was gained by "an outstanding Catholic Boys' college."<sup>90</sup> St Rita's Presentation Sisters, faithful to the Jesuit-inspired tradition of convent education,

<sup>82</sup> They were Agnes Ring, Kath Rice, Judith McMullen and Josephine McDonnell.

<sup>83</sup> Sr Consilia Ring, reminiscences.

<sup>84</sup> MacGinley, discussion, Brisbane, March 2009.

<sup>85</sup> SRC annual report, 1952.

<sup>86</sup> Among St Rita's prize-winners were Anita O'Connor, Mary Rose MacGinley (later Sr Rosa), Therese Drake, Mary McMahon (later Sr Jacinta), Margaret MacGinley, Eileen Craven, Janet Uhr and Naree Gibson. *The Catholic Leader*, December 18, 1947, 5; SRC annual reports, 1947 and 1961; and clippings, *The Catholic Leader* 1948, 1949 and 1951 in scrap book "Across the Years," 1: 8, 13. SRCA.

<sup>87</sup> The Xavier Society Essay competition for Queensland Catholic schools was established in the mid-1940s to promote devotion to Australia's patron Saints - Our Lady Help of Christians and St Francis Xavier. St Rita's student, Mary Rose MacGinley was among the first group of Queensland students to enter and win the secondary section of this competition in 1947. See SRC annual report, 1947; *The Catholic Leader*, December 18, 1947, 5.

<sup>88</sup> SRC annual report, 1947.

<sup>89</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 1949, clipping, "Across the Years," 1:9.

<sup>90</sup> *The Catholic Leader* December 1949, clipping, SRCA.

clearly enabled girls to reach a level of educational attainment equal to that of boys in Catholic colleges. In the same edition of *The Leader* in 1949, outstanding academic achievements reached at Loreto College, Coorparoo, were also reported. Significantly, the female teaching institutes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had thus moved beyond seeking equality of educational access for girls to achieving equality of educational outcomes.

This empowerment was demonstrated again in 1949, when two St Rita's students, Janet Uhr and Mary Rose MacGinley won the Archbishop Duhig prizes for the highest Junior and Senior pass respectively among Catholic girls' schools in the archdiocese.<sup>91</sup> The *Leader* noted "it was seldom in the history of the Archbishop's prizes that one school had secured both prizes."<sup>92</sup> It also reported that St Rita's achievement paralleled the success of Nudgee Christian Brothers College for boys, which achieved both honours for two of its students the same year. In public opinion, St Rita's had earned its place among Brisbane's larger and older educational establishments, and brought its academic thrust into view.

Sr Moira Creede clearly recalled that educational excellence was the key to St Rita's survival during the post-war years:

We built up the school on good results. It was the one thing that got it a name because it was out in the suburbs and it was hard. There were other great schools like Lourdes Hill, All Hallows' and Stuartholme, but they were well established.<sup>93</sup>

Academic accolades continued in the 1950s with a St Rita's student winning the Archbishop Prize in either the Junior or Senior examinations for the next two consecutive years, 1950 and 1951, and then for four years in succession from 1956-1959.<sup>94</sup> Convent Annals recorded:

There were very gratifying results for all examinations held, whether in music, speech, State scholarship, Junior and Senior University.<sup>95</sup>

The high level of public interest in educational standards at that time was reflected in the many academic competitions available to students, as well as the detailed newspaper coverage

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<sup>91</sup> Earlier, Mary Rose MacGinley had won the Ruth Fairfax Bursary of the Queensland Country Women's Association awarded to the girl with the highest scholarship pass from the Primary Correspondence School and one-teacher State Schools. It was awarded for the study of home science and covered four years boarding fees. This necessitated Mary Rose's taking extra subjects to cover also a full academic Senior. Afterwards she was offered Faculty fellowships in each of the Faculties in which she had matriculated, including Arts, Law, Science and Medicine, also a declined open scholarship. MacGinley, discussion, Brisbane, March 2009.

<sup>92</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 1949, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>93</sup> Creede, interview, Brisbane, March 13, 2002, AP.

<sup>94</sup> The Archbishop Prize was won by Marie Louise Uhr in 1950, Bernice Benton in 1951, Patricia Vizzard in 1956, and Jill Brereton in 1959. Patricia Vizzard enrolled in a science degree at the University of Queensland and Jill Brereton gained an open scholarship to the University. Bernice Benton won the Tom Pyne Bursary for the highest Junior pass in Presentation schools in Queensland by a student wishing to continue her Senior studies at the same college. *The Catholic Leader*, December 7, 1950, 9, and December 12, 1957, 9. See also clippings, *The Catholic Leader*, December 13, 1951, and April 21, 1956, in "Across the Years," 1: 11.

<sup>95</sup> CCA 2: 154.

of competition results. For example, the Thallon Memorial Medal in memory of James Forsyth Thallon, Railways Commissioner from 1902–1911, was awarded to children of Railway Department employees who achieved the highest junior passes in the State. St Rita's students Jill Brereton and Annette Shears (later Sr Annette) received the prize in 1957 and 1959 respectively, and on both occasions, *The Courier Mail* and *The Catholic Leader* carried detailed reports and photographs of each girl.<sup>96</sup>

In this competitive period in education, only one criterion of excellence prevailed, an academic one. Although the prescriptions of public examinations dominated the secondary curriculum, the emphasis at many Catholic girls' secondary colleges including St Rita's remained, as reported at All Hallows', the "integrated human and Christian formation of students."<sup>97</sup> This holistic ideal of Catholic women's education continued at St Rita's throughout this period. The college prospectus of the 1950s confirmed:

St Rita's has won wide repute for its success in all branches of education, particularly in the preparation of children for the scholarship, Junior and Senior examinations. Special attention is also paid to the cultural subjects, particular stress being laid on proficiency in English, both in speaking and writing. Music, singing, ballroom dancing, voice production, all have their place in the curriculum.<sup>98</sup>

## 6.6 PROMOTING WOMEN'S HIGHER EDUCATION

Although many parents and employers considered the Junior examination as educationally sufficient for girls, St Rita's annual reports frequently emphasised the importance of Senior examinations and of higher education for women:

A pleasing feature to record is that an appreciable number returned to school to study for the senior, which besides broadening considerably the pupil's education offers also entrance to many mentally satisfying and remunerative walks of life.<sup>99</sup>

In similar fashion, the Mercy Sisters at All Hallows' and also at Our Lady of Mercy College (OLMC), Parramatta, urged girls to avail themselves of tertiary education.<sup>100</sup> These sisters actively encouraged their students to obtain Commonwealth Government bursaries to "secure their degrees in the various faculties" of the universities and to be "represented in the highly-educated section of the community."<sup>101</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Brereton obtained seven 'A's' and one 'B' in the 1957 Junior examination, *The Catholic Leader*, December 4, 1958, 6; *The Courier Mail*, December 1958, clippings in "Across the Years," 1: 25-26.

<sup>97</sup> Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 214.

<sup>98</sup> *Prospectus: 1955*, 10. SRCA.

<sup>99</sup> SRC annual reports, 1951 and 1957; *The Catholic Leader*, December 12, 1957, 9.

<sup>100</sup> McGrath, *These Women?*, 51.

<sup>101</sup> M Alphonsus Stanley, principal of OLMC, quoted in McGrath, *These Women?*, 52.

Clearly, the well-educated and cultured teaching sisters themselves were role models for those girls who aspired to higher education. The Catholic sisters were in fact prominent among the increasing number of women in Australia who enrolled in university courses in that period. Initially, the enclosed congregations like the Presentation and Dominican Sisters, enrolled for their full degree course or part of it only in subjects offered externally. Many now took up residence at university colleges like Sancta Sophia, as previously noted.<sup>102</sup> M Ursula Kennedy had encouraged university and in-house educational training of St Rita's teachers in preparation for the introduction of senior studies and the secondary science syllabus. Sr Alphonsus Hogan completed Bachelor degrees in Arts and Education, and Sr Veronica Casey obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree and Diploma in Education which exceeded the qualifications of many teachers at that time.<sup>103</sup> Sr Alphonsus came to St Rita's in 1941 from Our Lady's, Longreach, where she had successfully presented students for the Senior examinations.<sup>104</sup> From the early 1940s, Sr Veronica Casey, with her noted gift for English teaching and "obviously wide culture", taught the upper-secondary classes and prepared girls for the examinations.<sup>105</sup>

In the 1940s, most female congregations including the Presentations at St Rita's, actively promoted teaching as a suitable career for women. Consequently, many convent-educated graduates responded to Queensland's teacher shortage which arose from the expansion of secondary school attendance and the movement of men away from government schools to occupations offering better pay and conditions.<sup>106</sup> For example, Miss Eileen Claussen, a past pupil of All Hallows' who held a Science degree from the University of Queensland, was employed at St Rita's to teach the first Senior class from 1941 to the following year when Sr Alphonsus Hogan arrived from Longreach as Senior teacher.<sup>107</sup>

In 1951, Ann Bukowski became the first St Rita's student to gain a teacher's scholarship tenable for a period of three years, comprising the two Senior years at St Rita's College and one year at the Senior Teachers' Training College.<sup>108</sup> Teacher-training scholarships offered by the Department of Education, together with Commonwealth funded scholarships begun in 1951, assisted academically capable students from any social rank to obtain a university

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<sup>102</sup> On the higher education of the Dominican Sisters in Eastern Australia during the post-war years, see MacGinley, *Ancient Tradition*, 273.

<sup>103</sup> Creede, interview, Brisbane, March 13, 2002, AP.

<sup>104</sup> Sr Immaculata Stubberfield, written reminiscences, SRCA; CCA 2: 114.

<sup>105</sup> MacGinley, discussion, Brisbane, March 2009.

<sup>106</sup> Barcan, *A History of Australian Education*, 338; see also Wyeth, *Education in Queensland*, 200.

<sup>107</sup> Sr Immaculata Stubberfield, reminiscences.

<sup>108</sup> SRC annual report, 1951.

education.<sup>109</sup> In that period, the graduate destinations for Senior students at St Rita's were the University, Teachers' Training College or the public service, a pattern that was to repeat itself for many years, with students gaining Commonwealth scholarships out of proportion to the number of examination entrants.<sup>110</sup> In 1957, St Rita's students gained first, second and third place in Queensland for the coveted and restricted University scholarships.<sup>111</sup> Bernadette Fleming, who received the highest Senior pass that year, entered the Presentation congregation and then completed a science degree at Queensland University while teaching at St Rita's. A highly competent and leading educator, she was deputy principal of St Rita's between 1976 and 1978 and was subsequently principal of St Ursula's, Yeppoon.

## 6.7 HOME SCIENCE

The objective of women activists like Annie Golding in the 1910s of raising the status of home-making and domestic instruction, as examined earlier, was partially realised in Queensland when the State science syllabus of the mid-1940s incorporated home science 'A' and 'B' as examinable in the public examinations. St Rita's new facilities in 1946 included a combined classroom and kitchen in readiness for the implementation of the new home science course. By 1940, there had been a growing emphasis among the independent girls' schools in Brisbane in providing domestic education to middle-class girls. This was in response to the same vocational imperative which had created the earlier domestic arts schools for working-class girls.<sup>112</sup> The Domestic Science School in Brisbane (1925), offered cookery, laundry work, housewifery, ambulance and home nursing, household accounts, domestic science, English and arithmetic, and was considered a fitting model for girls' education generally.<sup>113</sup>

Whilst the Presentation Sisters at St Rita's actively encouraged academic endeavour and promoted higher education for girls, they also recognised that many students, including the most capable, would not move on to upper secondary schooling. The introduction of home science 'A' and 'B' at St Rita's was a pragmatic response to this reality, as the 1946 annual report makes clear:

While stressing the importance of a good general education, we should like to emphasise that the ultimate goal of the vast majority of our girls is the building up of a

<sup>109</sup> Barcan, *Sociological Theory*, 84.

<sup>110</sup> In 1955, two St Rita's students obtained Commonwealth university scholarships to undertake their degrees in science and arts, and the remaining four secured positions in government departments. Similarly, in 1955, three moved on to the university and the remaining five went to Teachers' Training College, then in 1957, five progressed to the university and the remaining five moved on to the Teachers' College or entered the public service. SRC annual reports, 1951, 1955 and 1957.

<sup>111</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 4, 1958, 6.

<sup>112</sup> Goodman, *Secondary Education*, 223.

<sup>113</sup> Logan and Clarke, *State Education*, 7. In 1925, the technical, commercial and domestic science sections of the Central Technical College in Brisbane became separate high schools.

good Catholic home. Knowledge of such fundamentals as cooking, dressmaking and general house management does much to produce harmony and happiness; hence these subjects should occupy an important place in the curriculum of every girls' school.<sup>114</sup>

Of the two home science subjects that could be taken separately, home science 'A' had a strong science emphasis, especially in physiology, organic chemistry, and nutrition; home science 'B' was devoted to practical skills in sewing, cooking, and home care. Organic chemistry, which was not studied elsewhere in the curriculum, was included in home science 'A' at a high level, which explains why St Rita's students experienced it as an academic subject.<sup>115</sup>

## 6.8 AMBIGUITIES IN GIRLS' EDUCATION

The popular view that higher education stripped women of their femininity was mirrored in Bishop John Coleman's (1932-47) comments in his address at St Ursula's College, Armidale, in the 1930s in which he stated that professional life and the commercial world "unsexed women and unfitted them for home life."<sup>116</sup> This present study has found that such notions were rejected by the sisters at St Rita's, Clayfield. Sr Veronica Casey, who wrote St Rita's annual reports in the 1940s, held a broad view of women's education.<sup>117</sup> Her reports challenged disparaging stereotypes of educated women by strongly reassuring students and their parents that:

Additional education gained in the Senior course adds much to the graciousness and poise of the well-educated Catholic woman.<sup>118</sup>

Accordingly, the 19<sup>th</sup> century ideal of cultured Catholic womanhood was upheld at St Rita's during the 1950s, and lessons in etiquette and deportment were introduced.<sup>119</sup> These were weekly lessons, and hardly constituted a heavy emphasis on the refinements, as some might suggest. In fact, St Rita's 1955 prospectus informed parents that girls were taught:

...how to handle situations involving correct social behaviour....In this way it is assured that our girls acquire the poise and graciousness of manner which should characterise every Catholic lady.<sup>120</sup>

Another accepted notion contrary to the Presentation Sisters' objectives was that "higher education is very strenuous for girls," which was claimed by Archbishop Duhig in 1948.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Logan and Clarke, *State Education*, 7.

<sup>115</sup> MacGinley, interview, Brisbane, October 4, 2001, AP.

<sup>116</sup> Bishop Coleman, address given at St Ursula's College, Armidale, 1931, cited in Campion, *Australian Catholics*, 106.

<sup>117</sup> Creede, interview, Brisbane, March 13, 2002, AP.

<sup>118</sup> SRC annual report, 1946; *The Catholic Leader*, December 12, 1946, 10.

<sup>119</sup> Mrs Vicki Kehoe conducted deportment classes at SRC in that period. See "Acquiring the Social Graces," *The Catholic Leader*, 1959, clipping in "Across the Years," 1: 28.

<sup>120</sup> *Prospectus: 1955*.

<sup>121</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 9, 1948, 6.

His remark mirrored the view of a growing movement against the masculinisation of girls' education. He stated:

I think we are scarcely fair to girls expecting them to compete with boys in modern education. Modern educationists have imposed upon girls the same curriculum, the same time-tables, the same examinations as boys regardless of psychological and physiological differences so that it is far easier to overwork girls in their teens than boys.<sup>122</sup>

It is important to note, however, that Duhig supported women's aspirations for higher education throughout his episcopacy. For example, at the opening ceremony of the Ursuline Convent, Oxley, in 1924, Duhig asserted that women's entry into university education in Australia exemplified the "progress of learning and the arts" and that the Catholic sisters had contributed significantly to such human progress not least through the academic orientation of convent high schools.<sup>123</sup> Duhig's highlighting what he considered was the masculinisation of girls' education needs to be understood in the light of this broader background and of his work as an advocate of Catholic women's higher education.

The view that women were unfit for academic rigour stood in clear contrast to what the teaching sisters believed, and what proved to be true. In explaining why few girls at St Rita's pursued education beyond junior level, the 1933 annual report explained that social and economic reasons were to blame rather than girls' intellectual incapacity:

All the students presented for the Junior university examinations were successful, and good passes were obtained, but once again the exigencies of the times have prevented these pupils from continuing their studies and the successful students of the last examinations have taken up office work wherever available.<sup>124</sup>

As the 1940s progressed, the teachers at St Rita's were at pains to emphasise the importance of senior studies for securing women's economic independence, and the annual reports reiterated the sisters' familiar pleas:

It is a matter for thought that so many of our girls fail to pursue their education beyond the Junior standard. We would like to draw parents' attention to the fact that the Senior public examination opens avenues to the more remunerative, as well as the more intellectually satisfying vocations.<sup>125</sup>

In each epoch, as has been shown, the female teaching congregations were capable of advancing girls' education beyond the limit at which society wished to confine it. St Rita's academic life at least reminded girls that higher education was of immediate relevance to their lives. In fact, M Ursula had arranged for a former student of Our Lady's, Longreach, Jean

<sup>122</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 9, 1948, 6.

<sup>123</sup> Address by Archbishop Duhig, Ursuline Convent, Oxley. *The Brisbane Courier*, December 8, 1924, 10.

<sup>124</sup> SRC annual report, 1933; *The Catholic Leader*, December 21, 1933, 37. This was a year of deep economic depression.

<sup>125</sup> SRC annual report, 1946; *The Catholic Leader*, December 12, 1946, 10.

Gavin, to board at St Rita's in 1940 to enable her to complete her Bachelor of Arts degree, which she obtained in 1943.<sup>126</sup> M Ursula had envisaged establishing a Catholic University College at St Rita's along the lines of Duchesne College which had made a small beginning at Stuartholme convent, Toowong, in 1937.

Archbishop Duhig had in fact invited the Sisters of the Sacred Heart to convert part of their Stuartholme convent into a residential college for young Catholic women from rural Queensland who wished to attend the University of Queensland in Brisbane.<sup>127</sup> The college was temporarily closed in 1942 when Stuartholme was commandeered by the American Army. Duchesne re-opened in New Farm in 1947 and then moved to its present site at St Lucia in 1959.<sup>128</sup> M Ursula's wish, however, to establish a university college to house young country-women students was never realised at St Rita's because of the sisters' already pressing commitments and because the project was beyond their resources. Nevertheless, the agency of the teaching sisters in progressing women's education in collaboration with clergy highlights, as Burley put it, "the limitations of the notion that education merely reproduces social formations and ideologies."<sup>129</sup>

The 1950s, dominated by the Cold War abroad, ushered in a new age of social conservatism in Australia. The Menzies Government promised stability and certainty in a period of rapid change. The churches and society looked to women for stability in the home. As women's participation in the workforce increased, the emphasis on girls' schooling as preparation for motherhood instead of employment beyond the home intensified. *The Catholic Leader* in 1950 published the commentaries of Fr Morgan Howe, of the Brisbane Diocesan Education Office, who linked "the destruction of family life" to "mothers working outside their homes."<sup>130</sup>

During the Marian year of 1954, the exalted rather than human Mary, mother of Jesus, was upheld by the Catholic Church as an ideal of noble womanhood and motherhood which, in reality was beyond reach for most women.<sup>131</sup> The Presentations at St Rita's balanced an intellectual tradition with their time-honoured ideal of a cultured Catholic womanhood, as the 1952 Report indicates:

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<sup>126</sup> CCA: 2: 109-113.

<sup>127</sup> Rita Carroll, "A History of Stuartholme," *Proceedings of Brisbane Catholic Historical Society* 9 (2004): 96.

<sup>128</sup> View archival material on website "Duchesne College: History," University of Queensland, accessed March 10, 2011, <http://www.uq.edu.au/duchesne/history.html>.

<sup>129</sup> Stephanie Burley, "Lost Leaders from the Convent and the Classroom 1880-1925," in *Leading the Catholic School*, eds. John McMahon, Helga Neidhart, and Judith Chapman (Richmond, VIC: Spectrum, 1997), 57.

<sup>130</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 7, 1950, 9.

<sup>131</sup> This sentiment was expressed by past pupils of SRC (Senior, 1966) interviewed as a group by the author, Brisbane, September 10, 2002.



To women God has given especially the potent gift of influence – this natural endowment is embellished and extended by the additional gifts of intellect and character, that are acquired and cultivated assiduously in the education of our Catholic schools, which endeavour to equip our girls, not only for the part they are to play in the academic or commercial world, but even more so for the noble role of cultured Catholic womanhood.<sup>132</sup>

The Presentation Sisters and other women religious did not, as has been seen, define women's sphere solely in domestic terms. The Catholic sisters were women of their times and would have indeed affirmed aspects of the Australian post-war domestic rhetoric, but this study has shown that they also championed feminist ideals such as intellectual endeavour and self-reliance for women – a point which is frequently overlooked.

## 6.9 EXPANSION OF ST RITA'S SECONDARY SCHOOL

### 6.9.1 Upper Secondary Enrolments

In 1946, there were two senior students at St Rita's and in the following year the number had doubled to four.<sup>133</sup> The 1947 Report stated:

This we trust is an indication that parents are appreciating the cultural and economic advantages gained by those who have pursued the additional two years' Senior course, and we hope that a good percentage of our present Juniors will return to study for the Senior which opens avenues to the more remunerative and also more intellectually satisfying walks of life.<sup>134</sup>

By 1955, a record number of ten seniors and thirty-three juniors were presented for the public examinations, reflecting significant increases in school enrolments.<sup>135</sup> In 1958, numbers had increased to thirteen and fifty-three students respectively.<sup>136</sup> Thus about one-third of the Junior students continued to Senior. Increases in Senior enrolments recorded at colleges like St Rita's and All Hallows' in the mid-1950s,<sup>137</sup> reflected women's expanding employment options and aspirations at that time. Archbishop Duhig addressed St Rita's school community in 1955 on women's education in the changing social climate:

How very important is the education of our girls. We want them to be trained not only in piety, but also in all those useful walks of life into which women have now entered.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> SRC annual report, 1952.

<sup>133</sup> They were Patricia McDonald and Jule Tanks. In 1947, four students were presented for the Senior and twelve for the Junior examinations. See CCA 2: 146; SRC annual reports, 1946 and 1947.

<sup>134</sup> SRC annual report, 1947.

<sup>135</sup> CCA 2: 179.

<sup>136</sup> CCA 2: 187.

<sup>137</sup> On senior enrolments at All Hallows' from 1955 to 1959, see Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 210.

<sup>138</sup> Address by Archbishop Duhig at SRC, 28 November 1955. *The Catholic Leader*, December 8, 1955, 11.

St Rita's annual reports of the 1950s consistently noted that "an appreciable number returned to school to study for the Senior."<sup>139</sup> The post-war recovery boom in Australia that produced high employment and unprecedented prosperity for many families enabled a greater number of children to remain at school beyond primary level. Student retention grew markedly in the final year of primary school in Queensland, increasing from fifty-nine to eighty-five per cent by the end of the decade.<sup>140</sup> Capable students were also assisted by the scholarship grant which St Rita's annual reports confirm "secured a good percentage" of students who came to the school for their secondary education.<sup>141</sup> However, only a small percentage of students in the 1950s remained until the final year of secondary at St Rita's since the majority still completed their schooling at Junior level.

### **6.9.2 Formation of a Past Pupils' Association (1944)**

A small number of past pupils formed an Ex-Students' Association in 1944. Its first President was Eunice Wilkes, née Knapp, and the Vice Presidents were Irene Sparkes and Irene Cusack. These women were among the first students enrolled at the college in 1926 and over the years they maintained a close association with the sisters and the school. Convent records show that past pupil reunions were held once a year; however, because of the few senior students in that period a viable association could not be formed and the small body discontinued after several years. Many larger and well-established Catholic colleges, however, were able to maintain vigorous past pupils' networks that ensured alumnae support.

### **6.9.3 Primary and Secondary Enrolments**

Logan and Clarke have demonstrated in their history of State education in Queensland that:

The many demographic, industrial and economic movements, changes in community attitudes, and new perceptions of societal needs, which occurred in the period 1930 – 1957...had a particularly significant influence on the demand for secondary education.<sup>142</sup>

The rapid rise in the State birth rate in the 1940s saw the demand for primary and secondary education increase markedly during the latter part of that decade. Parallel to this, the Chifley Government's immigration policy following the 1945 Japanese air attacks on Darwin in the Northern Territory aimed to increase Australia's population and thus reduce its vulnerability. Of the 500,000 migrants who consequently arrived in Australia by 1949, many had come from war-ravaged and traditionally Catholic countries in central and southern Europe. Most

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<sup>139</sup> SRC annual report, 1957. *The Catholic Leader*, December 12, 1957, 9.

<sup>140</sup> See also Logan and Clarke, *State Education*, 8.

<sup>141</sup> SRC annual report, 1950. *The Catholic Leader*, December 7, 1950, 9.

<sup>142</sup> Logan and Clarke, *State Education*, 8.

were absorbed into Catholic parishes and schools.<sup>143</sup> Over time, such migration effected changes in local communities and had the effect of gradually weakening the Irish cultural dominance of the Australian Catholic church.

As the first wave of baby boomers and children of migrants reached school age in the late 1940s, the number of primary schools in Australia increased to accommodate them. In Brisbane, many young families moved away from the metropolitan area to build homes in more affordable outlying parts, contributing to a suburban sprawl. Accordingly, the Catholic teaching sisters in Australia faced a new phase of expansion to staff the expanding parish school system. The Queensland Presentation Sisters, led by M Ursula Kennedy, opened six new parish primary schools in Brisbane between 1947 and 1958: at Cannon Hill (1947), Norman Park (1948), Buranda (1949), Wavell Heights (1950), Northgate (1952) and Ekibin (1958).<sup>144</sup> Our Lady of the Angels school at Wavell Heights became the principal feeder school for St Rita's,<sup>145</sup> situated as it was in proximity to the Chermside tram line and the Sandgate bus route, and received students from the expanding outer northern suburbs. Within a few years it was to become the largest convent primary school in Queensland with a roll call of nearly 1,000. From 1947 to 1958, students streamed in to St Rita's from each of the congregation's new primary schools, and joined the usual intake from the Herston (1924), Clayfield (1925), Graceville (1937) and Manly (1940) parish schools, producing numbers that exceeded levels scarcely hoped for in the past.<sup>146</sup>

By 1948, for the school community, the early signs of St Rita's growing prominence among Brisbane's secondary colleges carried a sense of both certainty and promise about the future. The years of struggle and patient building were about to bring rewards barely conceivable a decade earlier. As records show, the 1950s opened at St Rita's with a record attendance of 287 students from kindergarten to Senior,<sup>147</sup> but by 1965 enrolments had more than doubled to 600 students.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Barcan, *A History of Australian Education*, 316.

<sup>144</sup> EB, 14-5. QPA.

<sup>145</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, January 19, 1950, clipping in QPA.

<sup>146</sup> This was possible because of improved public transport. See Student Register, 1926 to 1961. SRCA.

<sup>147</sup> CCA 2: 163, 180, 182.

<sup>148</sup> SRC enrolments increased to 375 in 1956, 465 in 1957, 485 in 1958, and 576 by 1959. See CCA 2: 180, 182, 186, 226.

#### 6.9.4 St Rita's New Junior School

In 1950, there were twice as many primary students attending St Rita's as there were at St Agatha's parish school.<sup>149</sup> This ratio was undoubtedly linked to Clayfield's changing demographics and reflected the number of families able and willing to pay the higher fees at St Rita's primary school. With increasing enrolments at St Rita's, the 1950 annual report announced that the "pressing" need to "accommodate the overflow" of secondary students forced a merger of the two primary schools.<sup>150</sup> Msgr English had agreed to the transfer of St Rita's primary classes to St Agatha's parish school. While St Agatha's lost its identity and became St Rita's Junior, additional classrooms and teachers were immediately available to the college, at little expense to the sisters.<sup>151</sup> Under M Aloysius, St Rita's Junior School was opened in 1951 with 147 students from the preparatory levels (prior to the first year of primary school) through to Grade Six, while the remaining primary year and all the secondary classes were conducted at St Rita's.<sup>152</sup> This adaptation of the time-honoured practice of operating two primary schools, one parochial and one order-owned, saw St Rita's Junior School adopt the lower-fee structure of the parish school, ending the distinction between girls who attended the higher-fee convent school and those at the parochial school.

#### 6.9.5 Building Expansion

For many school principals across Australia, the expansion of secondary education in the 1950s brought promise as well as pressure to undertake expensive building programs in the expectation that high enrolments would continue.<sup>153</sup> St Rita's annual report for 1951 outlined the estimates of future enrolments at the college, and revealed ambitious plans for further building.<sup>154</sup> Mother Aloysius was unable to secure a bank loan for needed development because of the outstanding debt,<sup>155</sup> but borrowed £10,000 from the Carmelite Sisters at Auchenflower on commercial terms.<sup>156</sup> The money permitted the addition in the following year of a new wing to the 1938 building, which had already been extended in 1945.<sup>157</sup> The

<sup>149</sup> Enrolments at St Agatha's had dropped to forty by 1950. See "Sixty Years" (Clayfield: St Agatha's Parish, 1984). Copy, SRCA.

<sup>150</sup> SRC annual report, 1950.

<sup>151</sup> The parish community provided funds to renovate and paint the old parish school building for its new purpose. See report by Fr Vincent Rowan, "Report: The School Story, St Agatha's Clayfield, 1968," in SRCA.

<sup>152</sup> CCA 2: 163; SRC annual report, 1950.

<sup>153</sup> In 1957, the Good Samaritan Sisters at Lourdes Hill College, Hawthorne, opened a new school wing costing £150 000 that included a chapel, dormitories and dining facilities. See D'Arcy, "History of Lourdes Hill," 100.

<sup>154</sup> SRC annual report, 1951.

<sup>155</sup> See SRC student newsletter *The College Companion*, 1952. SRCA.

<sup>156</sup> Archbishop Duhig, Letter to M Aloysius Ryan, September 1951. Copy, Brisbane Archdiocesan Archives (hereafter, BAA). The loan was conditional upon handing over St Rita's title deeds as security, but as they were encumbered by the mortgage, the deeds could not be used. Duhig became guarantor through the Corporation of the Archdiocese.

<sup>157</sup> CCA 2: 173; SRC annual report, 1953; *The Catholic Leader*, December 17, 1953, 15.

new facilities included two new classrooms, a toilet block, and an extension to the boarders' dormitory, a tuckshop, and the school's first library to replace former classroom bookcases.<sup>158</sup>

Since St Rita's school concerts and speech days now had to be held at venues outside the college, an assembly hall was also planned.<sup>159</sup> In 1954, the congregation purchased the house next to the college that faced Hunter's Lane. It was later demolished and an assembly hall built there in 1958.<sup>160</sup> With space at a premium in many schools, halls like St Rita's were converted into classrooms by movable partitions. St Rita's annual reports described the hall as "modern style and featured the use of glass for better light conditions,"<sup>161</sup> an important consideration in school design.

## 6.10 CULTURED CATHOLIC WOMANHOOD - MUSIC

The popularised view that Catholic girls' colleges were synonymous with concert giving is at variance with the recollections of former students and teachers of St Rita's. Records make clear that the major component of St Rita's music program was not concert production, but the rigorous preparation of students for the music examinations.<sup>162</sup> While concerts provided valuable opportunities for students to develop their skills to a proficient level, St Rita's music program also helped girls to attain careers in music teaching and the performing arts.<sup>163</sup> They were encouraged to apply for music scholarships such as the T. C. Beirne vocal scholarship, which was awarded to the most promising vocal student at the Queensland Eisteddfod.<sup>164</sup> In the 1940s and early 1950s, then under St Rita's full-time music teacher, Sr Imelda O'Sullivan,<sup>165</sup> students excelled in the music examinations of the Australian Music Examination Board (AMEB) and Trinity College, London.<sup>166</sup>

St Rita's impressive music results paralleled the musical excellence of other Catholic girls' colleges in Brisbane. In 1947, of the sixty-three candidates presented for the 'practical music' examinations, fifty-seven received credits and honours, with twelve among them gaining first or second place in Queensland in their sections.<sup>167</sup> As noted earlier, St Rita's students were

<sup>158</sup> CCA 2: 173-75. Msgr English and a Mrs H. Douglas, a well-known Clayfield identity, donated books.

<sup>159</sup> From 1954 to 1958, St Rita's speech days continued at the Savoy Theatre, Clayfield, and concerts were held in the Albert Hall, Brisbane. CCA 2: 176.

<sup>160</sup> CCA 2: 176.

<sup>161</sup> SRC annual report, 1958; *The Catholic Leader*, December 4, 1958, 6. See also CCA 2: 187.

<sup>162</sup> Sr Marguerite Bartholomew, past pupil (1947-1952) and music teacher at SRC (1960s), interviewed by the author, Clayfield, Brisbane, November 20, 2001, AP.

<sup>163</sup> There were at least two full-time music teachers at SRC in the 1950s and 1960s. Bartholomew, interview.

<sup>164</sup> St Rita's student, Pauline Ward, won the award in 1947. *The Catholic Leader*, December 18, 1947, 5.

<sup>165</sup> Sr Consilia Ring, memoir. Prior to entering the congregation, Sr Imelda O'Sullivan had taught in the government school system.

<sup>166</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, 1949, clipping, SRCA. This article is a sample record of the outstanding results achieved by St Rita's students in seventh grade music examinations.

<sup>167</sup> SRC annual report, 1947.

prepared for their letters in music from an early age, and many entered various local Eisteddfodau.<sup>168</sup>

Between 1947 and 1951, Kathleen Fanton (later Sr Brigid) and Josephine McDonnell gained Associate Diplomas in Music (A.Mus.A) from the AMEB for violin, as did Barbara Dickson and Ann Bukowski for piano. Dawn Rodgers (later Sr Magdalen) obtained her Associate of the Trinity College of Music Teachers' Diploma (ATCL), and Beatrice Bartholomew (later Sr Marguerite) received three sets of letters: an A.Mus.A, an ATCL, and consequently a Licentiate of the Trinity College (LTCL), all while still at school.<sup>169</sup> For this latter exam, she was awarded the Silver Medal from the college. During her novitiate training, she went on to gain a Fellowship Diploma (FTCL) also with Trinity College. As an accomplished music teacher in Queensland, Sr Marguerite returned to St Rita's during the 1960s and taught music. She set high musical standards and prepared another generation of St Rita's girls for music examinations.

Throughout the 1940s, the end of year concerts staged at Catholic girls' secondary colleges continued to captivate the Catholic press. In 1947, *The Catholic Leader* deemed the concerts at St Rita's, Lourdes Hill and All Hallows' front page news, with the headline: "Catholic Girls' Schools Set High Cultural Standard."<sup>170</sup> In contrast, a report on the outstanding academic results attained at those colleges in that year was consigned to the inner leaves of the same edition of *The Leader*. The press's preoccupation with the musical program of Catholic girls' colleges meant that such schools were seen as giving greater accent to the cultural strand than to academic and vocational subjects.

Conversely, 'cultural education' was 'not high' on the priorities at independent boys' schools like Nudgee College.<sup>171</sup> In 1952, Nudgee's principal, Brother Maximus O'Connor, lamented in an address to parents that:

...there is not the time to impart to your children those other than purely academic accomplishments, which you, as parents, have a right to expect.<sup>172</sup>

This traditionally narrow approach to boys' education had unbalanced the curriculum for boys. Prevailing attitudes that assumed the unimportance of cultural subjects for boys were reflected in Brother O'Connor's comments:

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<sup>168</sup> SRC annual reports, 1947-51.

<sup>169</sup> Sr Marguerite Bartholomew, e-mail message to author, August 21, 2011.

<sup>170</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 11, 1947, 1.

<sup>171</sup> Boland, *Nudgee*, 185-86.

<sup>172</sup> Boland, *Nudgee*, 191.

...with the demands of a modern school curriculum... only a few will be able to acquire any training or experience in practical music-making...He would be no realist who expected to find in the average Australian school boy any spontaneous interest in music-making or any naturally correct taste in judging music.<sup>173</sup>

By comparison, the Catholic sisters, including the Presentations, achieved high academic outcomes for girls and retained the traditionally broad convent curricula, while resisting the purely utilitarian demands of the public examinations. It may be argued, however, that convent school girls were in fact over-achieving, expected to excel in both the academic and cultural strands of curriculum.<sup>174</sup>

The University of Queensland had by 1950 accepted AMEB prescribed grades as subjects for their public examinations, which served to validate the sisters' earlier recognition of the inherent and vocational importance of music education. In the decade prior to the opening of the Queensland Conservatorium in 1957, *The Courier Mail* reported the intense public pressure which had been applied on the State Government to establish such an institution for musical training.<sup>175</sup> The increased demand for music at St Rita's and other Catholic girls' colleges at that time also reflected a cultural shift in Australia, evident in the general expansion of the performing arts to which the Catholic sisters had themselves contributed significantly, as has been seen.

Music tuition gave St Rita's and other Catholic girls' colleges a distinctive quality that remained attractive to the middle-class, as was evidenced by the relatively large number of music students, often seventy to eighty from St Rita's, who entered the various examinations of the AMEB and the Trinity College of Music.<sup>176</sup> Cultural events presented by Catholic girls' colleges dominated newspaper social columns, especially when distinguished guests such as government officials and their wives were in attendance.<sup>177</sup> Convent annals reveal that the sisters at St Rita's supported local artists, including the Brisbane theatre group, The Villanova Players, who frequently rehearsed at the college.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Boland, *Nudgee*, 189.

<sup>174</sup> Burley raises this point in "Entrenched or Emancipated? Responses to Catholic Girls' Secondary Schooling, South Australia 1880-1930." *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, no. 26 (1998): 76.

<sup>175</sup> In 1948, *The Courier Mail* reported on the need for a Conservatorium in Queensland under the headline: "There's Money for Coal but Little for Culture," with the bi-line: "It is not a 'highbrow' institution but a necessity." See *The Courier Mail*, October 13, 1948, 2.

<sup>176</sup> SRC annual reports, 1950-60.

<sup>177</sup> In 1952, guests attending St Rita's Grand Ball and Dancing Display held in the Brisbane City Hall, included the Acting Premier and his wife, Mr and Mrs V. Gair, Archbishop Duhig and the American Consul and his wife, Mr and Mrs Cyril Thiel. *The Catholic Leader*, October 31, 1951, 10.

<sup>178</sup> The Gilbert and Sullivan Opera Company presented a public concert at SRC in 1950. CCA 2: 165. QPA.

By 1950, St Rita's concert programs contained substantial Australian content.<sup>179</sup> Most Catholic schools participated in the Xavier Society concerts held in honour of Australia's patron, Our Lady Help of Christians. These concerts had an Australian focus, undoubtedly reflecting the gradual indigenisation of school music programs.<sup>180</sup>

### 6.11 RELIGIOUS EDUCATION - PRE-VATICAN II

Throughout the 1940s, St Rita's annual reports emphasised the centrality of religious education and the development of spirituality in the Presentation tradition of forming the whole person:

Mindful of the serious obligation resting on religious teachers of educating the child both spiritually and intellectually...we have made it our greatest endeavour that religion should permeate every aspect of our school life.<sup>181</sup>

In the 1950s, it was expressed in this way:

Our faith is the greatest educational factor in our school life, developing as it does both the spiritual and temporal aspects of life and thus producing a complete personality.<sup>182</sup>

Margaret Healy, née MacGinley, (past pupil, 1947-1950) recalled that devotional practices formed a significant part of school life at St Rita's:

We used to rise at ten minutes to six to attend mass every morning...Years later, my nuptial mass was celebrated by Msgr English in St Agatha's Church. Our school retreats were a big event, conducted by visiting priests. These were taken very seriously...silence was kept for the whole retreat. We also enjoyed the yearly visits to Nudgee College for the large Corpus Christi processions.<sup>183</sup>

St Rita's prospectus of the 1950s summarised the religious education program as follows:

A thorough religious education is imparted, not only by daily instruction but also by many spiritual helps, such as an annual three days' retreat, conducted by a priest. Character is moulded on sound lines and good habits are acquired through the practical activities of movements such as the Young Catholic Students.<sup>184</sup>

In these pre-Vatican II years, daily religious instruction in Catholic schools included elementary catechism, bible history, sacramental preparation, doctrine and morality at primary level and gospel study, doctrine, apologetics, church history, and morality at secondary

<sup>179</sup> In 1950, Janet Uhr performed "Come Sing Australian Songs to Me" by John O'Brien, and in 1951, St Rita's students recited "The Road that has no Ending," reminiscent of the Australian bush. See *The Catholic Leader*, December 13, 1951, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>180</sup> Bartholomew, interview, Brisbane, November 20, 2001, AP. Other occasions for which concerts were organised included a visit to Brisbane by Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Carboni in 1954 and the celebration of Archbishop Duhig's golden jubilee of episcopal ordination in 1955.

<sup>181</sup> SRC annual reports, 1946 and 1947; *The Catholic Leader*, December 12, 1946, 10, and reiterated in 18 December 1947, 5.

<sup>182</sup> SRC annual report, 1951.

<sup>183</sup> Margaret Healy née MacGinley, past pupil (1947-50), memoir in SRCA.

<sup>184</sup> *Prospectus: 1955*, 9. SRCA.



level.<sup>185</sup> The National Catholic Education Conferences of Directors and Diocesan Inspectors of Schools issued guidelines for religious instruction.<sup>186</sup> The climate of faith was so pervasive at St Rita's that the vast majority of students attended the three-day retreats which were initially held during the school holidays.<sup>187</sup> The increasing popularity of sodalities and youth groups such as the Young Christian Students Movement (YCS) had accompanied development in the school's social justice program that was strengthened through initiatives like mission drives. Social action groups were incorporated in the YCS program introduced by Sr Canice (later Moira) Creede at St Rita's in the early 1950s. YCS was based on the Cardijn 'See, Judge, Act' framework of Catholic Action. Religious influence continued through a range of social action groups that developed with the fading of the YCS in Catholic secondary schools.

Throughout the 1950s, Archbishop Duhig continued to visit Catholic girls' colleges as a beneficent father figure. St Rita's annual reports make reference to Duhig's "fatherly interest" in the college.<sup>188</sup> During such visits, Duhig's magnanimity showed in gifts of "oranges, water melons, apples, large churns of ice cream and sweets", his announcing of boat trips on the Brisbane River and invitations extended to view his art collection at Wynberg.<sup>189</sup> In 1950, he gave St Rita's boarders several Roman pictures of St Maria Goretti as a memento of his Holy Year pilgrimage.<sup>190</sup>

### 6.11.1 Devotional Practice

Public demonstrations of faith, such as pageants and processions, characterised Catholic devotion with a marked renewal in the 1950s.<sup>191</sup> Judith Arthy (past pupil of St Rita's, 1950s) attributed her "ardent and willing" conversion to Catholicism in that period to:

The innate sense of drama...the pageant and mystery of the Latin Mass, the incense, bells, candles, ancient traditions, the beauty of the Latin hymns sung in choir.<sup>192</sup>

<sup>185</sup> See MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 270.

<sup>186</sup> Fr Bernard O'Shea was appointed Diocesan Inspector of Christian Doctrine and Youth Movements in Schools in 1943. On the history of the Brisbane Catholic Education Office, see Maurice Ryan, *From a Suitcase on the Verandah: Father Bernard O'Shea and the Development of Catholic Education in Brisbane 1943-1983* (Brisbane: Brisbane Catholic Education, 2005), 28.

<sup>187</sup> The retreat was introduced in 1946 and was subsequently held during the school term. SRC annual report, 1947; CCA 2: 182-85.

<sup>188</sup> SRC annual report, 1962.

<sup>189</sup> SRC students, Letters to Archbishop Duhig, 30 November 1935, and also 23 May and 28 November, 1948. BAA. The letters reveal that Duhig organised a boat trip for St Rita's students in 1935, and a tour of his home, Wynberg, in 1948. On similar excursions for Lourdes Hill, see D'Arcy, "History of Lourdes Hill," 101-102.

<sup>190</sup> See SRC annual report, 1950.

<sup>191</sup> Sr Marie Therese Corcoran accompanied four SRC students to Sydney for the 1953 Eucharistic Congress. CCA 2: 173.

<sup>192</sup> Judith Arthy, past pupil (1950s), reminiscences. *SRC Annual*, 1986, 59.

St Rita's past pupils recalled the elaborate annual Corpus Christi processions that were held initially at Nudgee College then at the Exhibition Grounds in Bowen Hills in which students from Catholic schools across Brisbane participated.<sup>193</sup> At the high point of the procession, Archbishop Duhig flanked by other clergy carried the Blessed Sacrament round the oval while the student marchers, led by a cross-bearer, joined the crowd in singing hymns and reciting the rosary. In another spectacular pageant, as reported by *The Catholic Leader* in December 1954, students from Brisbane Catholic schools including St Rita's processed triumphantly alongside colourful floats to mark the Church's Marian year.<sup>194</sup> The end point of the pilgrimage was the Exhibition Grounds where members of parishes, confraternities, and sodalities, many dressed in their distinctive uniforms and regalia, gathered in a display of Catholic strength. The music of the Queensland Irish Association Pipe Band that resounded in the arena confirmed the Irish heritage of Australia's Catholic Church.

### 6.11.2 Religious Vocations

By not over-extending their capacity to staff and resource parish schools in addition to their own independent colleges during the 1950s, the Queensland Presentation congregation largely escaped the teacher shortages that then affected State schools. This restraint was exemplified in Mother Ursula's decision in 1956 to decline requests to staff a parish school in Boonah south-west of Brisbane and an additional school in the Manly parish at Cleveland. By 1958, however, the sisters were able to open a new parish school at Ekibin.<sup>195</sup> By the end of the decade, there were approximately 4,000 students enrolled in Presentation schools in Queensland with 126 sisters, almost all of whom were teaching either full-time or part-time.<sup>196</sup>

Appeals for religious vocations were frequently made in Catholic girls' colleges during the 1950s in a bid to strengthen religious institutes and recruit teachers to staff the expanding parish school system.<sup>197</sup> Clergy who addressed the issue of vocations at St Rita's included Msgr English and Fr Patrick Codd OSA,<sup>198</sup> as well as Archbishop Duhig. Duhig was often accompanied on these occasions by visiting overseas clergy, such as Cardinal Gracias

<sup>193</sup> SRC past pupils (1966), group interview, Brisbane, September 10, 2002. The Brisbane City Council and State Government provided additional tram, train and bus services to bring people to the venue. See Tobin, *Catholic Education in Queensland*, 5:21-28.

<sup>194</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 9, 1954, 6.

<sup>195</sup> On the history of the Ekibin school, see *From Then to Now: St Elizabeth's School, Celebrating Our First Fifty Years, 1958-2008* (Brisbane: St Elizabeth's School, Ekibin, 2008); MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 248.

<sup>196</sup> MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 255.

<sup>197</sup> On recruitment practices of religious institutes, see Thomas O'Donoghue, *Come Follow Me and Forsake Temptation: Catholic Schooling and the Recruitment and Retention of Teachers for Religious Orders, 1962-65*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2004.

<sup>198</sup> CCA 2: 166-68.

(Bombay), Archbishops Pothacamury (Madras), McQuaid (Dublin), and Masterson (Birmingham).<sup>199</sup> The annals of the Clayfield Convent make only intermittent reference to vocations. A steady stream of vocations did flow from Presentation schools in that period. In 1953, of the eight postulants who entered the Presentation novitiate in Manly, four were past pupils of St Rita's: Kathleen Fanton, Dawn Rogers, Pamela McSweeney and Mary McMahon.<sup>200</sup> Together with nine girls who entered in 1957, they formed the largest novitiate group in the congregation's Queensland history. With all but two Australian-born, the full indigenisation of the Queensland Presentation congregation had begun and no further vocations were sought in Ireland. All candidates were to take up teaching in Presentation schools.<sup>201</sup> Most teaching institutes could not have imagined the severe decline in vocations in the ensuing decades, following a peak in membership in the mid-1960s.

## 6.12 CATERING FOR PHYSICAL NEEDS - SPORT

From the mid-1940s, young female teachers from the Graham-Burrow School of Physical Education were employed at St Rita's to conduct physical culture classes that afforded students one weekly lesson.<sup>202</sup> The Graham-Burrow School was founded in Sydney by Mrs Kathleen Burrow and her sister, Miss Anne Graham (later Mrs Schilling), an accomplished musician and choreographer. Katy Burrow, as she was known, completed a Bachelor of Arts degree and Diploma in Education at the University of Sydney.<sup>203</sup> She was employed as a sports instructress at North Sydney Girls' High School and also at Santa Sabina in Sydney. She later established her own school of physical education that supplied sports instruction at Catholic girls' colleges.<sup>204</sup> Burrow's school may be situated within the Catholic Action movement of lay women's organisations that emerged from the 1940s, including Sydney's Legion of Catholic Women, the Grail, and the National Catholic Girls' Movement. Former Graham-Burrow teacher, Betty Wallace, recalled Burrow's insistence that her teachers be young, convent-educated, and well-groomed role models for young girls.<sup>205</sup> When the

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<sup>199</sup> Among the visitors that Duhig brought to SRC in that period, were Fr Humber Claude, Professor of the Imperial University in Tokyo, and Msgr Pat Toumey of Dulwich Hill in Sydney. Bishop Guilford Young, past pupil and friend of the Presentation Sisters, visited SRC in 1952 and delivered a slide presentation of Catholic sites in Europe. CCA 2: 166-171.

<sup>200</sup> SRC annual report, 1953.

<sup>201</sup> MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 255.

<sup>202</sup> CCA 2: 150-151.

<sup>203</sup> Burrow also studied physiotherapy and social work. See Hilary Carey, *Truly Feminine Truly Catholic: A History of the Catholic Women's League in the Archdiocese of Sydney, 1913-87* (Kensington, NSW: UNSWP, 1987), 108 and 121.

<sup>204</sup> Burrow was president of Sydney's Legion of Catholic Women in the 1950s and received the United Nations Peace Medal for distinguished work in the community in 1975. Carey, *Truly Feminine*, 108, 121.

<sup>205</sup> Betty Wallace, former Graham-Burrow teacher, recollections provided to the author, February 24, 2003. Wallace (later Sr Mark) taught at the Presentation school in Croyden, Sydney, before entering the Lismore Presentation congregation. She then obtained qualifications in secondary teaching.

Graham-Burrow School spread to Queensland, St Rita's and other Catholic girls' colleges in Brisbane employed Graham-Burrow teachers to train students in sport and deportment.<sup>206</sup>

In 1946, Wallace came to Brisbane to co-ordinate a dance movement known as The Lancers for a display at the Exhibition Grounds to commemorate Archbishop Duhig's golden jubilee of priestly ordination in September.<sup>207</sup> The Lancers was performed in multiple squares, each comprising sixteen girls from Catholic secondary schools that included St Rita's, All Hallows', Stuartholme, Mt St Michael's, Brigidine, Loreto, Lourdes Hill, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College, Corinda, and the Ursuline schools at Dutton Park and Duporth at Oxley.<sup>208</sup> The squares filled the performance oval of the Exhibition Grounds, displaying the vibrant youth in convent secondary schools.<sup>209</sup>

In the 1950s, the Presentation sisters at St Rita's, recognising the value of sport in girls' education, provided "ample facilities" to cater for a range of physical activities. The college prospectus of 1955 declared:

The beautiful and spacious grounds lend themselves to all kinds of recreational activity. Many enjoyable hours are spent in healthy games and there is further advantage that the girls are coached by experts and so become proficient in the various branches of sport. Inter-school matches in tennis and basketball are keenly contested.<sup>210</sup>

In 1955, the sisters planned to construct a swimming pool, which Archbishop Duhig agreed was the "one thing wanting" at St Rita's.<sup>211</sup> Sr Conleth Mannion, head teacher of St Rita's Junior School, played a pivotal role in raising the estimated £9,000 required to meet the cost of the pool's unique design in steel.<sup>212</sup> Fundraising activities depended mainly on parents, as Bronwyn McKeering, née McDonald, (past pupil, 1950-1962) recalled:

My parents took on the organisation of a bottle drive...and newspaper collection. Children brought old newspapers to school and each Friday Mum and I would roll these into huge bundles that were sold...<sup>213</sup>

After a hiatus of over two decades, Mother Aloysius in 1956 re-established St Rita's annual fete, which was also organised by parents.<sup>214</sup>

The 1950s at St Rita's saw physical education, which had occupied only one period per week in the 1940s, replaced by a weekly sports afternoon. The range of sporting activities that could

<sup>206</sup> Wallace, recollections. Classes included squad drill, deportment, ball games, dancing and choreography.

<sup>207</sup> Wallace, recollections. See also CCA 2: 150-151.

<sup>208</sup> Wallace, recollections. See also Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 254.

<sup>209</sup> CCA 2: 150-151.

<sup>210</sup> *Prospectus: 1955*, 23. SRCA.

<sup>211</sup> CCA 2: 180; SRC annual report, 1955; *The Catholic Leader*, December 8, 1955, 11.

<sup>212</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 4, 1958, 6.

<sup>213</sup> Bronwyn McKeering née McDonald, past pupil (1950-1962), memoir, February 1996. SRCA.

<sup>214</sup> The last fete was in 1931. *The Catholic Leader*, April 29, 1956; McKeering, memoir.

be offered for a small fee in most Catholic girls' colleges at that time depended on the school's proximity to venues. Over the course of the decade the sporting offerings included basketball, squash, softball, hockey, vigoro, water-polo, ice and roller-skating, horse riding, archery, ten-pin bowling, gymnastics and self-defence classes.<sup>215</sup> Eurythmics remained popular and was retained at St Rita's as a form of cultured exercise.

Also in that period, St Rita's sports mistress, Sr Loyola McGrath, entered as many teams as possible in sporting fixtures, especially for tennis, which remained the school's main competitive concern. Five to seven tennis teams were usually formed to ensure St Rita's continuing success in the annual Catholic Girls' Schools' Tennis Competition, which had been interrupted by the wartime evacuations in 1942. St Rita's did not re-enter the competition until 1947,<sup>216</sup> the year St Rita's 'D' grade team won the sectional cup.<sup>217</sup> It was not unusual at that time for Catholic girls' colleges to employ sports coaches; for example in the 1940s, tennis specialist, Mr McAnany, was appointed at St Rita's.<sup>218</sup> In 1957, St Rita's won the Archbishop O'Donnell Cup for the highest number of tennis trophies presented to a single school. *The Catholic Leader* reported the result as impressive, given that a record number of schools competed, including All Hallows', Stuartholme, Lourdes Hill, Loreto, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Corinda, St Columba's, Soubirous, Mount St Michael's, Brigidine, Mt Alvernia and Convent of Mercy Sandgate.<sup>219</sup> St Rita's tennis prowess may be gauged by the number of times the college appears on inter-school tennis trophies during that period for all grades from 'A' to 'E'.

By the early 1950s, St Rita's had sufficient players to enter the Catholic Secondary Inter-School basketball fixtures, which reflected basketball's increasing popularity among girls. As St Rita's strength remained in tennis, the college did not win an 'A' grade basketball title until 1971.<sup>220</sup> The addition of track and field events to the usual ball games and foot races held at St Rita's annual sports days reflected new directions in girls' sport.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Tobin, *Catholic Education in Queensland*, 5:32.

<sup>216</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December 18, 1947, 5.

<sup>217</sup> *The Catholic Leader* December 18, 1947, 5.

<sup>218</sup> SRC annual report, 1940.

<sup>219</sup> Twenty-eight St Rita's girls competed, winning both the 'C' and 'E' grade competitions. St Rita's won the 'C' grade premiership again in 1958. "Convents' Record Entry," *The Catholic Leader*, 1957, clipping in "Across the Years," 1: 22.

<sup>220</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, 1971, clipping in "Across the Years," 1: 57.

<sup>221</sup> Tobin, *Catholic Education in Queensland*, 5: 32.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the mid-1950s, St Rita's expansionary program and reputation for educational excellence was to consolidate the school's position as a significant educational institute for girls in Brisbane. The continuity and growth of St Rita's which the sisters had long hoped to achieve now seemed assured. This chapter demonstrated that the teaching sisters at St Rita's, as elsewhere, adapted the convent curriculum to women's expanding employment options. It confirmed that girls at St Rita's were actively encouraged by their teachers to undertake education beyond middle-secondary level and also to study science. This chapter made clear that the Presentation Sisters had thoroughly prepared St Rita's College for the historic educational changes that would dominate the educational landscape of Queensland in the 1960s. The coming chapter will examine how the sisters at St Rita's responded to such developments and adapted convent traditions to new socio-educational pressures.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **AGE OF TRANSITION - A NEW ST RITA'S**

**1960 - 1978**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will investigate the planned responses of St Rita's Presentation Sisters to the currents of socio-educational and ecclesial reform that impacted on Catholic secondary schools in Queensland from 1960 to 1971 during Sr Moira Creede's administration and then from 1972 to 1978 during Sr Mary Foster's time as principal. It will consider how St Rita's leading women guided the college through the significant changes of the times and the strong influence they exerted over the school community. It will also challenge the still popular assumption that Catholic girls' education during this period emphasised the social graces to the detriment of academic or sporting pursuits.

#### **7.1 WINDS OF CHANGE – THE 1960S**

While the immediate post-war years in Australia centred on stability, security and harmony, the subsequent period, from about 1960, focused on change. The post-war 'baby boomers' sought and demanded broader life options, particularly in the workplace and education. The ascent of the modern feminist movement altered the way that women were perceived and the way they perceived themselves. Australian women reformers were passionate about creating a new society that did not confine women to domesticity and restricted public roles. Nonconformists liberalised old sensibilities and produced widespread social and cultural upheaval.

No institution was unaffected by the winds of change, not even the Catholic Church with its firm structure and tradition. In 1965, the Church introduced a reform agenda at the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (Vatican II) that was subsequently adopted in Australian parishes and schools. Vatican II reforms regarding education and religious life impacted on colleges like St Rita's that had to that point been implementing government reforms in response to the increasing demand for secondary education. At St Rita's, the school's longstanding debt was finally liquidated in 1963,<sup>1</sup> enabling many aspects of college life to progress from that time onwards.

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<sup>1</sup> This was in accord with the terms agreed upon with the Colonial Mutual Life Insurance Company in 1938, after the twenty-five years projected then.

## **7.2 ST RITA'S LEADING WOMEN (1960-1971)**

As the founding sisters of St Rita's began towards the end of the 1950s to move on, Srs Gabriel Hogan, Veronica Casey and Canice (later Moira) Creede, all past pupils of the college, emerged as the leading figures at the school. When Mother Ursula Kennedy died in office in January 1960, Sr Gabriel Hogan was elected to succeed her as Mother General of the Queensland Presentation Congregation. She immediately undertook the substantive task of preparing St Rita's for the marked social, religious and educational reforms that would dominate the next decade. At St Rita's, Mother Veronica Casey became the last superior to administer both the school and the convent in the established pattern. The two administrations were separated in 1961 when Sr Moira Creede was appointed principal of St Rita's, and Mother Veronica continued on as superior of the Clayfield convent. As Sr Moira was not the mother superior, she did not assume the title, 'Mother.' All three women were to embrace the educational changes that came to characterise the 1960s in Queensland and to spearhead the transformation of St Rita's College into a leading educational institution in Brisbane. The biographical details of these sisters as outlined below have been compiled from archival and oral sources to add to the knowledge of who these modernising women were and how distinctively different were their backgrounds and identities.

### **7.2.1 Mother Gabriel Hogan**

Gertrude Elizabeth Hogan was born in Ireland on October 2, 1912, the eldest child of Gertrude and Alfred Hogan.<sup>2</sup> Like other Irish families at the end of World War I, the Hogans sought a better life and relocated to Australia (a small migration compared with that to the USA) in 1921. The Hogans lived in Clayfield where Gertrude attended the Eagle Junction State School and then enrolled at St Agatha's parish school soon after it opened in 1925. Once St Rita's College opened in 1926, she transferred to the convent high school. She was therefore in the first cohort of students at St Agatha's and also at St Rita's. At the completion of her schooling, Gertrude briefly did office work in Brisbane before entering the Presentation novitiate in Longreach in 1931.<sup>3</sup> She was professed in 1934 and took the name Gabriel.

M Gabriel taught at St Rita's from 1938 to 1945, and subsequently held various positions of leadership in the Queensland Presentation Congregation, including mistress of novices from 1949 to 1960. Following her election as Superior-General of the Queensland Presentation Congregation in 1960, she was re-elected for three successive terms totalling eighteen years,

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<sup>2</sup> Obituary, M Gabriel Hogan (1912–2003). QPA.

<sup>3</sup> Hogan, interview, Brisbane, November 28, 2001, AP.



demonstrating the sisters' unanimous trust in her leadership of the Congregation.<sup>4</sup> Also in that period, from 1964 to 1976, she served as the President of the Australian Presentation Society, a federation established in 1958 to foster greater unity and collaboration among the seven independent Presentation congregations in Australia.<sup>5</sup>

### **7.2.2 Mother Veronica Casey**

Like Gertrude Hogan, Catherine Casey was among the first students enrolled at St Rita's when it opened in 1926. She was the only candidate from the college entered for the Junior examinations in 1929, for which she gained good results in all subjects. Inspired by her teachers, Catherine entered the Presentation congregation to live out her faith through teaching. She became St Rita's leading Senior teacher in the 1940s and 1950s. Sr Moira recalled M Veronica's even-tempered approach to teaching despite the many demands placed on her. These pressures included study commitments at the University of Queensland towards a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Diploma of Education which she completed early in that period:

M Veronica was a very cultured, learned and calm woman. She had a brilliant intellect. She would teach all day, go to university after school and then study at night to prepare for university examinations. She once said to me, 'I don't know if I'll go for this exam' and I replied 'go on, you've done so much, give it a go'. Well, she came out with top honours!<sup>6</sup>

Both M Veronica and Sr Moira, while differing in personality, shared a wide view of women's education and of building up St Rita's. Sr Moira recalled:

We got on extremely well. We were as different as chalk and cheese. [Veronica] was very laid back and calm and I was the opposite. But we were great friends until the day she died...She was a wonderful teacher. She was one of the makers of this school.<sup>7</sup>

### **7.2.3 Sr Moira Creede**

Sr Moira Creede was principal at St Rita's from 1961 to 1971 and thus figures as the leading force behind the progress and improvement of the college in that decade. Born in Ireland, she was one of eight children, all of whom entered religious life. The family migrated to Australia during the Depression and settled in Sydney before transferring to Brisbane in 1934. They resided in Clayfield where Moira and her sister Aina attended St Rita's in 1935. However, in 1936 the family returned to Sydney due to business. They were considered a well-to-do family, the father a businessman in both Ireland and Australia. Sr Moira recalled that the Presentations at St Rita's had had such a profound influence on her, especially Sr Marie

<sup>4</sup> Sr Zita Power, in discussion with the author, Brisbane, November 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Obituary, M Gabriel Hogan.

<sup>6</sup> Creede, interview, Brisbane, March 13, 2002, AP.

<sup>7</sup> Creede, interview.

Therese Corcoran whom she remembered as a “wonderful teacher,” that she left Sydney in 1937 to enter the Presentation novitiate at Longreach. She began her teaching career at St Rita’s in 1945. At her profession, she took the name Canice, but from the early 1970s returned to her baptismal name, Moira.

During her term as principal, Sr Moira undertook tertiary study and gained Bachelor degrees in Arts and Education, and also a Master of Education Administration at the University of Queensland. Sr Moira recalled that she enrolled in the latter course in its first year at the University: “there were eleven men and myself in the classes and I was in full regalia of course.”<sup>8</sup> In 1972, she began a Master’s degree in Religious Education at Fordham University, New York, and achieved outstanding results, known then as ‘10 straight As.’ Sr Moira later completed a Doctorate in Theology at Louvain University, Belgium.

Upon her return to Brisbane in the late 1970s, Sr Moira taught at the newly established Brisbane Institute of Faith Education (IFE) being appointed its first director. During that period, she presented seminars to religious congregations across the country as well as in New Zealand and the United States of America on the topic of renewal in religious life. Her work proved highly effective, helping to achieve some of the changes recommended for religious institutes by the Second Vatican Council. More recently, Sr Moira worked in Pakistan to establish a college of theology to be conducted by Presentation Sisters and she also lectured at the college over several years at the invitation of the Pakistani sisters.

Sr Moira recalled that her main educational objective while principal of St Rita’s in the 1960s was to develop the college and to raise its standing as a major educational institution for young women in Brisbane. The following analysis will explore whether this goal concerning the provision of quality Catholic girls’ education was realised at St Rita’s by the 1970s.

### **7.3 THE INCREASING DEMAND FOR GIRLS’ SECONDARY EDUCATION**

Between 1950 and 1960 in Australia, the notion of secondary education for girls became more universally accepted, as in that decade women entered the workplace in greater numbers than in previous years. Towards the end of the period, M Veronica reported that “a growing realisation for higher education [beyond primary schooling] was becoming more evident.”<sup>9</sup> Convent records for the period between 1955 and 1960 indicate that the number of students presented for the Junior and Senior public examinations virtually tripled in that short period,

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<sup>8</sup> Creede, interview, Brisbane, March 13, 2002, AP.

<sup>9</sup> SRC annual report, 1958.

increasing from thirty-three to one hundred and four students for the Junior, and from ten to twenty-six students for the Senior (See Table 1).

Table 1: Number of entrants from St Rita's College in the Junior and Senior public examinations, 1955-1960.

Date	Senior Candidates	Junior Candidates
1955	10	33
1956	10	50
1957	13	56
1958	13	53
1959	24	57
1960	26	104

Source: Clayfield Presentation Convent Annals 2: 179-204.

Margaret Russell (past pupil, 1955-1966) recalled that the sisters strongly encouraged girls to undertake Senior, rather than to leave school at Junior level heeding "parental guidance" to pursue work.<sup>10</sup>

During the 1960s as in the previous decade, M Veronica reiterated to parents the advantages of a senior education for girls. Her pleas were typical of those by other Catholic teaching sisters at that time. For example, the principal of St Ursula's College, Dutton Park, stated in her 1960 annual report:

Parents are mistaken when they think that a daughter is more than well-equipped scholastically with a Junior examination pass. As a result talents are squandered and great opportunities lost.<sup>11</sup>

Little acknowledgement has been given to women religious like the Presentations, who effected change in social attitudes towards female higher education. This they achieved despite lower parental expectations about women's career options, and the myriad of other social constraints on girls at that time.

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Russell, past pupil (1955-1966) of SRC, interviewed by the author, Brisbane, September 10, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> St Ursula's College annual report, 1960, *The Catholic Leader*, October 27, 1960, 6.

## 7.4 CRITIQUING THE PUBLIC EXAMINATION SYSTEM

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, public examinations remained the focus of secondary education, as student learning in some schools centred on predicting exam questions and memorising set essay responses. The University of Queensland's Conference with Principals of Secondary Schools that was held in Brisbane in 1955 re-examined the narrow university curriculum aimed at tertiary entrance against the broader purposes of secondary education.<sup>12</sup> Given that perhaps three per cent of Queensland students moved on to university at that time, school principals at this conference condemned the secondary curriculum as lacking in breadth and neglectful of creative, cultural and aesthetic learning.

M Veronica Casey had a similar view. She rejected the obsession with examination results and stated to a newspaper reporter in 1965 that "examinations take second place at St Rita's, although they are very important."<sup>13</sup> Margaret Russell recalled M Veronica's insistence that examinations were not to overwhelm students and teachers, as well as her encouragement "to stay calm" during the examinations.<sup>14</sup>

Whilst St Rita's students were expected to succeed creditably in the examinations the curriculum remained broad, reflecting the Presentations' holistic approach to educating the 'whole person,' as Sr Moira recalled:

[The Presentation approach] really strives for the education of the whole person - academically, but also spiritually and morally. It was always a wide overreaching idea of education. There was nothing narrow about it. We were always open to progressive ideas in education. There was always the emphasis on what's good for the human person... Nano Nagle's idea of education was revolutionary really. She said 'I'm not just teaching children the catechism, I'm teaching them all they need to make a good life.' I think somewhere that spirit had seeped through.<sup>15</sup>

Bronwyn McKeering, née McDonald, remembered how M Veronica instilled a love of learning in her students rather than pursue a narrow view of education that was examination bound:

Her lessons were always interesting...There was little of the format of the subject, she always intertwined it with her experiences...We enjoyed her classes...She'd go off on a tangent and you might not get back to the subject, but it was very interesting! It was what education should be...because we still got through the syllabus and knew what we were supposed to know...<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> University of Queensland, *Conference with Principals of Secondary Schools*, May 1955, cited in Goodman, *Secondary Education*, 345.

<sup>13</sup> *Telegraph*, Brisbane, June 24, 1965, 22.

<sup>14</sup> Russell, interview, Brisbane, September 10, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Creede, interview, Brisbane, March 13, 2002, AP.

<sup>16</sup> McKeering, interview, Brisbane, March 20, 2002, AP.

## 7.5 PLANNED RESPONSES TO EDUCATIONAL REFORM

### 7.5.1 The Watkin Report (1961)

The release of the Watkin Committee's Interim Report on Secondary Education in Queensland in 1961 brought widespread educational change.<sup>17</sup> Its far-reaching proposals introduced under the Queensland Education Act of 1964 diversified the curriculum to better cater for the majority of students not undertaking tertiary studies. The committee devised a curriculum that emphasised:

a proper balance in the moral, intellectual, social, manual, physical, and aesthetic education of the adolescent to ensure his complete and harmonious development.<sup>18</sup>

This development clearly resonated with and validated the broad, holistic educational approach that Catholic girls' colleges like St Rita's had retained from their convent school tradition.

Changes that were to impact on all secondary schools included raising the school leaving age from fourteen to fifteen years; bringing the age of transfer from primary to secondary school down to thirteen years following the completion of seven primary grades; and abolishing the scholarship examination. Thus, all children were given equal access to or unrestricted progression in secondary schooling. The Act also established two new administrative bodies to review the Junior and Senior school curricula and public examinations respectively: a Board of Junior Secondary School Studies (BJSSS) and a Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (BSSSS).<sup>19</sup>

### 7.5.2 Building and Development

The teaching sisters at St Rita's carefully planned for the introduction of the new secondary school structures and thus implemented the new Queensland curriculum with relative ease. In the wake of the Watkin Review, a letter from M Gabriel Hogan to Archbishop Duhig in November 1962 that outlined her proposal to extend the college reveals the sisters' usual readiness to adapt to new pressures.<sup>20</sup> According to convent annals, the sisters launched a comprehensive building plan designed to answer the need for more classrooms based on projected future enrolments and the anticipated new syllabus requirements. St Rita's student population by 1966 had doubled to 600 from the previous decade, as has already been noted.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The need for educational reform in Queensland had prompted the Education Minister, Jack Pizzey, to appoint the Director-General of Education, Mr Herbert George Watkin, to conduct a review of secondary schooling in Queensland. Goodman, *Secondary Education*, 346-352.

<sup>18</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, October 19, 1961.

<sup>19</sup> Goodman, *Secondary Education*, 346-352.

<sup>20</sup> M Gabriel Hogan, Letter to Archbishop Duhig, 26 November 1962. BAA.

<sup>21</sup> CCA 2: 226.

The number of boarders also increased markedly from that time, with many coming from regional Queensland and others, the daughters of expatriate Australians working in Hong Kong and also New Guinea, where the Australian Presentations conducted primary schools.<sup>22</sup> By 1965, the Brisbane *Telegraph* observed that St Rita's had become "one of the largest Catholic girls' schools in Brisbane."<sup>23</sup>

The sisters planned to build eight additional classrooms, a large science room and also toilet facilities. Convent Annals note:

To date all buildings have been erected and maintained from school fees. This colossal venture was beyond our resources. Hence it was decided to use a fundraising campaign, the [professional] firm being Parochial Councillors.<sup>24</sup>

For the first time the St Rita's sisters made a public appeal for funds. The scheme brought forward many stalwart supporters with past pupils and parents pledging £17,000 over the first three years. This response enabled the sisters to obtain a loan from the Bank of New South Wales (now Westpac) to erect what was later named the Sacred Heart Building.

On July 12, 1964, Archbishop Duhig opened and blessed the St Rita's new Sacred Heart building before a large gathering of the school and parish communities.<sup>25</sup> St Rita's was now well positioned to accommodate an increasing student population especially as the school leaving age of fifteen would be enforced the following year. Archbishop O'Donnell, the Coadjutor Archbishop, was also present at the opening. In his address, he remarked that high enrolments and curriculum change had placed enormous strain on Catholic secondary schools, a concern that his archdiocesan advisory committee had raised with the State Education Minister. He stated:

The extensions to St Rita's is an example of what is happening generally in Catholic secondary schools in Brisbane...The new curriculum, the automatic progression from primary to secondary education for all pupils, the greater emphasis on science as a necessary part of education in this age, posed a few years ago what was regarded by some as an insuperable challenge to our Catholic school system.<sup>26</sup>

O'Donnell was alluding to the funding crisis in Catholic education, which had originated with the withdrawal of government funding to private schools in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and had gathered speed in the early 1960s due to an unparalleled demand for secondary education. In 1961, of the 2,128 non-government schools in Australia, 1,752 were Catholic, providing for

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<sup>22</sup> CCA 2: 216.

<sup>23</sup> *Telegraph* Brisbane, June 24, 1965, 22.

<sup>24</sup> CCA 1: 38, QPA.

<sup>25</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, July 17, 1964.

<sup>26</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, July 17, 1964.

over 421, 000 pupils.<sup>27</sup> Thus the voting power of Catholics was not to be taken lightly. As Catholic bishops applied pressure on Federal politicians to reintroduce government aid, the catalyst for change came in 1962 with the Goulburn school “strike” in New South Wales. The strike consisted in the shutting down of parish schools that saw Catholics immediately enrol around 2,000 children in local government schools, highlighting the government’s legal obligation to fund education.<sup>28</sup>

Grants to non-government schools were finally reintroduced in 1964 on an election promise of the newly re-elected Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, to provide funds for the construction of science laboratories in non-government schools. It was this new science grant that enabled the construction of a well-equipped science laboratory in the basement of the Sacred Heart building, with four additional classrooms fitted out for science lessons.<sup>29</sup>

### 7.5.3 The New Junior Curriculum (1964)

St Rita’s commenced the 1964 school year under the new Watkin reforms with three Year Eight classes and a new Junior curriculum. Sr Moira recalled:

It was a lovely time. You got girls a year earlier and they were delightful at that age. We had a band of well-educated young sisters and our numbers kept up with what we could offer. There was no great overpowering sense of ‘we’ve got too many to manage.’ It moved just as we wanted it to move.<sup>30</sup>

The new syllabus was broad, and included English, mathematics, geography, history and citizenship, science, art, music, physical education and sport, religious education, home-craft or manual arts, and foreign languages, the most common of which were French and German.<sup>31</sup> Students in Years Nine and Ten were to study English, music appreciation and physical education, as well as one subject from among mathematics, science and humanities, and they could choose elective subjects as well. Completion of Year Ten was marked by an examination set by the Education Department. Although the Junior curriculum now enjoyed breadth and flexibility, the university-controlled senior curriculum remained narrow. Consequently, most schools developed a standard Senior course for matriculation purposes that included English, physics, chemistry, two mathematics subjects and one foreign language.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> By comparison, there were 122 Church of England schools. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia*, no. 49 (Canberra: ABS, 1963): 729.

<sup>28</sup> John Luttrell, “The State Aid Revolution: Interviews with Kim E. Beazley and Malcolm Fraser,” *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 23 (2002): 23.

<sup>29</sup> CCA 1: 39, QPA.

<sup>30</sup> Creede, interview, Brisbane, March 13, 2002, AP.

<sup>31</sup> Queensland Department of Education, *Interim Report of the Committee Appointed to Enquire into Secondary Education in Queensland*, (Brisbane: Queensland Department of Education, 1961).

<sup>32</sup> Logan and Clarke, *State Education*, 8.

As the Queensland Education Department now controlled the development of the Junior course for Years Eight to Ten, post-Junior vocational courses for students not requiring a Senior Certificate were introduced, such as English expression, general mathematics, general science, social studies and home-crafts. In introducing the 1964 Education Bill, the Education Minister, Mr Jack Pizzey, commented on the irrelevance of the Senior university examination for thousands of students not intending to enter university.<sup>33</sup> It would take a further six years before the Junior public examination was abolished in 1970. This was followed by the cessation of the Senior exam in 1972.

In placing greater emphasis on music, drama, visual arts, and oral work, the Watkin reforms validated the educational orientation of Catholic girls' schools like St Rita's. The teaching sisters had long recognised the value of cultural education in the formation of the human person, which no doubt accounts for the ease with which schools like St Rita's and All Hallows' implemented the new curriculum.<sup>34</sup>

#### **7.5.4 A New Funding Body - St Rita's College Association (1967)**

Many Catholic schools at that time sought new methods of financing vast building projects, since the annual school fete and small fundraisers could no longer fund their exponential growth. Organisations like the Federation of Parents and Friends (P & F) Associations arose in Queensland to shoulder the burden of fundraising, thus increasing the level of lay involvement in Catholic schools. At St Rita's, however, in 1967, M Gabriel and Sr Moira established St Rita's College Association along lines resembling a school board rather than the new P & F Associations. This proved to be an effective mechanism for mastering complex financial plans and coordinating building appeals. Sr Moira stated the objectives of St Rita's Association in her first meeting with prospective members:

....first, to organise and conduct a Building Fund for St Rita's College; second to promote the interests of St Rita's and to provide amenities for the students; and third to advance and foster the standard of education and training of students at St Rita's.<sup>35</sup>

Mr Gordon Postle, a prominent business leader in Brisbane and whose daughters attended St Rita's, was asked to chair the Association. Its planned giving program with full taxation rebate enabled benefactors to pledge donations for up to ten years.<sup>36</sup>

The Building Fund was established to meet the requirements of the 1964 reforms, which emphasised practical and independent student learning across the curriculum. New facilities

<sup>33</sup> *Queensland Parliamentary Debates, 1964-65*, vol. 239, cited in Goodman, *Secondary Education*, 355.

<sup>34</sup> On the All Hallows' experience, see Mahoney, *Dieu et Devoir*, 292

<sup>35</sup> Sr Moira Creede, Address given at a meeting of prospective members of SRC Association, 1966. SRCA.

<sup>36</sup> *St Rita's College Association* (Clayfield: Queensland Presentation Congregation, 1967). QPA.



such as language and science laboratories, a library and independent study rooms were all necessitated.<sup>37</sup> Before the close of 1967, construction of an upper storey to the Sacred Heart Building was commenced to answer some of the new needs.

An additional building, Nagle Hall, was begun in 1969, to provide a modern library, language laboratory and science rooms that included laboratories for Senior chemistry and biology classes. At the time, Sr Moira expressed the hope that the new amenities would “keep St Rita’s College in the forefront of education in Queensland,” adding that the “first class library” would be:

...a source of books and other materials to support and enrich the teaching-learning program...encourage independent learning and...teach children to enjoy reading, to read with discrimination and to make profitable use of leisure time.<sup>38</sup>

Almost eighty per cent of the cost of the new building was funded by a Commonwealth libraries and science grant. The Association met the remaining costs.

### 7.5.5 ‘Capping’ Student Enrolments (1966)

With the increasing demand for secondary schooling and the realisation that all Catholic children could not be accommodated within the Catholic system, church leaders conceded that Catholic parents were no longer morally obliged to send their children to Catholic schools. While many schools struggled with large enrolments and had insufficient resources for the transition occasioned by the new curricular structures, class sizes at St Rita’s were kept small and manageable by comparison. This was achieved by Sr Moira’s decision to cap enrolments at around 600 students. She explained in 1966:

We do not intend to increase our numbers now or in the foreseeable future. Six hundred is a good number for a secondary school....It is large enough to allow students to benefit from a varied curriculum, better facilities and opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities. It is not too large to prevent intimate contact with teachers or to become so impersonal that a great deal of stimulation and challenge is lost...greater enrolment means deterioration in too many important aspects.<sup>39</sup>

In capping enrolments at St Rita’s, minimal need for lay teachers continued. Consequently, school fees remained affordable for many families. There were ample teaching sisters available, as from the late 1950s to early 1970s religious institutes including the Presentations recorded unprecedented levels in vocations. In 1961, eight St Rita’s girls entered the novitiate at Manly.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Sr Moira Creede, SRC Association Address, 1966.

<sup>38</sup> *St Rita’s College Association Third Annual Report*, 1969. SRCA.

<sup>39</sup> Sr Moira Creede, SRC Association Address, 1966.

<sup>40</sup> MacGinley, *Roads to Sion*, 438.

### 7.5.6 Returning St Agatha's Primary School (1969)

After St Agatha's parish priest Msgr English's death in 1968, St Rita's Junior School was returned to the parish in 1969 and renamed 'St Agatha's Convent School,' a move instigated in collaboration with M Gabriel by Clayfield's new pastor, Fr Vincent Rowan.<sup>41</sup> The Clayfield sisters did not reconsider conducting primary classes at St Rita's. Thus in 1969, St Rita's like many other convent high schools in the 1960s,<sup>42</sup> discontinued the traditional dual system of primary and secondary schooling and emerged as a solely secondary college. By contrast, male religious institutes in Brisbane, being unencumbered by the parish school system, continued primary classes in their boys' colleges. Parish schools changed demographically, retaining mostly girls until the final year of primary schooling, whereas most boys left around Year Four for the Catholic boys' colleges. This gender imbalance in Brisbane parish schools has continued with patterns remaining relatively unchanged to the time of writing.

## 7.6 MAINTAINING THE HOLISTIC CURRICULUM

### 7.6.1 Home Science

In her 1966 annual report, Sr Moira Creede described the school's education tradition as providing "a rich and varied preparation for life" that included "the intellectual, aesthetic, spiritual, physical, moral and social development" of students.<sup>43</sup> In the context of this holistic approach to girls' education, she referred to the multiple dimensions of women's lives and the need to equip girls for "the type of world, the kind of society, in which they will lead their adult lives."<sup>44</sup> To that end, St Rita's curriculum continued to show significant breadth, an inherited feature of the traditional convent high school.

While women's employment options before marriage were expanding, a high proportion returned to family and domestic life after marriage.<sup>45</sup> Aware of the social constraints upon women, Sr Moira stated in the 1966 Report:

There is not a tremendously wide choice of avocations open to a girl and we like to provide openings to as many as we can. To do this of course means a varied curriculum...<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Fr Vincent Rowan, "The School Story."

<sup>42</sup> Provision of primary classes at St Ursula's, Yeppoon, was discontinued at the conclusion of the war. Our Lady's College, Longreach, transferred its primary classes to St Joseph's parish school in the mid-1950s. MacGinley, *A Place of Springs*, 229.

<sup>43</sup> "St Rita's College Association," 1967.

<sup>44</sup> Sr Moira Creede, SRC Association Address, 1966.

<sup>45</sup> See Barcan, *Sociological Theory*, 88.

<sup>46</sup> Sr Moira Creede, SRC Association Address, 1966.

In response to high student demand, St Rita's continued to offer home science which prepared girls for their future roles as home managers. In terms of vocational importance, home science enabled girls to find employment in the technical sector still dominated by males, and also in teaching, which was fast becoming the preferred profession for many women.<sup>47</sup> Although feminist theorists have criticised past educators for leading girls towards domestic work,<sup>48</sup> the sisters at St Rita's saw themselves as providing training that would enable women to manage the heavy burden of motherhood and family life, at a time when notions of shared domestic responsibility were not yet current.

In that period, St Rita's students approached home science with the usual academic rigour expected in other subjects, and many obtained outstanding results in the home science examinations. For example, Elizabeth Tinney in 1962 secured first place in the Senior home science exams as well as high grades in English, music, maths I, physics, chemistry and physiology, earning her a two-year scholarship at the Teachers' Training College in addition to the Home Makers' Bursary of £300 sponsored by Hills Hoists.<sup>49</sup>

The commercial course at St Rita's was approached with the same rigour. It too remained in demand, forming a major stream in the vocational curriculum. One past pupil recalled:

It allowed me to walk into the first job I applied for and that job gave me experience to further my career for future employment.<sup>50</sup>

Another former student said "the teachers gave us every opportunity to find employment."<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, she attributed her achievement of first place in the 1964 Queensland Public Service examination to the scholastic training she received at St Rita's. In one Report, Sr Moira explained that "the increasing popularity of the teaching profession for women" had been the reason for continuing the bookkeeping course while at some schools it was discontinued to release needed classrooms.<sup>52</sup>

### **7.6.2 Speech, Music, and the Arts (1960-1972)**

Annual reports of the 1960s indicated that "speech training was an integral part of the daily round" at St Rita's for the personal and social formation of girls.<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, St Rita's

<sup>47</sup> The popularity and commercial value of needlework gave rise to the Australian Embroidery Guild in the early 1960s and subsequent Guilds in each State.

<sup>48</sup> See Jill K. Conway, Susan C. Bourque and Joan W. Scott, eds., *Learning about Women: Gender, Politics and Power* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1987), xxix.

<sup>49</sup> *The Courier Mail*, December, 1962, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>50</sup> Russell, interview, Brisbane, September 10, 2002.

<sup>51</sup> Christine Purcell, née Mortimer, past pupil (1962-1964), interviewed by the author, Brisbane, September 10, 2002.

<sup>52</sup> Sr Moira Creede, SRC Association Address, 1966.

<sup>53</sup> SRC annual report, 1962.

teachers welcomed the Board of Secondary School Studies' inclusion of oral English in the 1964 syllabus. St Rita's students repeated past successes and frequently gained high grades in the art of speech examinations conducted by the AMEB and Trinity College, London. For example, all eight St Rita's students in the 1964 Senior speech class secured 'A' grades in the AMEB exams.<sup>54</sup> By 1971, speech and drama, which had been an important learning area in convent curricula was finally recognised as a Board course in the Queensland school curriculum.

Around that time, Mary McMahon (later Sr Jacinta), a talented student of the late 1940s and early 1950s who entered the congregation in 1953, had returned to St Rita's as an accomplished drama teacher. She held a Licentiate in speech and drama, and later gained a Bachelor of Arts. Sr Jacinta inspired girls to pursue careers in the performing arts.<sup>55</sup> Past pupils such as Judith Arthy who had established successful acting careers were held up for emulation. Arthy won wide acclaim in Australia and the United Kingdom for her work in television and theatre.<sup>56</sup> She also published her first novel *Goodbye Goldilocks* in 1984, and was cast in Michael Powell's Australian film, *They're a Weird Mob*. Other talented students included Nonie Stewart and Helen Zemek who pursued careers with the Arts Theatre in Brisbane.<sup>57</sup> Drama evenings at St Rita's remained regular features of school life and continued to feature in the social pages of Brisbane papers.<sup>58</sup>

St Rita's students gained prominence as public speakers and debaters, roles traditionally reserved for men. Anne Kortlucke was chosen to captain the Queensland Schools Debating team for the Australian Schools Championships in Sydney in 1971, and was dubbed by the Brisbane *Telegraph* as 'Queensland's ace school debater.' She mentioned at the time:

Debating forces you to think about topics that schoolgirls do not usually have to consider - like law and its function in society.<sup>59</sup>

### 7.6.3 Stepping Out in Public Roles – 'Poised, Elegant, and in Control'

The popular press in the 1960s remained preoccupied with the tradition of refinement training in Catholic girls' colleges. For example, the *Telegraph* published a series of articles on Brisbane secondary schools in 1965, which featured St Rita's College under the heading, "Emphasis is on Arts and Graces."<sup>60</sup> Actually, in that article M Veronica Casey had simply

<sup>54</sup> CCA 2: 215. For outstanding results in 1961 and 1962, see also SRC annual reports, 1961 and 1962.

<sup>55</sup> *St Rita's College Review*, 1971.

<sup>56</sup> St Rita's College, Clayfield, *Portfolio: Their Past, Our Future* (Brisbane, 1988), 5. SRCA.

<sup>57</sup> *Telegraph*, June 24, 1965, 22.

<sup>58</sup> *Telegraph*, June 24, 1965, 22.

<sup>59</sup> *Telegraph*, June 8, 1971, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>60</sup> *Telegraph*, June 24, 1965, 22.

stated that “several years ago a course in deportment and the social graces was introduced for senior girls at the school.” In fact she referred to an emphasis on breadth in St Rita’s curriculum that included academic, commercial, home science and cultural subjects. She gave an account of distinctions gained by past pupils in their university studies, and also of the school’s tennis and swimming prowess, its sports facilities and the practice of appointing skilled sports coaches. Clearly, M Veronica advocated a multi-faceted image of womanhood.

Refinement training, which was an integral part of the upper-stream educational provision of convent high schools, as has been seen, remained highly valued by middle-class parents in Australia during the 1960s. Francis Devlin Glass (past pupil, 1953-1965) recounted:

It is perhaps hard to understand now how necessary it was deemed then for girls to be ‘finished’. Attention was paid to our vowels, to perfecting trip-free deep curtses, how to put on gloves and cardigans gracefully and how to eat bananas and oranges, wearing gloves and using a knife and fork.<sup>61</sup>

It is often overlooked that subjects such as deportment and elocution were part of the traditional curriculum of Catholic girls education which aimed to form disciplined, poised, socially engaged and articulate women capable of exerting a strong transformative influence in secular society. In fact past pupils from this period reject the notion put forward in some histories that the sisters were more intent on “confining and refining women” than on promoting high educational ideals.<sup>62</sup> It may be argued that the Presentation Sisters at St Rita’s during the sixties provided strong models for a generation of women who would soon embrace the second feminist wave in the 1970s. Frances Devlin, an open scholarship holder in 1965, went on to pursue an academic career in Australian universities. In 1986, she recalled the influence of the nuns on her own ‘feminist’ perspective:

The nuns were fine models for girls from Irish or Anglo-Saxon homes where to be male was to be powerful and important. In an era when feminism had not penetrated Brisbane (or anywhere much for that matter), we were fortunate to be exposed to women, some of them elegant and cultivated, who were well-educated, and in superb control of themselves.<sup>63</sup>

Other past pupils refer to the dichotomy between the sisters’ claim that girls were intellectually equal to boys and the Church’s apparent acquiescence at that time in the social structures that denied women equal career opportunities, pay and conditions as men. Furthermore, they recalled the social pressures on girls “to shape their lives and work around

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<sup>61</sup> Frances Devlin Glass, reminiscences, *SRC Annual 1986*.

<sup>62</sup> As put forward in Kyle, *Her Natural Destiny*, 71; SRC past pupils (1966), group interview, Brisbane, September 10, 2002.

<sup>63</sup> Glass, reminiscences.

their husband's careers" while at school they were taught to become financially independent.<sup>64</sup>

Germaine Greer, past pupil of Star of the Sea, Gardenvale, Victoria, whose seminal work *The Female Eunuch* (1970) was part of the second feminist wave, referred to her convent education by the Presentation Sisters as being:

...inducted into life by a rare and eccentric breed of women who reject the servility of marriage...<sup>65</sup>

From the sisters' perspective, Sr Moira recalled that towards the end of the 1960s:

The feminist movement impacted on our idea of girls' education, that girls could study anything. And we had girls here that achieved great things in science...We took it [feminism] up strongly. We taught girls that they were fully human beings with as many rights as men. The whole education was geared towards that.<sup>66</sup>

This clearly represented Sr Moira's own outlook on women's education. The College Association supported the Presentation sisters' holistic ideal and in 1967 reported that its main objective was to ensure that St Rita's continued to offer a broad curriculum that would support integral human formation.<sup>67</sup>

## 7.7 MAINTAINING ACADEMIC PROMINENCE (1960-1971)

During Sr Moira's school administration between 1961 and 1971, the aim of "building up" St Rita's educational reputation "on good results"<sup>68</sup> was fervently advanced. The school's academic prowess was best demonstrated by repeated winning of the Archbishop Prize for either the highest Junior or highest Senior examination pass among Catholic girls' colleges in Queensland. The prize was awarded to a St Rita's student for four years in succession between 1966 and 1969, following on from St Rita's two successes in the late 1950s.<sup>69</sup>

A number of St Rita's students reached the pinnacle of academic achievement in Queensland during that time. In 1968, both Suzanne Graham and Robyn Arnell were ranked among the top twenty-five students in the Queensland Senior examinations, all of whom received open scholarships to the University.<sup>70</sup> It was still unusual for girls to be ranked among this top

<sup>64</sup> SRC past pupils (1966), group interview, Brisbane, September 10, 2002.

<sup>65</sup> Germaine Greer, former student Presentation Convent, Star of the Sea, Gardenvale, cited in Campion, *Australian Catholics*, 155-156.

<sup>66</sup> Creede, interview, Brisbane, March 13, 2002, AP.

<sup>67</sup> "St Rita's College Association," 1967.

<sup>68</sup> Creede, interview.

<sup>69</sup> The Senior prize was awarded to Suzanne Graham in 1968 and to Bronwyn Cushing in 1969. Suzanne received 'A's' in nine subjects and moved on to university. *The Catholic Leader*, December, 1966, and June 4, 1968, clippings, "Across the Years," 1: 44; SRC Association, *Third Annual Report*, 1969.

<sup>70</sup> The Commonwealth scholarship scheme introduced in 1950 was offered on a wider basis. *The Courier Mail*, 1968, clipping, "Across the Years," 1: 49.

group of students, as is evidenced by the considerable media attention to the seven girls in the group, and the fact that two were from the same school, being St Rita's.<sup>71</sup>

Although girls achieved notable success in the examinations, few progressed to university. A survey conducted by the State Director of Special Education Services, Mr William Wood, of students who had gained eighty-five per cent or more in the 1966 State scholarship examination, revealed that of the top 679 students, 340 were girls and 339 were boys.<sup>72</sup> Among them, 125 boys moved on to university (more than one in three), but only forty girls had enrolled at university (less than one in eight). Such valuable statistics indicate that greater educational and work opportunities for women had produced only a moderate increase in female university enrolment.

In extolling the advantages of tertiary study for women, St Rita's teachers continued to perceive education as the great equaliser in society and as the means by which women could acquire economic independence. The Presentations' time-honoured education tradition, which gave girls access to the same schooling provided to boys in Jesuit colleges, was still in evidence in the 1960s in schools like St Rita's, where girls were actively encouraged to undertake tertiary education. The outcomes of this thrust were duly noted in the annual reports. The 1960 Report pointed out:

...all of last year's Seniors are now doing university work in arts, science or medicine or have enrolled at the Teachers' Training College.

In subsequent years the Reports stressed that:

...all Senior candidates were successful in reaching the goal selected – whether university studies, teaching or some of the varied and interesting Commonwealth positions offered to Senior students.<sup>73</sup>

Frances Devlin Glass recalled the opportunities for higher education offered to St Rita's students when yet few women were tertiary educated:

Young women [were enabled to] proceed with scholarships to university or to training college, destinations that in my time constituted an extraordinary achievement for women.<sup>74</sup>

Of St Rita's eighty-two Seniors in 1967, twenty-nine gained Commonwealth scholarships to the University and many others obtained Special Teachers' scholarships to either the University, Technological Institute or Teachers' Training College.<sup>75</sup> By 1971, women's career

<sup>71</sup> *The Courier Mail*, 1968, clipping, "Across the Years," 1: 49.

<sup>72</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December, 1967, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>73</sup> SRC annual report, 1961.

<sup>74</sup> Glass, reminiscences.

<sup>75</sup> CCA 1: 64. QPA.

aspirations were shifting to professions other than teaching and nursing, as exemplified in the comments of St Rita's student, Anne Kortlucke, reported in the press at that time:

For the past eight years I have wanted to be a teacher. Recently...there were openings for psychologists. So I have been giving this some thought.<sup>76</sup>

That year, eighty-six St Rita's students sat for the Senior examination, forty-five received Commonwealth scholarships and a further two received open scholarships to the university. Mr Godon Postle, Chairman of St Rita's College Association, in his report stated that the academic results attained by St Rita's students "have become renowned."<sup>77</sup>

## 7.8 EMPHASIS ON LANGUAGE EDUCATION

The emphasis on English and foreign languages continued at St Rita's as exemplified by the record of outstanding results in the English examinations. It was frequently the case that the majority of St Rita's entrants for the English, French and Latin examinations received 'A' passes. In a typical year as in 1961, more than ninety-five per cent of candidates received 'A's' in French and almost eighty per cent of Junior candidates received 'A's' in Latin, a pattern of success that was to continue in later years.<sup>78</sup>

Such detailing of student achievements may appear hagiographic; however the data is amply documented and establishes the extent to which the sisters' empowerment aims were realised.

The language laboratory in Nagle Hall was designed to help students develop oral skills that accounted for twenty per cent of their assessment in the language syllabus. Specialist foreign language teachers were appointed at St Rita's to ensure high standards were maintained. Mrs Gabriel Wagner, a published author of German language textbooks for secondary schools, was employed to teach German classes. Similarly, the new French teacher, Miss Griffin, brought to her classes valuable language expertise gained in France prior to her appointment at St Rita's. While most Brisbane secondary schools offered only these two European languages, St Rita's took the judicious step in 1971 of introducing Japanese, reflecting the growing recognition of the value of Asian language education in Australia.<sup>79</sup>

French retained its primacy at St Rita's throughout the 1960s and 1970s as the most studied foreign language. Students frequently received the highest awards in the Alliance Francaise competitions. Those studying German entered the annual Goethe Society Verse-speaking competitions; students of Japanese entered the Japanese Language Speech Contest, many

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<sup>76</sup> *Telegraph*, June 8, 1971.

<sup>77</sup> *Chairman's Report*, St Rita's College Association, March 1971. SRCA.

<sup>78</sup> SRC annual reports, 1961-63. SRCA.

<sup>79</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1972, 42.



receiving outstanding honours. For example, Susan O'Connell won a student exchange scholarship to Germany in 1974 and Frances Joyner won the national Japanese speaking title in 1975.<sup>80</sup> St Rita's introduced Japanese in the early 1970s at a time when few Queensland secondary schools had moved in this direction. Consequently, St Rita's students were well positioned to fill a growing number of corporate and commercial roles requiring Japanese language.

## 7.9 TEACHER-TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

In pursuing educational excellence, the Presentation Sisters at St Rita's continued to enrol in university degree courses and teacher-training programs throughout this period. Many taught during the day and studied at night, attaining very good results as recorded in the Convent Annals. In 1968 it was noted that:

All the sisters taking University subjects were highly satisfactory, Sr Bernadette Fleming gaining her Bachelor of Science with four Distinctions.<sup>81</sup>

Srs Bernadette Fleming and Elvera Sesta completed science degrees, majoring in zoology, as well as chemistry, in preparation for the introduction of biology in the science syllabus.<sup>82</sup>

By comparison, university graduate teachers in Queensland continued to be under-represented in government secondary schools. In 1964, only twenty-six per cent of teachers in government schools were university trained and only ten per cent had a postgraduate Diploma in Education.<sup>83</sup> Sr Elvera recalled that few women studied for science degrees at that time:

In third year physical chemistry, there were very few females. There were eight of us out of a class of forty.<sup>84</sup>

Furthermore, the Presentation Sisters at St Rita's frequently attended seminars at the Teachers' Training College at Kelvin Grove during the school holidays.<sup>85</sup> As science teachers remained predominantly male, religious sisters at these seminars were all the more conspicuous in their religious habits. When McAuley Teachers' College, established by the Mercy Sisters in 1955, offered its teacher-training course to other religious institutes in 1965, the Queensland Presentation Sisters immediately enrolled,<sup>86</sup> securing teaching qualifications

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<sup>80</sup> *The Courier Mail*, August, 1974, and 1975, clippings, SRCA.

<sup>81</sup> CCA 1: 64. QPA.

<sup>82</sup> Bernadette Fleming, past pupil (1954-1957) and teacher (1961-66, 1974-78, 1983, 1987-94) of SRC, interviewed by the author, Brisbane, February 12, 2002, AP.

<sup>83</sup> Goodman, *Secondary Education*, 364.

<sup>84</sup> Sr Elvera (Clement) Sesta, past pupil (1947-55), teacher (periods between 1960 and 2008) and principal of SRC (1989-2008) interviewed by the author, Clayfield, Brisbane, January 16, 2002, AP.

<sup>85</sup> Sr Zita Power, in discussion with the author, Brisbane, November 2001.

<sup>86</sup> Tobin, *Catholic Education in Queensland*, 4:70.

above the minimum standards required for admission to teaching.<sup>87</sup> Academic staff from Queensland University and Kelvin Grove College provided professional advice on the course at McAuley.

### 7.10 NEW CHALLENGES – 1960s SOCIAL REVOLUTION

With around 600 students enrolled at St Rita's during the 1960s, it became increasingly difficult for the college to maintain the traditional familial atmosphere of the convent school, which it formerly enjoyed as a smaller community. According to some past pupils the constant pressure to succeed at high levels had marred the usual easy relationship between certain students and their teachers.<sup>88</sup> These women recall the contrast between M Veronica Casey's kindly approach to teaching and the more exacting methods of other teachers. There are painful memories of a severe disciplinarian who used belittling methods such as consigning less able students to "the dumb row." Learning here occurred "through fear" of humiliation rather than enjoyment.<sup>89</sup>

All Catholic schools throughout the 1960s faced the challenge of harmoniously aligning the new social values of youth with the Church's traditional teachings on morality and civil responsibility. Many parents and teachers struggled with this new revolutionary age of hippie culture, drug use, anti-authoritarian protest, and youth rebelliousness. One former student of the 1960s recalled that:

[The sisters] were constantly lecturing about 'dangers.' However these 'dangers' were never fully explained or talked about.<sup>90</sup>

Past pupils recall that the main 'dangers' were secular thinking, pop idolatry, consumerism, and the new contraceptive pill, which at that time accompanied the notion of sexual liberation and undermined traditional Catholic moral patterns. Thus, as Sr Moira remembered, St Rita's girls were taught to resist the negative influence of popular culture, an immense challenge since television had begun to infiltrate every Australian home. *The Beatles* had arrived, as did radical changes in hair styles and dress standards. New ways of seeing and knowing the world confronted classical perceptions. The media embraced popular culture and became instrumental in promoting it. Consequently, *St Rita's School Rules and Directions for Students* stressed that it was:

...absolutely forbidden to bring to the college, any books, comics or magazines of doubtful character. Furthermore, all girls were expected to be members of the college library.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Turner, "The Professional Preparation of Teachers," 102.

<sup>88</sup> SRC past pupils (1966), group interview, Brisbane, September 10, 2002.

<sup>89</sup> SRC past pupils (1966), interview.

<sup>90</sup> SRC past pupils (1966), interview.

Rule books in Catholic schools closely regulated the demeanour of ‘Christian men’ and ‘ladies,’ particularly in public places, reflecting the Renaissance meaning of education as forming courteous and responsible citizens. For St Rita’s students, boisterous behaviour was prohibited in public, as stipulated in the *School Rules*:

When travelling to and from school in trams, trains or buses, the girls shall be particularly careful as regards behaviour. Loud talking or laughing is forbidden. The girls shall not eat in the streets or on trains, trams or buses.<sup>92</sup>

Concern for girls’ sexual behavior extended to social activities outside school hours, as Devlin Glass recalled it was an expellable offence for a St Rita’s girl to go to a Drive-In-Theatre in a mixed crowd.<sup>93</sup>

The disciplinary system at St Rita’s, like other Catholic schools in the 1960s, mirrored the authoritarian tendencies of the Church and of religious institutes. Yet permeating the recollections of past pupils is the sisters’ emphasis on self-discipline as a God-given virtue, not an external punitive system. College annual reports of the period cite the Catholic faith as the guiding principle for self-discipline:

The building up of a balanced personality, one in which a habit of self-discipline comes to the aid of a girl in a time of crisis, is the aim of the school. Only her faith can give a girl this sure and dependable quality – hence Religion is the pulsating centre of every aspect of school life.<sup>94</sup>

### 7.11 A NEW CATHOLICISM - VATICAN II (1962-1965)

Like other major institutions in Australian society in the early 1960s, the Australian Catholic Church was not immune to change. As St Rita’s implemented the Watkin educational reforms, Archbishop O’Donnell and Monsignor English travelled to Rome to participate in the historic gathering of Catholic bishops from across the globe that would set the Roman Catholic Church on a momentous path of modernisation and reform. The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) opened by Pope John XXIII on October 11, 1962 met for four sessions over four years concluding on December 8, 1965. St Rita’s annual report for 1962 noted that women religious were invited to participate through prayer:

We in this little section of the great Catholic world are grateful that we have been privileged to participate, by our prayers, in the auxiliary work asked of all Catholics by the Pope, and the whole school prays daily for the success of the Council.

The Council reappraised the role and relevance of the Catholic Church for young people. As Arbuckle noted, “people began to feel that alternative ways of doing things in the Church

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<sup>91</sup> *School Rules and Directions for Students at St Rita’s College*, circa 1960s. SRCA

<sup>92</sup> *School Rules and Directions*.

<sup>93</sup> Glass, reminiscences.

<sup>94</sup> SRC annual report, 1961.

might now be possible.”<sup>95</sup> The Vatican II document, *Declaration on Christian Education*, focused on the nature and purpose of the Catholic school, emphasising “integral human formation” in education. To that end, Catholic schools were called to assist youth “in the harmonious development of their physical, moral and intellectual endowments...and a more mature sense of responsibility towards pursuing authentic freedom.”<sup>96</sup> Like the Watkin reforms, the Council decree validated the Presentation Sisters’ holistic approach to education. Teaching religious were urged “to intensify [the Church’s] beneficial presence in the world...especially the world of the intellect.”<sup>97</sup>

The decree portrayed Catholic schools not as institutions, but as communities of faithful people sharing a common religious heritage, collaborating and journeying together. Parents were recognised as “the primary and principal educators” of their children and were called to greater participation in catholic education.<sup>98</sup> This participative philosophy regarding the laity, distinct from the model of patronage in which parents offered financial support to religious teaching institutes, began to characterise St Rita’s annual reports from 1965 onwards. A shift in perspective is evident between the 1960 report that defined the sisters’ teaching apostolate as a “God-given duty to mould the character of our girls,” and that of 1965 which stressed the need for “full cooperation of parents and teachers in the work of moulding children’s characters.”<sup>99</sup> Moreover, Sr Moira stated in 1966:

Only in conjunction with their parents can we give [St Rita’s girls] those Christian ideals of noble womanhood that will make such valuable contribution for both their own personal happiness and the wellbeing of family and national life.<sup>100</sup>

At the same time, the family metaphor that referred to the sisters as second mothers, as in the Ursuline tradition, prevailed in the context of modern Catholic girls’ schooling, as instanced in an address given by Duhig at St Rita’s in 1964: “The sisters largely take the place of mothers and the best qualities of a teacher are those of a good mother.”<sup>101</sup> Amid the first currents of ecclesial modernisation, the sisters at St Rita’s embraced the Vatican II ideal of working alongside parents to achieve the traditional aim of forming competent and responsible Catholic women capable of wielding social and religious influence in their families and in the wider community.

<sup>95</sup> Gerard Arbuckle, *Refounding the Church: Dissent for Leadership* (Homebush: St Paul, 1993), 48-50.

<sup>96</sup> *Declaration on Christian Education (Gravissimum Educationis)* in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter Abbott (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), 643.

<sup>97</sup> *Declaration on Christian Education*.

<sup>98</sup> *Declaration on Christian Education*. On the ideal of shared partnership in religious education, see Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980).

<sup>99</sup> SRC annual report, 1965. SRCA.

<sup>100</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, October 14, 1966.

<sup>101</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, July 16, 1964.

Other Vatican II reforms impacting on Catholic schools included the revitalisation of religious institutes, changes to the 'Liturgy of the Mass' and developments in religious education. Sr Marlette Black observed that while many Catholics were "hesitant, confused or resistant" to the Vatican II reforms, M Gabriel, at that time Mother General of the Queensland Presentation Sisters, faced the challenges of overseeing and implementing change:

...with energy and a clarity of vision that guided her through many difficult situations in her leadership role.<sup>102</sup>

M Gabriel gained the full co-operation of the Queensland Presentation Sisters, arranging numerous meetings for reviewing both educational objectives and congregational structures, as well as providing a series of seminars on the Vatican II documents, especially *Gravissimum Educationis*.<sup>103</sup> One of these sessions titled *The Training of the Adolescent in School Years and After* called for "challenging and inspiring religion periods planned to fit the need of the modern girl."<sup>104</sup> Seminar documents emphasised "the power of influence" of parents, Catholic Action groups, devoted teachers and Religious teachers on the adolescent girl. Reference was made to the influence of the teaching sister extending beyond secondary students to past pupils through home visits and circular letters, and "the encouragement of adult Catholic Action Movements." M Gabriel, like other congregational leaders, had received valuable support from Archbishop Francis Rush who committed himself to ecclesial modernisation.<sup>105</sup>

### 7.11.1 Catholic Action at St Rita's

From the early 1950s, St Rita's had fervently embraced Abbé Joseph Cardijn's model of Catholic Action in the Young Christian Students' Movement (YCS),<sup>106</sup> which offered youth a practical framework for effecting social reform. St Rita's annual report for 1961 stated:

The YCS holds its place of honour as one of the major influences for good in the school... [It] inculcates an apostolic spirit in its members and it is impressive to note the spiritual development of its members.<sup>107</sup>

That year, two St Rita's students were sent to the Second National Congress of Catholic Students in Melbourne.<sup>108</sup> One of those students, Kathleen Tynan, would soon enter the Presentation congregation and return to St Rita's to teach in 1969 and be appointed college principal in 1979. Sr Moira Creede vigorously promoted the YCS so that it would permeate

<sup>102</sup> Sr Marlette Black, Eulogy delivered at the Funeral Mass of M Gabriel Hogan. QPA.

<sup>103</sup> Hogan, interview, Brisbane, November 28, 2001, AP.

<sup>104</sup> "Workshop For Sisters: Vatican II and Renewal of the Religious Life," n.d., ca. 1966, copy in QPA.

<sup>105</sup> Jeffrey P. Dorman, "Attitude to Christianity in Schools, Research in Australian Catholic Secondary Schools," *Catholic School Studies: A Journal of Education for Australian Catholic Schools* 71 (1998): 47; Hogan, interview.

<sup>106</sup> On the movement in Australia, see Carey, *Truly Feminine, Truly Catholic*, 52. See also, Patrick O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community in Australia* (Sydney: UNSWP, 1992).

<sup>107</sup> SRC annual report, 1961.

<sup>108</sup> CCA 2: 204.

every aspect of college life, and it remained popular among St Rita's students well into the 1970s, as will be seen.

The Catholic Foreign Missions program in the Brisbane archdiocese in the 1960s may be situated within the Catholic renewal movements of that time. The program introduced competitions between Catholic schools to raise money. St Rita's annual reports mention that in 1960 and 1961 the college achieved the highest aggregate among Catholic girls' schools and the highest average per pupil in the archdiocese. The emphasis on foreign missions by the Church in Brisbane saw St Rita's support a Catholic Mission in Korea in 1961 as "the special object of prayers."<sup>109</sup> St Rita's awareness of overseas missionary activity deepened when the Australian Presentation Sisters led by M Gabriel Hogan established a school mission in Papua New Guinea (PNG) in 1966.<sup>110</sup> This mission was undertaken to mark the centenary of the Presentation Sisters' coming to Australia. M Gabriel, then the President of the Australian Presentation Society, was the driving force behind the mission and was its constant supporter. Over the years, St Rita's school community remained well informed of the progress of this first overseas mission by the Australian Presentation Sisters. The sisters' PNG school mostly catered to indigenous children while the daughters of Australian expatriate families were educated in Australian boarding schools that included the Ursuline College in Toowoomba, and St Rita's.<sup>111</sup>

Past pupils refer to St Rita's religious culture and the general climate of Catholic action during that period as having strongly influenced their concern for social justice and reform. Among them, Gail Hyslop, entered the Presentation novitiate at the completion of her schooling and became involved in missionary work in Chile during the dangerously oppressive Pinochet regime.<sup>112</sup>

Archbishop Duhig's 'fatherly interest' in St Rita's continued despite his ailing health. Past pupils fondly recall his familiar term of endearment for Catholic schoolchildren, "chickereewidges."<sup>113</sup> In 1965, the death of this 'giant' of the Brisbane Church marked the end of an era. Over the decades, Duhig had attended many St Rita's end of year prize giving ceremonies, bringing a box of holy pictures for those who missed out on prizes.<sup>114</sup> Three years

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<sup>109</sup> SRC annual report, 1961.

<sup>110</sup> For a full account of the New Guinea mission led by M Gabriel Hogan, see Barbaro, *Acorn to Oak*, 116.

<sup>111</sup> CCA 2: 222.

<sup>112</sup> SRC past pupils (1966), group interview, Brisbane, September 10, 2002.

<sup>113</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, December, 1951, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>114</sup> SRC annual report, 1962.

later, St Rita's community would mourn the loss of Msgr English, whose familial rapport with teachers and students remains in the collective memory.<sup>115</sup>

### 7.11.2 Presentation Women - Adapting to Religious Change

A similar social restlessness to that experienced by youth in the 1960s began also to pervade religious institutes, including the Presentations. While the sisters at St Rita's were influential models of female leadership, their distinctive dress and the observance of 'minor enclosure' still set them apart from other women. While minor enclosure was less confining than full enclosure, past pupil Bronwyn McKeering, née McDonald, recalled that at St Rita's:

The Presentation Sisters could not eat in public. If they purchased an ice cream or any other food at the school fete they would disappear into the convent to consume it.<sup>116</sup>

In 1964, the winds of change that had enveloped the Catholic Church internationally enabled the Queensland Presentation Sisters to update their traditional habit, guimps and bandeaux to a shortened lighter dress better suited to Queensland's summer climate. This modification represented the first major change to the traditional Presentation ankle length habit.<sup>117</sup> Further modifications were made in subsequent years. Additional change came in 1966 when Pope Paul VI abolished minor enclosure.

As the Presentations at St Rita's were relieved from the historical restriction of enclosure they developed a more public profile. Towards the late 1960s, Sr Moira Creede first gave an address at a public function. To date this function had been performed by men, usually the parish priest or a father of a student at the school, speaking on the sisters' behalf. For example, at the opening ceremony of the Sacred Heart Building in 1964 Senator Condon Byrne addressed the crowd and Dr Clive Uhr, father of Janet (1951) and Marie Louise (1952) chaired the public meeting that followed.<sup>118</sup>

By 1966, Sr Moira addressed prospective members of the St Rita's College Association in a public forum on the school's future direction. In the following year, M Gabriel and Sr Moira took the step of producing a professional publication in pamphlet form that documented the educational work of the Presentations at St Rita's and outlined the school's building plan. The pamphlet included photographs of these two leading women, as well as the Chairman of the Association, Mr Gordon Postle. The Presentation Sisters at St Rita's had rarely, if ever, appeared in photographs taken at the school's official functions. Bernadette Fleming (past

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<sup>115</sup> CCA 2: 287.

<sup>116</sup> McDonald, memoir.

<sup>117</sup> CCA 2: 214.

<sup>118</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, July 16, 1964.

pupil, 1954-1957), who entered the congregation and was deputy principal at St Rita's from 1976 to 1978, recalled that such publicity was "fairly innovative" for a former enclosed religious institute.<sup>119</sup>

Michael Lloyd, the first secretary of St Rita's Association, recalled Sr Moira's decisive leadership in guiding the operation of the college and the Association:

Sr Moira gave us a brief and clearly outlined what her requirements were. Anybody who knew her at that time would agree that when she spoke no one was left in any doubt about what she said and what she meant...<sup>120</sup>

He remembered her authority over Association members, all of them men in business or the professions, and recalled occasions when she reproached those who strayed from the accepted goals of the college:

It wasn't all plain sailing with Sr Moira and the committee. At one stage, Gordon Postle and I were summoned to a meeting in the convent parlour and we were suitably chastised in a nice way for our omissions or commissions...After feeling firmly reprimanded and suitably chastised we were dismissed.

Sr Moira's relentless drive to maintain St Rita's academic prominence meant her being remembered as an authoritarian administrator and disciplinarian. Yet instances of harsh reproaches are often explained in the oral history as symptomatic of the strain on Catholic principals at that time, and the heavy demands placed on the teaching sisters, many of whom spent long hours teaching, studying and managing schools. Among the seminar documents prepared by M Gabriel Hogan on the implementation of Vatican II reforms at that time, one specifically focused on the problem of 'overwork.' Requirements of the changing curricula were cited as the main cause of the problem, resulting in "lack of time for prayer" and in "nervous strain."<sup>121</sup>

The Presentation Sisters' new public profile from the time when minor enclosure was abolished in 1966 enabled them to accurately represent themselves as competent leaders accustomed to the demands of educational change. The more mobile and well-established Mercy Sisters in Brisbane already portrayed such an image. Thus in 1965, Mother Marcella, Mother General residing at All Hallows,' appeared on the newly formed Brisbane Archdiocesan Education Commission that was to address the needs of Catholic schools.<sup>122</sup> It would be a matter of time before the Presentation Sisters accepted nomination to committees on education comprised of religious superiors and lay professionals, as will be seen.

<sup>119</sup> Fleming, interview, Brisbane, February 12, 2002, AP.

<sup>120</sup> Michael Lloyd, past parent of SRC, memoir provided to the author, June 2002.

<sup>121</sup> See documents "Workshop for Sisters: Vatican II and Renewal," and "Some Problems to be Faced in Living the Religious Life in Australia," n.d., ca. 1966, in QPA.

<sup>122</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, July 29, 1965, 1, cited in Ryan, *From a Suitcase*, 68.



## 7.12 PRESERVING RICH TRADITIONS –

### SR MARY FOSTER, PRINCIPAL (1972-1978)

In 1972, Sr Mary (Concepta) Foster became the third past pupil of St Rita's College to be appointed principal of the school. As a student, she boarded at St Rita's from 1946 to 1947 after which she entered the Presentation novitiate at Longreach. She recalled that the Presentation Sisters who had inspired her to enter the congregation included Srs Brendan Dolphin and Bernard Conneely at the Presentation primary school in Manly, and Srs Moira Creede, Teresa Wood and Veronica Casey at St Rita's.<sup>123</sup> As a novice, she trained under Sr Teresita Ahern who had been a teacher in the government system before she joined the congregation. On her entry, Mary took the name Sr Concepta, though in 1973 reverted to her baptismal name, as did many other religious sisters in the wake of Vatican II reforms on religious life.

At the completion of her novitiate training, Sr Mary taught at St Ursula's College in Yeppoon from 1955 to 1956. She returned to St Rita's in 1956 and taught in most subjects, including Religion, English, French, Latin, history, geography, mathematics, and commercial studies. Like other religious sisters who taught all day and undertook tertiary study at night, she completed a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Queensland in 1969. In her first year as principal, she completed a Graduate Diploma in Theology at Manly Seminary through the Archdiocese of Sydney. The course was designed for Catholic teachers and school administrators and enabled them to implement the changes of Vatican II. Sr Mary also obtained a Bachelor of Education degree in 1977. Upon completing her term as principal of St Rita's in 1978, she enrolled at Mt Oliver University in Dundalk, Ireland, and gained further qualifications in religious education. From 1981 to 2000, Sr Mary worked in the Brisbane Catholic Education Office (BCEO) and developed various materials and teaching programs of faith formation and religious education for the development of teachers in Catholic schools.<sup>124</sup> She made a significant contribution to Catholic education in Brisbane.

As principal of St Rita's from 1972 to 1978, Sr Mary, like her predecessors, maintained high standards in all aspects of college life. She also oversaw St Rita's smooth transition through the educational and religious reforms of the period of her administration.

Past pupil Jenny Lee, née McEniery (1968-1972), remembered how many students experienced life at St Rita's during the extensive social, political and educational changes of

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<sup>123</sup> Sr Mary Foster, past pupil (1946-1947), teacher (1956-1971) and principal (1972-1979) of SRC, interviewed by the author, Brisbane, October 20, 2003, AP.

<sup>124</sup> Foster, interview.

the early 1970s, and how they were encouraged to openly discuss the impact of such changes on their lives:

It was a period of great change both within St Rita's and beyond – Whitlam was running his "It's Time" campaign; the debate was raging inside the college on the merits of the Vietnam War and the papal encyclical on birth control, as well as Bjelke Petersen's State of Emergency over the South African Springbok team. The classroom discussions were lively.<sup>125</sup>

### 7.13 IMPLEMENTATION OF RADFORD REPORT

The last students to sit for the public examinations at St Rita's, as elsewhere in Queensland, were the 1970 Junior and 1972 Senior classes. The discontinued Junior and Senior public examinations were replaced by the new Radford system of internal, school-based assessment at the end of Years Ten and Twelve.<sup>126</sup> One of Sr Mary Foster's first tasks as principal was to implement the Radford curriculum changes and assessment procedures outlined in the Radford Report (1970). Under the Radford system, student work was assessed on a numerical grading scale of one to seven. Internal assessment enabled schools to provide greater breadth in the curriculum and to cater for a wide range of student needs. Sr Mary recalled that although additional English, mathematics and commercial subjects were introduced at St Rita's to best serve girls not moving on to university, most of these students were reluctant to enrol in subjects offered as an alternative to the academic course. This is not surprising, given the evolved academic culture of the college to that time.

The Queensland Education Department's requirement of compliance by all schools with the Radford scheme impacted on St Rita's in a number of ways. Teachers now enjoyed greater freedom in interpreting the new syllabi according to student needs, rather than by the demands of the public examinations. They began to form curriculum teams that devised course materials and assessment instruments. The price for such freedom, however, was greater workloads for teachers. Consequently, the Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) obtained from the State Department of Education significant changes in working conditions for teachers in government schools.<sup>127</sup>

Accordingly, the support and personnel provided for teachers in government schools included teacher-librarians, guidance counsellors, remedial teachers, teacher-aides and clerical support. Regular in-service training was introduced. In contrast, there was no industrial award for teachers in Catholic schools, and in the years that followed the Queensland Association of

<sup>125</sup> Jenny Lee, née McEniery, recollections provided to the author, Sydney, on January 28, 2004.

<sup>126</sup> Barcan, *A History of Australian Education*, 358. Dr William Radford chaired the committee appointed in 1969 to review tertiary entrance.

<sup>127</sup> Logan and Clark, *State Education in Queensland*, 9.

Teachers in Independent Schools (QATIS, later the Independent Education Union) was particularly active in securing an award for their members.<sup>128</sup> At St Rita's, as elsewhere, experienced teachers became subject coordinators, and they accepted responsibility for individual subjects as well as for the moderation of assessment. Sr Mary Foster has recalled with gratitude the many teachers at St Rita's who accepted heavy workloads and supported one another as best they could.<sup>129</sup>

## **7.14 BUILDING EXPANSION**

### **7.14.1 The Karmel Report (1973)**

Until the early 1970s, the only direct government aid to non-government schools had been in the form of building grants for libraries and science blocks. When the Australian Schools Commission that was established by the Whitlam Government in 1972 released the Karmel Report entitled *Schools in Australia*, a government funding revolution in education followed.<sup>130</sup> Accordingly, from 1973, valuable grants were channelled into non-government schools for libraries, special education, teacher development and educational innovation.<sup>131</sup> Congregational schools, such as St Rita's, received funding directly from the Federal Government.

### **7.14.2 Building Expansion**

The increased flow of Commonwealth funding to non-government schools enabled St Rita's to sustain the on-going building program that was commenced in the preceding decade under the progressive leadership of Mother Gabriel Hogan and Sr Moira Creede. The 1970s at St Rita's thus began with the sound of construction as new facilities and buildings were added to the college. During that period, a new one-storey block of three classrooms, known as the Year Twelve block, was erected behind Nagle Hall to accommodate the expanding Senior school.

A common staff area was also required since the number of lay teachers at St Rita's had increased considerably during the early 1970s. In 1973, there were over thirty teachers on St Rita's staff, of whom approximately one-third was not from the Presentation congregation.<sup>132</sup> By 1979, the staff composition consisted of thirty lay teachers and only thirteen sisters. This change reflected the decline in religious vocations during the 1970s, as well as professed

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<sup>128</sup> Vincent J. O'Rourke, "Reflections on Issues of Significance for Catholic Systemic Schooling in the Archdiocese of Brisbane in the 1980s and 1990s," *Proceedings of Brisbane Catholic Historical Society* 9 (2004): 10-29. O'Rourke was Director of Brisbane Catholic Education between 1983 and 1998.

<sup>129</sup> Foster, interview, Brisbane, October 20, 2003, AP.

<sup>130</sup> See Barcan, *A History of Australian Education*, 386-87.

<sup>131</sup> See Luttrell, "The State Aid Revolution," 29.

<sup>132</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1973, 9.

members of religious institutes either leaving their calling or moving into apostolates other than teaching. Indeed a report in 1972 noted that in the period between 1965 and 1970 the number of religious teachers in Australian catholic schools decreased by 9.8 per cent and the number of lay teachers increased by 115.5 per cent.<sup>133</sup> It was envisaged that a staff centre for lay teachers would engender a similar sense of unity as that experienced by religious teaching sisters through conventual life.

By 1977, an Art Centre had also been built at St Rita's. This building owed its inspiration and design to Sr Pamela Bright, a skilled artist and teacher in the areas of art, literature and ancient history.<sup>134</sup> Sr Pamela gained her Bachelor of Arts and of Divinity degrees at the University of Queensland and later obtained a PhD from Notre Dame University, Indiana, in the field of patristics. Following a lecturing period at Loyola University in Chicago, she left the Presentation Congregation though maintaining a strong link with them and was, at the time of writing, a teaching Professor at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada.<sup>135</sup>

Funding for the Year Twelve block, Staff Administration Centre and Art Centre was almost entirely covered by the Commonwealth grants introduced after 1973. The school fees at St Rita's were set at \$35.00 per term and were reportedly, "the lowest in Brisbane of any Catholic girls' college."<sup>136</sup> Thus fees provided only limited funding for building works. Each family at St Rita's also paid an additional \$2.00 per term in a sports levy. As government grants flowed in for new development, the school debt was substantially reduced. In 1972, the final payment of \$20,000 was made on the 'White House' - the elegant two-storied home, purchased and then used for music and speech lessons.<sup>137</sup> It was demolished in 1996 for further school extension.

The sisters continued to acquire land for expansion and in 1973 purchased the McDonald property on Enderley Road, adjacent to the basketball court. Although the site was initially bought to alleviate the classroom shortage, it was decided to lease the property to generate income. It was later used as the Queensland Congregation's Administration building, being known as the Presentation Centre. The property was sold in 2001 and a new administration centre was built in Sandgate Road, Clayfield.

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<sup>133</sup> M de Lourdes Ronayne, "Practices and Problems of Administration and Organisation of the Order" (paper presented at the National Conference on the Administration of Catholic Education in Australia, Armidale, NSW, 1972), in *The Organisation and Administration of Catholic Education in Australia*, ed. Peter D. Tannock (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1975), 56.

<sup>134</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1977, 38-9.

<sup>135</sup> MacGinley, discussion, Brisbane, March 2009.

<sup>136</sup> *Chairman's Report*, St Rita's College Association, March 1971.

<sup>137</sup> CCA 1: 73.

### 7.14.3 End of an Era: Closure of the Boarding School

From the late 1960s onwards, the demand for boarding schools diminished in Queensland as the government of the day provided additional high schools in country areas, and buses were deployed to convey students from the wider locality to those schools. Hence due to dwindling numbers, St Rita's boarding school was phased out in the mid-1970s, class by class.

## 7.15 MAINTAINING THE PRESENTATION EDUCATION TRADITION

There was no formal policy at St Rita's to ensure that successive administrations held to the Presentation education tradition of a broad and balanced education for girls with an emphasis on academic endeavour. Elements of this long tradition were instead cultivated through the informal daily interactions between the sisters who remained at the college and the lay teachers now increasing in number. The principal means of faithfully imparting the Presentation ideal to lay teachers were staff meetings and in-service seminars conducted by the sisters.<sup>138</sup>

Sr Mary Foster recalled being "very much aware" of the school community's aspirations for advancing women through quality education and its expectation that she would maintain "the good name of the school."<sup>139</sup> In her first annual report as principal in 1972, Sr Mary reminded students and their parents that:

At St Rita's we consider it of the utmost importance to encourage and foster a strong spirit of study.

Former St Rita's student and Presentation Sister, Bernadette Fleming, was deputy principal at St Rita's from 1976 to 1978. She recalled Sr Mary's thoroughness in ensuring that teachers adhered to syllabus requirements across the curriculum:

Mary used to meet with Sr Xavier and myself, and she had a small notebook with a Clip-on folder and every week she would say, 'now, in algebra you should be up to this, and in French, you should be doing this.'<sup>140</sup>

Although Sr Mary was attentive at a micro level to the details of classroom teaching, she was also cognizant of the broader aim of Catholic education to lead children to the Christian faith. She stated in 1972:

The objective of the school is the students' internalisation of Christian values, not merely the handing on of a moral code, nor insistence on regular attendance at religious ceremonies.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Fleming, interview, Brisbane, February 12, 2002, AP.

<sup>139</sup> Foster, interview, Brisbane, October 20, 2003, AP.

<sup>140</sup> Fleming, interview.

<sup>141</sup> SRC annual report, 1972.

### 7.15.1 Forming Agents of Change

With the declining number of Presentation Sisters teaching at St Rita's in the early 1970s, there arose a need to foster and perpetuate the Presentation 'ethos.' To that end, Sr Mary Foster actively recruited teachers from among the past pupils of the college, reflecting the hiring policies of many Catholic schools at that time that sought to preserve the religious charisms (original spirit) of their congregations.<sup>142</sup> A booklet prepared by the Victorian Presentation Congregation in 1972 assisted Presentation communities like St Rita's with the task of maintaining the distinctive charism of Nano Nagle.<sup>143</sup>

In keeping with Vatican II recommendations for religious congregations to rediscover the spirit of their founders, the teachers at St Rita's ensured that students were aware of Nano Nagle's contribution to education and to changing unjust legal and social structures in 18<sup>th</sup> century Ireland.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, Sr Mary frequently emphasised the Presentation ideal of service to others and in 1972 wrote:

We cannot be satisfied with an education that forms in our students an individualistic ideal of personal achievement... We have to imbue them with a profound sense of service to others... it must include that most fundamental and necessary service to society, namely, contributing to a change of those structures and conditions which are oppressive and unjust. Therefore, we in a Catholic school, have to form, as it were, the agents of change and liberation of modern society.<sup>145</sup>

This bore the spirit of post-Vatican II liberation theology that focused on changing unjust structures wherever they existed, an ideal that harmonised with the empowerment and transformation vision of the convent school tradition.

Sr Mary Foster also brought to prominence St Rita's school motto, *Virtute Non Verbis* – 'by deeds, not words.'<sup>146</sup> This emphasis on the Christian ideal of social action found application in the introduction of new service activities at the college, such as an 'Actions not Words Week' initiated by the Senior class in 1977.<sup>147</sup>

Various social justice groups and sodalities modelled on Nano Nagle's example of leadership through service were revitalized in that period. For example, a service activity known as Project Extension was initiated by Sr Elvera Sesta and involved the collection of non-perishable food items for distribution to the local poor. St Rita's students also hosted regular

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<sup>142</sup> Fleming, interview, Brisbane, February 12, 2002, AP.

<sup>143</sup> See Victorian Presentation Congregation, "Heritage: Reflections on the Charism of Nano Nagle," booklet (Victorian Presentation Congregation, 1972).

<sup>144</sup> SRC annual report, 1972, 3.

<sup>145</sup> SRC annual report, 1972.

<sup>146</sup> SRC annual report, 1972, 1.

<sup>147</sup> SRC annual report, 1977, 1.

afternoon teas and concerts for elderly residents in the local area, and they visited such nursing homes as Clifford House, Weewondilla and Melrose. The level of student participation in such activities was reported in the 1971 *Annual* (St Rita's school magazine), which noted that more than half the students at the college were in the YCS.

### 7.15.2 Religious Education (1972-1978)

In the wake of Vatican II, the idea of 'nurturing' students in their faith was generally accepted as a more meaningful approach to teaching religion than that of the question and answer catechism. Religious education in Catholic schools now concentrated on the experience of faith, a method known as 'experiential catecheses'. As Sr Marlette Black in 1984 recalled, discussion and group activities began to characterise the religion classroom when the student and her perception of faith became the focus of learning:

The salvation history wall charts were replaced by collages and butcher paper summaries reflecting personal experience.<sup>148</sup>

Critics of these Vatican II-spawned changes claimed that religious education had lost its impact because of the vagueness of the subject matter. Indeed many Catholic school students began to view religion class as an unimportant period of the day.<sup>149</sup> Addressing such a problem became the key challenge for religious education teachers during the 1970s. The clock, however, could not be turned back. Understandably, not all members of St Rita's school community embraced the Vatican II-inspired reforms; however, there is no evidence that any deep divisions arose over this issue.<sup>150</sup>

The 1970s saw the arrival of the era of Christian Living Camps. At St Rita's, these camps replaced the well-attended retreats of the 1960s, as did reflection days for Years Eight and Nine. The two to three day Christian Living Camps were part of St Rita's religious education program. Reflection days for the younger students were not wholly focused on spirituality, unlike the retreats of the past, but were often developed around the theme of personal relationships. In another key change to St Rita's religious practices, making an individual confession at St Agatha's Church was now optional.

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<sup>148</sup> Marlette Black, "The Catholic School and Religious Education: Crucial Questions for School Administrators," *Catholic School Studies: A Journal of Education for Australian Catholic Schools* 57 (1984): 12-16.

<sup>149</sup> Sr Marlette Black, past pupil (1963-1967), teacher (1973- 1978; 1982-1985) and principal (1986-1988) of SRC, interviewed by the author, Presentation Centre, Clayfield, Brisbane, November 3, 2003, AP.

<sup>150</sup> On the concerns of the Queensland bishops at that time, see Jeffrey Murphy, "The Catholic Church in Queensland on the Eve of Vatican II," *Proceedings of Brisbane Catholic Historical Society* 7 (2000):1-30.

### 7.15.3 Community Celebrations

The demise of the public examinations from 1973 brought to an end the formal deliverance of annual reports at St Rita's. The end of year speech night was accordingly replaced with an annual 'Mass of Thanksgiving,' but the traditional distribution of academic prizes and the 'Principal's Report' were retained. As the school moved forward, significant milestones were celebrated at St Rita's in 1975 and 1976. The year 1975 marked the bi-centenary of the foundation of the Presentation Order by Nano Nagle in Cork, Ireland. It also signalled seventy-five years since the five pioneering Presentation Sisters from Wagga Wagga established the Longreach foundation from where the Clayfield community was derived. To celebrate these milestones, Archbishop Francis Rush led a thanksgiving mass on June 6, 1975 in the Brisbane Festival Hall. The event was well attended by members of St Rita's school community as well as students and staff from Presentation schools throughout Queensland. In the following year, 1976, St Rita's celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. The Clayfield Convent Annals likened the school's fifty years of development to an "acorn that grew into an oak tree," and noted:

No one could predict that the small beginnings of both convent and college, blessed and opened in September 1926 would become the large complex of convent, chapel and college (717 pupils) just fifty years later.<sup>151</sup>

Archbishop Rush and St Agatha's parish priest, Fr Vincent Rowan, con-celebrated the Jubilee Mass in the Festival Hall on September 26.<sup>152</sup> The jubilee celebrations took several forms. Past pupils, parents and friends joined the sisters in the convent grounds for a picnic lunch followed by an 'open house' in Stanley Hall. *The Courier Mail* reported that St Rita's Women's Auxiliary organised an art show and cocktail party at the home of Mr and Mrs McCafferty, and that one of the displayed works was a painting of Stanley Hall by St Rita's student Paula Whitman.<sup>153</sup>

### 7.16 MAINTAINING FEMINIST IDEALS

The profound social and cultural upheaval of the late 1960s and the radicalism of the feminist movement provided the needed impetus for Australian educators to review dominant assumptions about the purposes of women's education. In 1975, governmental policy recommended long-term action to improve girls' self-esteem as well as their competence at school.<sup>154</sup> St Rita's convent high school tradition of empowerment and transformation,

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<sup>151</sup> CCA 1: 88.

<sup>152</sup> St Rita's College, *Souvenir of Golden Jubilee Celebrations*, September, 1976. SRCA.

<sup>153</sup> *The Courier Mail*, September 9, 1976.

<sup>154</sup> Commonwealth Schools Commission, *Girls, Schools and Society* (Canberra: Australian Government Printing Service [hereafter AGPS], 1975).



reflected in the high standards maintained at the college from its beginning, was continued into the 1970s with girls actively encouraged to realise their potential in all areas of school life. Sr Mary Foster remembered that she prevailed upon students to believe:

There was no reason why girls could not achieve as highly as boys and men did. I always felt at St Rita's that girls knew that they had an important role and that they could take on responsibilities. Teachers discussed with their students the importance of women in society and the Church.<sup>155</sup>

That many girls were empowered by St Rita's educational program and their teachers is clear from student perceptions at the time:

The years 1974-1975 have seen the emergence of women in many vital fields. Not since the beginning of this century have we been so vocal in matters of world-wide importance – politics, the arts, equal rights...During the year at St Rita's many interesting and stimulating discussions emanated regarding women's role in today's changing society.<sup>156</sup>

Monica Long (past pupil, 1976-1980) recalled that "through St Rita's my perception of women's ability was reinforced."<sup>157</sup>

### **7.17 MAINTAINING STRONG ACADEMIC IDEALS (1972-1978)**

Of the eighty-six students prepared for the Senior examination in 1971, thirty-one gained Commonwealth University scholarships and ten received Advanced Education scholarships. In 1972, three St Rita's students, Marissa Zavataro, Mary Kennedy and Anne O'Connell, were ranked among the top twenty-five Senior passes in Queensland and were awarded open scholarships to the University of Queensland.<sup>158</sup> Kennedy and O'Connell were joint winners of the State Service Union Bursary and shared prizes as Queensland's top students in the subject of modern history. Commendations followed as *The Courier Mail* reported that "to have three open scholarship winners in the one class is an outstanding achievement for a school."<sup>159</sup> Additionally, Barbara Hall received a Repatriation scholarship and the W H Harris scholarship as well as *The Courier Mail* Bursary in the Senior section of the 1972 Queensland Science Contest.<sup>160</sup> Marissa Zavataro enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Queensland, Mary Kennedy enrolled in Law, Anne O'Connell in Education and Barbara Hall in Science. Hall later completed a Bachelor of Medicine and specialised in Obstetrics. By 1977, other St Rita's students, such as Eileen Ponting, viewed medicine as a suitable career option for women.

<sup>155</sup> Foster, interview, Brisbane, October 20, 2003, AP.

<sup>156</sup> Fiona Burley, Senior 1975, *SRC Annual, 1974/75*, 8. The 1975 *Annual* carried articles on women's issues to mark the International Year of Women.

<sup>157</sup> Monica Long, (Senior 1980), *SRC Annual, 1986*, 63.

<sup>158</sup> "Nine in Top Student List," *The Catholic Leader*, 1972, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>159</sup> "University Studies Ahead," *The Courier Mail*, 1972, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>160</sup> "Student Ingenuity in Science Contest," *The Courier Mail*, 1972, clipping, SRCA.

### 7.17.1 Emulation

As in previous years, past pupils with tertiary qualifications were proposed as role models for St Rita's girls to emulate. The 1973 *Annual* contained glowing academic profiles of several former students. These included recent graduates of the University of Queensland who gained first class honours and were awarded University medals, along with postgraduate and honours scholarships in various faculties. The list of distinguished past pupils also included graduates with academic distinctions from the Conservatorium of Music, the Kelvin Grove Teachers' Training College, and the nurses' training program at the Mater Hospital. With the increasing number of Queensland women in the 1970s who were St Rita's past pupils, Sr Assumpta O'Flynn began to compile scrapbooks for the college library that showcased the varied achievements of these women.

St Rita's Presentation sisters proved strong role models for girls to emulate. Jane Bieger, née Nixon (past pupil, 1971-1975) remembered the Presentation sisters as empowering and transforming women:

[The 1970s] was a time when women were stretching the boundaries, redefining what it meant to be a woman, asking questions and demanding answers. So attending a school staffed almost exclusively by strong-willed, independent, intelligent women was a real gift. The nuns at St Rita's were pushing boundaries of their own. They helped us become as strong-willed, independent and thoughtful as they were.<sup>161</sup>

These well-educated, cultured, and socially aware religious women clearly imparted a multi-dimensional image of womanhood that enabled their students to broaden their self-perceptions.

## 7.18 FORMING ARTICULATE AND CULTURED WOMEN

### 7.18.1 Public Speaking and Debating

Throughout the 1970s, efforts by St Rita's teachers enabled girls to excel at debating and public speaking - areas traditionally regarded the dominion of men. School initiatives such as lunchtime speaking sessions, team debates and forum discussions encouraged broad student participation. Consequently, St Rita's entered several teams in the annual inter-school debating competitions and gained outstanding results.<sup>162</sup> In 1971, it was a St Rita's student, Anne Kortluck, who had the distinction of being the first girl to captain the Queensland Debating team. In 1977, Shannon Gregory, also from St Rita's, became the second girl to do so. When Gregory's team won the Australian Secondary Schools' debating championship in

<sup>161</sup> Jane Bieger née Nixon, past pupil (1971-1975), memoir. *SRC Annual*, 1996, 68.

<sup>162</sup> In 1973, SRC and St Ursula's in Yeppoon were the only Catholic secondary schools among nine finalists from 170 competing schools in the Apex Debating Championships. *The Catholic Leader*, June 1973, 22; *SRC Annual*, 1973, 25.

Sydney in 1977, she went on to become the first girl to captain the Australian Schools' Debating Team.<sup>163</sup>

### 7.18.2 Speech and Drama

In the early 1970s, the BSSS in Queensland approved speech and drama as a BSSS subject, replacing the speech and drama syllabus of the AMEB. Many St Rita's students, however, continued to be presented for the speech and drama examinations conducted by the AMEB, which had retained its reputation as an esteemed examining body. In 1972, 145 St Rita's students were prepared for these examinations. Their drama teacher, Sr Jacinta McMahon, suggested at that time:

The effectiveness of any subject in the school is not to be gauged in terms of mere numbers, but by the interest it engenders and the stimulus it gives to students to pursue their interest... these girls carry with them from the school, an interest in literature and the theatre that will be a source of great enrichment and satisfaction to them in the years ahead.<sup>164</sup>

St Rita's drama group now presented productions on a much larger scale than in previous years. The success of *Pygmalion* and *Pride and Prejudice* in 1970 and 1971 respectively, led to the introduction of the school's first musical, *The Boyfriend*, in 1972.<sup>165</sup> This appealing parody of the 'roaring twenties' and the Charleston era was set around a girls' finishing school on the French Riviera. By all accounts the production involving more than seventy girls was highly professional. Indeed the attention to detail in St Rita's musicals equated with that of a theatre company. For the *Boyfriend* set, Sr Jacinta obtained from families and friends a genuine Edison gramophone, an old hook-telephone and a 1920s garden seat. Annette Murphy, who played Maisie, wore a beaded Charleston dress that her grandmother purchased in Paris in the 1920s.<sup>166</sup>

A series of drama and musical productions have been performed since at St Rita's up to the present time, including *Toad of Toad Hall* in 1973, *Oliver* in 1974 and *Quality Street* in 1977. Such productions always involved a large cast of students as actors, singers, dancers and back stage assistants. Years Ten to Twelve art students designed and produced the sets and backdrops in the time of Sr Dominica (Pamela) Bright, while talented students, such as Vivian Splatt (Senior 1974), provided direction with choreography.<sup>167</sup> Occasionally, boys from St Columban's school assisted; for example, Michael Costigan played drums in *The Boyfriend*.

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<sup>163</sup> *The Courier Mail*, 1977, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>164</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1972, 48.

<sup>165</sup> Sr Jacinta McMahon, in discussion with the author, Brisbane, March 2004.

<sup>166</sup> *The Courier Mail*, July, 1972, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>167</sup> See SRC Annuals, 1972-1975.

Sr Jacinta's expertise in producing and directing St Rita's drama evenings was highly esteemed by students and staff. One of her students, Catherine Sullivan, paid the following tribute to her in 1973:

Without the help of Sr Jacinta, who has been a tremendous encouragement to me, I would never have sustained my interest. Her tremendous ability to slip into any character astounds everyone...she has always made herself available to students.<sup>168</sup>

### 7.18.3 Music Education

When music became a Board subject in Queensland secondary schools in 1972, music and singing could be heard at St Rita's at any time of the day. As St Rita's was a pilot school for the new course, elective music was introduced in Year Nine with the view to extending it to Senior level. At that time, the unmistakable sound of recorders being played by music students frequently interrupted the quiet hush of the school.

The Presentation Sisters remained involved in St Rita's music program, helping maintain the school's high standards in instrumental music, singing and choral performance. The college choir, led by Srs Mary Ryan and Zoe Fitzpatrick burgeoned during the 1970s. Impressively, there were over 200 members, around a third of the student body, in the combined Senior and Junior choir in 1973. St Rita's held its first annual music camp in 1970 at Camp Cal, Caloundra on the Sunshine Coast north of Brisbane, an instance of the sisters' readiness to adopt initiatives that would encourage student talent.<sup>169</sup>

While classical music retained its primacy in St Rita's music concerts, the sisters adapted to the times, and arranged musical evenings in which students also performed compositions of Nana Mouskouri, Cat Stevens and the like. The sisters themselves often performed in the concerts. For example, a concert program from 1974 indicates that Sr Kathleen Fanton accompanied as the orchestra played Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusick*.<sup>170</sup>

### 7.19 SPORT (1960-1978)

The addition of a school pool enabled St Rita's to hold its first swimming carnival in April 1960. The following year, the college competed for the first time in the Catholic Girls' Secondary School Swimming Carnival and gained third place.<sup>171</sup> In again the following year, St Rita's overall performance improved to second position. Among the outstanding swimmers of that period was Jenny Steinbeck, whose father trained the school swimming team. In 1968,

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<sup>168</sup> SRC Annual, 1973/74.

<sup>169</sup> SRC Annual, 73, 52.

<sup>170</sup> SRC College Concert Program, 1974. SRCA.

<sup>171</sup> SRC annual report, 1961.

Jenny was still a student at St Rita's when she trained in freestyle under Mr Don Talbot.<sup>172</sup> She was also a member of the Australian Olympic swimming squad in the Mexico City Olympics. In the following year, she won the James Duhig Cup for the 50 metres freestyle race in the Catholic Girls' Secondary School Competition.<sup>173</sup>

St Rita's continued to dominate in tennis and won the Archbishop O'Donnell Cup (for the highest number of premierships) in 1960 and the next two years in succession.<sup>174</sup> In 1964, it also won the Archbishop Duhig Shield for the 'A' grade premiership.

In 1969, Sr Moira replaced St Rita's weekly half-hour physical culture lessons with classes in ballet and deportment. Most girls also welcomed lessons in ballroom dancing as useful preparation for the annual college dance. Sr Moira explained at the time that:

Dancing is good for girls – it develops them and is more graceful than physical jerks...if girls are taught graceful and beautiful dances they will not be forced merely to perform the contortions that so often go by the name of dancing nowadays.<sup>175</sup>

Sr Moira employed past pupil Patricia MacDonald (1930s - 1946) as the dance teacher. She had been a professional dancer while still at school.<sup>176</sup>

In the early 1970s, Miss Maria Drobinski was appointed St Rita's first full-time coordinator of physical education. She coached almost all of the school's sporting teams and introduced new sports including hockey and softball, along with American basketball which was gaining popularity in Australia. When softball was introduced at the college in 1972, two teams entered the inter-school competition and reached the finals. The Senior softball teams won premierships in 1973 and again in 1974. Similarly, premierships were won by St Rita's Netball teams whose coaches included Srs Patrice Cuthbert, Timothy (Mary) Franzmann and Dianne Hearn.<sup>177</sup> The swimming team was particularly strong at this time and achieved second place in the inter-school competitions in 1974 and 1975. St Rita's swimmers competed in the Scarborough Carnival as well, and in 1975 won the competition that earned them the Monsignor Frawley Cup.<sup>178</sup> The college continued to participate in these 'friendly' swimming meetings with other girls' schools. Likewise, the tradition of friendly sporting competitions with sister school, St Ursula's College, Yeppoon, was maintained.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> *The Courier Mail*, 1968, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>173</sup> *The Courier Mail*, 1969, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>174</sup> SRC annual reports, 1960-62; *The Catholic Leader*, 1960, 1964 and 1971, clippings, SRCA.

<sup>175</sup> *The Catholic Leader* 1969, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>176</sup> Sr Consilia Ring, reminiscences.

<sup>177</sup> Netball premierships were recorded for the 'A1' team in 1972, the 'B1' and 'D1' teams in 1973 and the 'A' and 'B' teams in 1975.

<sup>178</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1974/75, 66.

<sup>179</sup> Sr Assumpta O'Flynn, discussion, Brisbane, October 30, 2001.

Success in tennis continued as usual. For three consecutive years from 1973 to 1975, St Rita's won the Archbishop O'Donnell Cup for overall success in the inter-school Catholic Girls' Tennis Competition.<sup>180</sup> While the tennis teams were mainly coached by Presentation Sisters, including Srs Kathleen Tynan, Elvera Sesta, Judith Murphy, and Mary Ryan,<sup>181</sup> specialist tennis coaches were also employed, this reflecting a commitment to educational excellence in all areas of school life.<sup>182</sup> In an historical first, St Rita's won the T. C. Beirne Cup in inter-school athletics in 1973 and went on to retain the Cup for the next two years.

The professionalisation of sport in Australia, however, had begun to impact on school competitions. In 1977, the inter-school athletics competition was held for the first time at the new QE2 sports complex at Mt Gravatt. The speed-enhancing tartan track replaced the uneven turf of Lang Park at Milton and St Rita's athletes began to wear the latest sports' apparel. Bare feet were rarely seen on the track or field, as young athletes donned lightweight running shoes and spikes. Aerodynamically snug pants replaced loose sports skirts, bloomers and shorts. The inter-school athletics carnival was gradually transformed from an amateur style of competition into one worthy of elite performances.

## CONCLUSION - LOOKING AHEAD

This chapter demonstrated that St Rita's Presentation Sisters proved capable of adapting to the immense social and educational pressures of the 1960s and '70s, and of introducing changes that best answered the educational needs of girls. It established that the sisters' planned responses to educational change included initiatives such as capping enrolments, returning St Agatha's primary school to the archdiocese, and creating the St Rita's College Association. This chapter also demonstrated that St Rita's students were strongly encouraged by their teachers to proceed to Senior and higher education, to reach high standards in all branches of the curriculum, including sport, and to become articulate, socially aware women who embodied the empowerment and transformational ideals of Catholic women's education. Past pupil Jane Bieger, née Nixon confirmed:

We were encouraged to explore our identities...St Rita's had a reputation for excellence. Whatever we did we put heart and soul into it and did it to the best of our ability, whether it was the school play or the inter-school sports day. That is a gift that has stood by me throughout my career.<sup>183</sup>

<sup>180</sup> SRC was awarded the Archbishop O'Donnell Cup in 1973 for premierships in the 'A', 'D', and 'E' grades, then in 1974 for the 'C', 'D' and 'E' sections and again in 1975 for the 'B', 'D,' and 'E' grades. See SRC *Annals 1973*, 58 and *1974/75*, 65.

<sup>181</sup> Mary Ryan later transferred to the Benedictine Sisters in Sydney and as at 2011 continues a strong interest in her Presentation links as a former St Rita's pupil and Presentation Sister. MacGinley, discussion, March 2009.

<sup>182</sup> Sr Assumpta O'Flynn remembered the coaching provided by Mrs Daphne Fancutt, Mr Brendan O'Shea, Mr Neil Murray and Mr Brian Voss.

<sup>183</sup> Bieger, memoir.

The teaching sisters adapted past traditions to women's current needs and to educational trends, which trends they critiqued against their own objectives in order to select changes that would best serve women. In 1966, Sr Moira stated that:

Planning for children's development should not result in a mad dash for the new look...every innovation is assessed by us when it appears on the educational scene. If it is worthwhile, we want it for the college; if it is just an innovation for the sake of innovation, it is rejected.<sup>184</sup>

There is no indication that the sisters resisted change. In fact the Presentation educational resolve to remain forward-looking yet practical was explicit in the preamble of the school's prospectus in 1967:

Change is the keynote of our mid-20<sup>th</sup> century...change begets change. A college which ignores these facts is headed for stagnation – cut off, as it is, from the forward thrust of life which marks a great school as a dynamic educational institution...the future belongs to the best educated.<sup>185</sup>

Moreover, students at St Rita's perceived the sisters as women of their times, and open to new ideas and change. Jenny Lee, née Mc Eniery confirmed:

We didn't think we had missed the revolution of the sixties. We thought we were right in the middle of change. St Rita's offered a very open intellectual climate within which to test the ideas of the time.<sup>186</sup>

By the late 1970s, St Rita's had gained a confident and ever-growing sense of its purpose and place within Brisbane's broader educational scene. A major task of this chapter has been to profile leading women educators such as Sr Moira Creede, Mother Veronica Casey and Sr Mary Foster who have not figured up till now in histories of Catholic education in Brisbane. The chapter endeavoured to judge St Rita's educational outcomes against the sisters' aims. Its analysis of this dominant question of the thesis revealed the numerous and varied achievements of the sisters and their students. Indeed the chapter found that a range of outcomes reflected the sisters' aims to empower girls. This could be seen as praise, but such outcomes were carefully documented.

The coming chapter will examine the transformational ideals and efforts of Srs Kathleen Tynan and Marlette Black who enhanced St Rita's reputation as a leading educational institution for young women in Brisbane between 1979 and 1988.

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<sup>184</sup> Sr Moira Creede, SRC Association Address, 1966.

<sup>185</sup> *St Rita's College Prospectus: 1967*. SRCA.

<sup>186</sup> Jenny Lee, née Mc Eniery, recollections.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### STRENGTHENING THE TRANSFORMATIONAL VISION OF EDUCATION

1979 – 1988

#### INTRODUCTION

This chapter will examine how socio-educational, technological and economic pressures impacted on St Rita's development during the 1980s. It will demonstrate that Srs Kathleen Tynan and Marlette Black introduced wide-ranging changes at St Rita's in response to such pressures during their respective administrations from 1979 to 1988. The chapter will further develop the argument of this thesis that the aspirations and outcomes of St Rita's school community reflected the empowerment and transformation traditions of the convent high school. It will show that the extensive changes undertaken by St Rita's reform-minded principals at that time contributed to the progress of women's education in Queensland generally.

#### 8.1 A NEW ERA IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

In 1979, St Rita's Year Twelve students, Helen Kelly and Gabrielle Russell, described the many changes introduced during Sr Kathleen Tynan's first year as principal that year, as signalling a new era for the college:

The changes we have seen between 1978 and 1979 are many and varied. The school has welcomed in 1979, a different administrative staff in the persons of Srs Kathleen Tynan and Elvera Sesta, several new buildings, a change in uniform and timetables, and the introduction of extra-curricular activities on a Thursday afternoon, as well as many other innovations. 1979 marks the beginning of a new era for St Rita's.<sup>1</sup>

By the late 1970s, a majority of students across Australia remained at school until the completion of Year Twelve, mainly due to high levels of youth unemployment. In Queensland, there had been widespread dissatisfaction with the Radford system and this led the BSSS to review its moderation and assessment procedures. The Board commissioned a report that was published in 1978 entitled, *A Review of School-Based Assessment in Queensland Secondary Schools*, known by the acronym, ROSBA.<sup>2</sup> By the early 1980s, ROSBA had replaced the Radford scheme in all Queensland schools. The new system used a less competitive framework for assessing students and brought radical change to the secondary school curriculum. Additionally, secondary schools were urged to broaden their curricula in response to a wide range of student needs and aptitudes and to renew emphasis on

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<sup>1</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1979, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Board of Secondary School Studies, *A Review of School-Based Assessment in Queensland Secondary Schools* (Brisbane: Board of Secondary School Studies [hereafter cited as BSSS], 1978).



vocational education. The question of how St Rita's responded to these challenges under the principalship of Sr Kathleen Tynan will now be answered, beginning with a brief biography of Sr Kathleen.

## **8.2 SR KATHLEEN TYNAN, PRINCIPAL (1979-1985)**

Kathleen Tynan was a student at St Rita's College from 1949 to 1962. In her Senior year, she achieved the highest academic award, dux of the college.<sup>3</sup> All her teachers from kindergarten to Year Twelve were Presentation Sisters, and her admiration for them had influenced her to join the congregation. She entered the Presentation novitiate in Manly in 1963 and after completing training there she attended McAuley Teachers' Training College in Brisbane.<sup>4</sup> Sr Kathleen taught at St Rita's from 1969 to 1975, and in that time she also studied at Queensland University towards a Bachelor of Science degree, later changed to a Bachelor of Arts. In 1976, she was transferred to St Ursula's in Yeppoon where she taught for three years, and then was appointed principal of St Rita's, Clayfield, in 1979. She is remembered for instigating major change and for her collaborative approach in planning future directions. She was well liked by students, parents and staff of St Rita's with whom she maintained harmonious relationships.<sup>5</sup> In 1984, St Rita's school captain, Elizabeth Stafford, spoke of the affection that Sr Kathleen inspired in others:

I am truly grateful to Sr Kathleen. Her wisdom and kindness radiate throughout St Rita's.<sup>6</sup>

At the completion of her time as principal of St Rita's, Sr Kathleen obtained a postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration at Queensland University of Technology. She proved a capable administrator in her elected role as 'Major Superior' of the Queensland Presentation Sisters (later known as Congregational Leader) from 1988 to 1994. In 1996 she was elected President of the Society of Australian Presentation Congregations, a position that she continued to hold for two five year terms until 2006.

## **8.3 CENTRALITY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

With the changes recommended by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) in the area of religious education, as outlined in the previous chapter, some parents feared that Catholic schools would become less effective in passing on Catholic beliefs and morals to their children. Mrs Pamela Townsley, St Rita's Religious Education Coordinator (REC) from 1979

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<sup>3</sup> Honour Board, Trinity Hall, St Rita's College, Clayfield.

<sup>4</sup> Sr Kathleen Tynan, past pupil (1949-1962), teacher (1969-1975) and principal (1979-1985) of SRC, interviewed by the author, Brisbane, October 29, 2003, AP.

<sup>5</sup> Clare Campbell née Coman (past pupil, 1979-1983) in discussion with the author, Brisbane, August 2010.

<sup>6</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1984, 9.

to 1982, stated in 1979 that St Rita's had embraced the post-conciliar changes while past methods in religious education were also respected:

The policy of the school has been both welcoming of the growth and changes that have followed from Vatican II and yet sensitive to past ideas and modes of teaching the Christian message. At a time when religious educational ideas are open to both criticism and praise, the thorough going attempt at St Rita's to avoid polarisation and yet allow no damaging compromise to occur, is something to be proud of.<sup>7</sup>

This moderate approach was continued by Sr Marlette Black, St Rita's REC from 1983 to 1985. In this period, Sr Marlette published several influential articles in *Catholic School Studies: A Journal of Education for Australian Catholic Schools*, examining the diminishing involvement of Catholic schools in the Church's evangelising mission.<sup>8</sup>

Some Catholics were appalled by innovations in school liturgies. At St Rita's, there were occasions when innovative liturgies were reported as radical to church officialdom, attracting their watchful eye. For example, Mrs Kay Herse, St Rita's deputy principal from 1987 to 1991, recalled certain "visitations" from Archdiocesan personnel:

We got 'visited' because at the annual Thanksgiving [Mass]...the Communion plate was passed down the rows, and Eucharistic Ministers held a candle. Someone reported us and [a church official] came out for a 'please explain'.<sup>9</sup>

### 8.3.1 Introducing Study of Religion as a Board Subject

In the early 1980s, St Rita's was among the first secondary schools in Queensland to introduce Study of Religion (SOR) as an academic subject in Years Eleven and Twelve. The Board of Secondary School Studies (BSSS) had approved SOR for inclusion in the determination of tertiary entrance (TE) scores required for admission to tertiary institutions. At that time, Sr Marlette was a member of the Association of Australian Religious Education (AARE) and was asked by the BSSS to appraise and trial the new syllabus.<sup>10</sup> The BSSS had received the initial proposal and syllabus for SOR from Villanova College at Coorparoo in Brisbane.<sup>11</sup> By 1989, the approved syllabus focused on the nature of religion through the study of Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism and Christian Scriptures, the history of Christianity and philosophical viewpoints on the meaning and purpose of life.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1979, 8.

<sup>8</sup> As an example, see Marlette Black, "The Catholic School and Religious Education."

<sup>9</sup> Kay Herse, deputy principal of SRC (1987-1991), interviewed by author, Brisbane, November 17, 2002, AP.

<sup>10</sup> Black, interview, Brisbane, November 3, 2003, AP.

<sup>11</sup> Fr Laurence Mooney, principal of Villanova College, Coorparoo (1976-87) and Provincial of the Australian Province of the Order of St Augustine (1990-98) in discussion with the author, Brisbane, October, 2006. Two teachers from Villanova wrote the initial draft syllabus.

<sup>12</sup> Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (BSSSS), *Senior Syllabus in Study of Religion* (Brisbane: BSSSS, 1989), 20-47.

Srs Kathleen and Marlette took the additional step of offering SOR as a compulsory subject in Years Eleven and Twelve, bringing St Rita's to the forefront of developments in religious education. Sr Marlette recalled that:

A lot of time went into making Study of Religion a credible academic subject towards the TE score. So it was a pivotal time to be the Religious Education Coordinator. We were one of the few schools that made it compulsory, so in a way it was a trail blazing time.<sup>13</sup>

Sr Marlette recalled that a major shift of consciousness for both teachers and parents was that the Catholic school was now teaching students *about* religion rather than evangelising them:

It was a great challenge to the Catholic school....Introducing a subject that taught *about* religion and not just Christianity but also other religions caused a lot of upset among many people.<sup>14</sup>

Some parents claimed that the compulsory aspect of SOR at St Rita's would disadvantage their daughters in their TE score. They wished to see SOR offered as an elective subject as proposed in other schools. Sr Marlette recalled that three difficult years followed when parent-teacher meetings went "beyond tense, because some parents were quite aggressive."<sup>15</sup>

When the first Year Eleven cohort of SOR students completed Year Twelve, it was apparent that their TE scores had not been adversely affected by the policy. Despite this, some parents remained so adverse that they removed their daughters from St Rita's. Villanova College had also offered SOR on a compulsory basis, and it too experienced similar opposition from parents in those initial years.<sup>16</sup>

#### 8.4 IMPLEMENTING EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Under the new ROSBA (1978) scheme, all secondary schools in Queensland including St Rita's were once again involved in curriculum and assessment restructuring. The norm-based Radford system of assessing student achievement was replaced by a competency or criteria-based system of assessment.<sup>17</sup> Sr Kathleen Tynan's task as principal was to provide the necessary support and infrastructure to enable ROSBA to come into operation at St Rita's. She personally led most of the training sessions on the new procedures to assist teachers at St Rita's, and by 1985 newly accredited ROSBA work programs were introduced at the college in Years Nine and Eleven.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Black, interview, Brisbane, November 3, 2003, AP.

<sup>14</sup> Black, interview.

<sup>15</sup> Loreto College, Coorparoo, introduced SOR as an elective in the religious education program.

<sup>16</sup> Ryan, *One Mind One Heart*, 92.

<sup>17</sup> BSSS, *A Review of School-Based Assessment*.

<sup>18</sup> Tynan, interview, Brisbane, October 29, 2003, AP.

Overall significant changes arising from ROSBA impacted on secondary schools. All syllabi were rewritten and teachers constructed work programs according to ROSBA principles.<sup>19</sup> The BSSS became responsible for issuing a Junior Certificate at the end of Year Ten and a Senior School Certificate at the end of Year Twelve. Schools could also issue School Leaving Certificates containing information about a student such as their application to study.<sup>20</sup> ROSBA affirmed the primacy of the school curriculum and as such encouraged schools to broaden their secondary curricula, which for the Catholic teaching sisters was a firm validation of their distinctively holistic curricula.

#### 8.4.1 Broadening the Curriculum

Although the curriculum of Catholic girls' colleges, such as St Rita's, was traditionally broad and usually included a vocational strand such as commercial and business studies, additional courses were also developed in response to the diverse needs of a swelling band of Year Twelve students. As youth unemployment levels rose and the Australian economy from 1982 slipped into recession, the number of students completing Year Twelve, particularly girls, increased considerably.<sup>21</sup> With women's increased participation in paid employment, the percentage of girls completing secondary school in Queensland increased from forty per cent in 1979 to seventy per cent in 1988.<sup>22</sup> Across Australia, girls consistently completed more years of schooling than boys did in a trend that continued into the 1990s. At St Rita's, there were ninety-eight Year Twelve students in 1979 and by 1989 this number had increased by twenty-one.<sup>23</sup> Enrolments, however, continued to be capped at fewer than 650 students to maintain the effective operation of the school.

The teaching sisters in Australia had traditionally played a significant role in broadening the career aspirations and educational goals of girls in Catholic secondary colleges, as has been seen. Sr Kathleen Tynan recognised that additional courses were required for girls not wishing to pursue tertiary studies:

The school was not meeting the needs of some students. The idea of setting an alternative course was to try and meet the needs of all students – that is part of the Presentation charism.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See Eddie Clarke, *Assessment in Queensland Secondary Schools: Two Decades of Change 1964-1983* (Brisbane: Department of Education Queensland 1987), 27.

<sup>20</sup> BSSS, *A Review of School-Based Assessment*, 11-14.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Teese and University of Melbourne, Department of Education Policy and Management, *Who Wins at School? Boys and Girls in Australian Secondary Education* (Canberra: AGPS, 1995), 3.

<sup>22</sup> Teese, *Who Wins at School?* 26, Table of Figures.

<sup>23</sup> See SRC Annuals 1979 and 1989.

<sup>24</sup> Tynan, interview, Brisbane, October 29, 2003, AP.

Accordingly, St Rita's offered additional or 'extra' English and mathematics subjects in Years Eight to Ten for students who experienced difficulty with basic literacy and numeracy. Additionally, Years Eleven and Twelve students were offered what was called a certificate course, which included TAFE subjects that required relevant work experience together with academic study. It was envisaged that students in the certificate course would pursue particular areas of interest and develop realistic expectations about the world of work. General maths was also offered in Years 11 and 12 as an alternative to the BSSS maths I and maths II courses. Furthermore, a business practice course that covered basic business principles was offered in addition to the existing subject of business studies. Lourdes Hill College at Hawthorne, offered an alternative program to Board subjects for which the Good Samaritan Sisters constructed a new building named the "Student Centre for On-going Participation in Education", known as SCOPE.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Villanova College for boys offered an additional year of preparation for Senior studies between Years Ten and Eleven, known as Senior Preparatory Year (SPY).<sup>26</sup>

Sr Kathleen Tynan recalled that the certificate course at St Rita's was difficult to promote as an alternative to the academic curriculum because of the school's strong academic tradition. Moreover, students in Queensland secondary schools often disparagingly labelled such programs as 'veggie' or 'mickey mouse' courses, suggesting they allowed a substandard effort on the student's part. Sr Kathleen remembered:

It was difficult for some students [undertaking the certificate course]...There was a sense that your worth was tied up with this...particularly in a school where the academic was so highly valued.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, St Rita's continued to provide 'alternative' courses, such as the school-based subject film and television, which aimed to develop student communication and media skills. Indeed several students from this course moved on to successful careers in journalism. For example, at the time of writing, Sandra Fry and Rachael Mealey both worked for the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC). Sr Marlette recalled other satisfying outcomes of the 'alternative' courses:

I used to feel happy that those young women could stand up in front of the school with poise and to speak. They left the college with confidence in themselves which I think is what Presentation education is all about.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> D'Arcy, "History of Lourdes Hill," 106.

<sup>26</sup> Ryan, *One Mind One Heart*, 117.

<sup>27</sup> Tynan, interview, Brisbane, October 29, 2003, AP.

<sup>28</sup> Black, interview, Brisbane, November 3, 2003, AP.

This recurring emphasis on poise and confidence that characterises the history of Catholic women's education was particularly evident during Sr Moira Creede's principalship in the 1960s and is instanced in Mother Aloysius's comments of the 1930s, as has been seen.

### 8.5 MAINTAINING THE HOLISTIC EDUCATION TRADITION

When Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser claimed in 1980 that "children were being sent out of school unable to read, write or add to an acceptable standard,"<sup>29</sup> there followed governmental reviews and development of new policies for the training of secondary students for the workforce. At St Rita's, Sr Kathleen Tynan rejected the reduction of education to a mere preparation for employment, and insisted that the holistic aim of education was all-important. She stated in the 1981 *Annual* that the emphasis at St Rita's was on striving "for academic excellence, for fitness, for constructive leisure and for full personal development."<sup>30</sup> This in turn was fulfilled in the experience of many students. For example, in 1980, Monica Long in Year Twelve affirmed that St Rita's did not provide a purely market driven curriculum:

Through St Rita's I have been able to discover many different worlds, and at least begin to question and think. School should be much more than a place 'to get you into a job'. It should be a place to teach a person to understand what it is to be alive, with all its emotions, hopes, dreams, struggle and pain. I have been blessed with a well-equipped school and qualified teachers who have helped me to develop such an understanding of life.<sup>31</sup>

Teresa Benedetti, School Captain in 1981, similarly referred to her experience of the multidimensional nature of education at St Rita's:

St Rita's has given us more than the opportunity for academic learning; it has provided us with a pathway for personal discovery, growth and development. St Rita's has fostered an atmosphere of acceptance, tolerance, understanding and perseverance which has helped us to define ourselves both as individuals and as members of society.<sup>32</sup>

A historical feature of the convent high school was revived at St Rita's in 1979 by a program of enrichment activities that further broadened the curriculum. The activities were as diverse as squash, pottery, photography, golf, film, drama, first aid, judo, tai-kwon-do, gymnastics, yoga, sailing, fencing, cooking, jazz ballet, roller skating, hockey, community service, visits to places of interest, canoeing on Breakfast Creek, bowling, computing, calligraphy, leatherwork, touch football, ballroom dancing and guitar.<sup>33</sup> According to Sr Elvera Sesta, an important aim of the program was to build self-esteem and confidence in girls.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 15, 1980, cited in Barcan, *A History of Australian Education*, 397.

<sup>30</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1981, 3.

<sup>31</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1980.

<sup>32</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1981, 8.

<sup>33</sup> See *SRC Annuals*, 1979-85. Community service included helping children at Newstead Special School.

<sup>34</sup> Sesta, interview, Brisbane, January 16, 2002, AP.

### 8.5.1 Vocation-oriented Courses - Work Experience

At the beginning of 1979, St Rita's offered workplace experience to students in anticipation of the Queensland Government legislation enacted that year mandating work experience for secondary students in government schools.<sup>35</sup> St Rita's work experience program was designed to enable girls to explore a diverse range of career options.<sup>36</sup> Thus students were placed for three days in workplaces ranging from educational institutes, nursing homes, dental and medical clinics, publishing houses, radio stations, hospitals, television studios, farms, theatres and Judges' chambers.<sup>37</sup> In consciously broadening the career options available to girls, the teachers at St Rita's were clearly confronting and eroding any narrow understandings of women's work at that time.

By 1987, the provision of vocational education was brought more definitively into the ambit of secondary schooling when the Federal Labor Government abolished unemployment benefits for 16 and 17 year olds.<sup>38</sup> This policy aimed to reduce the large number of youth moving directly from school to long-term unemployment by removing the financial incentive for them to leave the education system. Focus now shifted away from unemployment benefits and on to training programs as the Government called upon secondary schools and tertiary institutions to provide training that was specific for the workplace. By that year, St Rita's was already providing vocationally oriented programs such as the Careers Education Course for all Year Ten students.<sup>39</sup>

### 8.5.2 Education in a Technological World

Computer literacy was introduced at St Rita's at a time when computer technology was relatively unknown to teachers in Queensland. For example, in the early 1980s, St Rita's Senior maths II students were accompanied by their teacher, Mrs Williams, to Kedron Park Teachers' College to use "punch-card fed" computers. In 1983, a much wider use of computers became possible when the college purchased fifteen Micro-Bee Microcomputers that stored data on reel to reel tape recorders. Initially, they were used to record, collate and analyse student marks and to create timetables, exit statements and certificates. Then in 1984 computing was offered to students within the optional weekly activities program. The new

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<sup>35</sup> Ted Hobbs, *Evaluation of Work Experience Programs for Queensland State Secondary Students – 1981* (Brisbane: Department of Education Queensland, 1982), 1.

<sup>36</sup> Sesta, interview, Brisbane, January 16, 2002, AP.

<sup>37</sup> See SRC Annuals, 1979, 48; 1980, 18; 1981, 18.

<sup>38</sup> "Look How Far We've Come: One Hundred Years of VET in Australia," *Australian Training Review* 40 (October 2001): 4-10. See also, "Youth forced to stay at school by axing of dole," *The Australian*, 1987, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>39</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1987, 94.

technology soon spread to other areas of college life that involved the transmission, recording and storing of information.<sup>40</sup>

Sr Kathleen Tynan recalled that in 1983 St Rita's first computer laboratory was opened in response to the new technology and to parental requests:

I felt initially that students were coming through in primary schools with some knowledge of computers. There was parental pressure to introduce computer education...parents through the Parents and Friends Association kept coming at us until we took it on, which is good to acknowledge.<sup>41</sup>

## 8.6 IMPORTANT CROSSROADS IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION

In Sr Kathleen's time, the number of Presentation Sisters available for teaching at St Rita's was rapidly declining and the trend seemed irreversible.<sup>42</sup> The phasing out of the enclosure requirement had allowed religious institutes like the Presentations to enter apostolates other than teaching. Sr Assumpta O'Flynn recalled that the teaching commitment and enclosure had generally confined the Presentation Sisters to convent school environments:

Before the mid-1960s the Presentation Sisters didn't go out to visit people - they stayed within the convent grounds. When going into town we couldn't go on our own; we had to take a companion. We couldn't have afternoon tea with our families nor could we eat with secular people - we ate our food separately. These were the remnants of enclosure. It was not possible for us to visit the sick and aged as Nano Nagle did.<sup>43</sup>

From 1989 to 2000, however, Sr Anne Maree Jensen's work in south-western Queensland exemplified the fields, other than teaching, into which the Presentation Sisters were now moving so as to improve the lives of Queenslanders. Sr Anne routinely flew a light plane from Longreach to remote stations across the vast State to minister to families, provide companionship to isolated women, and bring priests to provide masses and assist her.<sup>44</sup>

### 8.6.1 Educating and Forming Lay Teachers in the Catholic Education Tradition

With the diminishing presence of the sisters at St Rita's and the increasing number of lay teachers and students who were not Catholic, the question of how to maintain the school's Presentation tradition became pressing. The need arose in Catholic colleges like St Rita's, for school administrators to educate lay teachers in the philosophy of Catholic education and to support their development in spirituality. New programs coached teachers to reconceptualise

<sup>40</sup> See SRC Annuals, 1983, 3; 1989, 74; Tynan, interview, Brisbane, October 29, 2003, AP.

<sup>41</sup> Tynan, interview. Mr Denis Bridger was St Rita's first computer education teacher.

<sup>42</sup> Based on a comparison of staff lists in the 1979 and 1980 SRC Annuals.

<sup>43</sup> O'Flynn, interview, Brisbane, October 30, 2001, AP.

<sup>44</sup> Marilyn Rodrigues, "A Conversation with Sr Anne Maree Jensen," *The Catholic Weekly*, June 5, 2005, accessed July 30, 2011,

<http://www.catholicweekly.com.au/article.php?classID=3&subclassID=9&articleID=919&class=Features%subclass=A%20conversation%20with.html>.



teaching as a form of ‘ministry’ or vocation. Vatican II documents including *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* and *The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, embraced numerous forms of lay ministry, among which the ministry of teaching retained great significance.<sup>45</sup> In 1982, the Vatican document, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, provided a theological rationale for teachers accepting a “personal vocation in the Church.”<sup>46</sup>

During the 1980s in Australia, the notion that teachers in Catholic schools were participating in the overall mission of the Church was advanced by the National Catholic Education Commission and various Catholic educationists in each State.<sup>47</sup> In Queensland, Maria Harris in her book, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, provided a set of principles that helped reconceptualise teaching as a vocation.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, Kevin Treston, an influential adult faith educator in Brisbane at that time, provided a framework for Catholic schools for understanding the ‘vocation’ of teaching, in contrast to the secular industrial model advanced by trade unionists.<sup>49</sup> It is important to note here that throughout the 1980s, industrial relations between the Queensland Teachers’ Union (QTU) and the Brisbane Catholic Education Office (BCEO) reached historic lows. Vincent O’Rourke, Director of Brisbane Catholic Education from 1983 to 1998, recalled the continuous confrontation between BCEO and the Union:

It would be accurate to say that for ten years from 1983 the Archdiocesan system was one of the main bodies to appear before the State Industrial Commission in arbitration and conciliation.<sup>50</sup>

The issue of having to reconcile the two, often conflicting, vocational and industrial models of teaching at St Rita’s will be taken up in the next chapter.

## 8.7 MAINTAINING THE PRESENTATION ETHOS

A significant hallmark of Sr Kathleen Tynan’s leadership was the development of a deep sense of community among students, parents and staff. By 1989, when Sr Elvera Sesta was principal, the experience of school-as-family or as community was very much in evidence as will be seen.

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<sup>45</sup> For a comprehensive treatment of this issue see Barry Dwyer, *Catholic Schools: Creating a New Culture* (Newtown, NSW: David Lovell, 1993), 66.

<sup>46</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (Homebush, NSW: St Paul, 1982), n.37.

<sup>47</sup> Dwyer, *Catholic Schools*, 66.

<sup>48</sup> Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

<sup>49</sup> Kevin Treston, “The Relationship between the Vocation and Industrial Models of Teaching in a Catholic School,” *Catholic School Studies: A Journal of Education for Australian Catholic Schools* 60 (1987): 47-50.

<sup>50</sup> O’Rourke, “Reflections on Issues of Significance for Catholic Systemic Schooling,” 18.

Moreover, the ideal of school-as-community was espoused in both non-government and government school sectors during the 1970s and 1980s. The influential Karmel Report (1973) stated:

Schools can build within themselves a community where both education and people are valued. Participants in such a caring community, which sets out to build social relationships through its methods of teaching and learning can, by reducing the alienation of the individual, be a regenerating force in society.<sup>51</sup>

Church documents encouraged the consideration of Catholic schools as communities rather than institutions. *The Catholic School* (1977) and *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988) each presented the image of the Catholic school as an extension of a nurturing home.<sup>52</sup> Throughout St Rita's development, the Presentation Sisters perceived themselves as not only building an impressive institution, but also as providing an empowering faith community for young women and their families. Having begun as a small boarding school, the sense of belonging and of extended family engendered by the founding sisters remained palpable at St Rita's.<sup>53</sup> For example, in 1980, Year Eleven student Carolyn Caldicott affirmed: "St Rita's is a place where I know I will be accepted for who I am."<sup>54</sup>

In 1985, St Kathleen set out the ideals of St Rita's school community as:

Caring for the poor and disadvantaged, giving priority to religious and moral education, establishing curricula which answer the needs of the students, adopting teaching methods which are pupil-centred, providing for pastoral care and remedial education, preparing for the world of work, developing a sense of mission, and handing on our heritage which is enshrined in religious and social customs.<sup>55</sup>

Like other Brisbane Catholic colleges at that time, St Rita's developed a mission document that communicated the school's aims and values. It stated:

The mission of St Rita's is to educate girls in partnership with their families to an understanding of life based on the values Jesus lived and taught....St Rita's values:

- Affirmation of the dignity and sacredness of each person.
- Commitment to Gospel values of justice and compassion in our relationships.
- Truth as the goal of our learning and intellectual inquiry.
- Independence through critical analysis of changing social and global patterns.
- Optimism in our capacity to transform our world and create a future of hope.
- Nurturing and encouragement of each person's potential and giftedness.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Australian Government, *Interim Committee of the Australian Schools Commission, Schools in Australia* (Canberra: AGPS, 1973), accessed September 15, 2010, <http://dpl/Books/2010/SchoolsAustinterimReport1973.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (Homebush, NSW: St Paul, 1977); Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (Homebush, NSW: St Paul, 1988).

<sup>53</sup> This was especially evident in 1984, when for the first time the daughters of past pupils were acknowledged and photographed as a group, then numbering seventy-six students. *SRC Annual*, 1984, 67.

<sup>54</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1980, 69.

<sup>55</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1985, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Mission Statement, n.d., ca. 1980 in SRCA.

Louise Kneebone in 1980 confirmed that students generally embraced the social and spiritual values espoused in the school's mission statement:

We have learnt to trust and respect one another and have really tried to uphold the dignity of every human being with whom we have come in contact. No doubt we have failed sometimes, but at least the high ideal of Christian love has been recognised as an all-important one.<sup>57</sup>

In addition, Sr Kathleen oversaw the implementation of several initiatives at St Rita's that were designed to foster "a new sense of belonging to the college community" for all members.<sup>58</sup> These initiatives included a pastoral care system and the construction of an assembly hall, as will be seen in the following section.

## **8.8 SCHOOL AS COMMUNITY**

### **8.8.1 St Rita's Pastoral Care System (1982)**

In 1982, St Rita's was among the first Queensland secondary colleges to pioneer a system of pastoral care, in part to strengthen the bonds between teachers, students and parents.<sup>59</sup> St Rita's initiative reflected the then emergent thinking that schools should answer the social and pastoral needs of youth as well as their academic needs. At that time, pastoral theologian, Alastair Campbell, developed the concept of guardianship according to which individuals in faith communities could be nurtured, healed and protected from harm.<sup>60</sup> By 1989, Kevin Treston's influential book, *Pastoral Care for Schools*, defined pastoral care as "developing empathetic relationships so that the people in the school community are nurtured into wholesome maturity."<sup>61</sup> In order to foster such relationships at St Rita's Sr Kathleen introduced pastoral care groups in 1982 along vertical rather than horizontal Year level lines. Years Eight to Twelve students were grouped within the existing structure of the four 'House' groups - Cascian, Nagle, Xaverian and Marian.<sup>62</sup> Senior students in each vertical group were encouraged to provide guardianship and leadership to younger students who under the new system came more immediately into contact with older students.<sup>63</sup> Hence, from 1982, the *Annual* no longer displayed student photographs in Year level class groups, but rather in the new, smaller pastoral care groups.

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<sup>57</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1980, 8.

<sup>58</sup> Sr Kathleen Tynan, "From the Principal," in *SRC Annual*, 1982, 3.

<sup>59</sup> Tynan, interview, Brisbane, October 29, 2003, AP.

<sup>60</sup> Alastair Campbell, *Rediscovering Pastoral Care* (London: Longman, 1981), 28.

<sup>61</sup> Kevin Treston, *Pastoral Care for Schools* (Brisbane: Creation Enterprises, 1989), 5.

<sup>62</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1981, 17-28.

<sup>63</sup> "From the Principal," *SRC Annual*, 1982, 3

### 8.8.2 Communal Gathering - Trinity Hall

St Rita's school assemblies were held in the open air until 1981. The need had arisen for an assembly hall which Sr Kathleen envisaged would provide a:

...meaningful focal point for the gathering of the school community which meets to integrate past and present culture with a faith for today, and to translate that faith into practical living terms.<sup>64</sup>

Named Trinity Hall, the building was opened in August 1982 by Bishop James Cuskelly. It comprised two auditoria with tiered seating, a large stage area, sliding screen, and a dressing room. The hall could also be partitioned into four classrooms as required. This welcome indoor facility also served as a sacred space allowing creative possibilities for liturgy and prayer. Consequently, communal liturgies and prayer retained their importance in the life of the college. Sr Marlette stated in the 1984 *Annual*:

Our school liturgies...remind us that education at St Rita's is not merely a feverish preparation for something which lies ahead but an invitation to grow within a rich Catholic tradition... [that] constantly calls us to an ever-deeper faith relationship with God who loves us and challenges us to create a world of justice and peace.<sup>65</sup>

Mrs Kay Herse, deputy principal at St Rita's from 1987 to 1991, confirmed that school liturgies in that period were profoundly meaningful and were often oriented to action for social justice.<sup>66</sup>

### 8.8.3 Establishing a Parents and Friends Association

A Parents and Friends Association (P&F) was established at St Rita's in 1981 initially to raise funds for the new assembly hall.<sup>67</sup> The aims listed in St Rita's P&F Constitution (1985) reflected the willingness of parents and loyal friends to help sustain the sisters' educational endeavours and to:

- foster the welfare and progress of the college and of the pupils thereof;
- seek to create a close and harmonious relationship between the teachers and the parents of students and between the Association members themselves;
- promote Catholic Education;
- assist the sisters in the interests of the college and the pupils;
- raise funds for furthering such aims and objectives.<sup>68</sup>

### 8.8.4 Shared Leadership

While some schools in the late 1970s abandoned the prefect system because it only endowed a select few students with the responsibility of leadership, St Rita's, surprisingly, revived it.<sup>69</sup> St

<sup>64</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1982, 3.

<sup>65</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1984, 20.

<sup>66</sup> Herse, interview, Brisbane, November 17 2002, AP.

<sup>67</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1980, 65.

<sup>68</sup> *St Rita's College, Parents and Friends Constitution*, 1985, copy in SRCA.

Rita's prefects, however, were given much wider portfolios than the duty usually associated with that role of monitoring compliance with school rules and dress regulations. Sr Kathleen Tynan actively encouraged student leadership at the college and placed leadership opportunities within reach of all Year Twelve students. In 1979 she introduced a College Council so that students could participate in the school's decision-making processes.<sup>70</sup> Members were elected class captains and prefects who met fortnightly with the principal, deputy principal and a classroom teacher and discussed the life and direction of the college. When the pastoral care system was introduced, an elected representative from each pastoral group also sat on the Council to facilitate communications in the college. Susan Gilmour, College Council President in 1981, reflected upon the collaborative nature of the Council's decision-making role:

The exchange of ideas and co-operation between the various representatives means that any project the school undertakes can involve everyone and everyone is informed.<sup>71</sup>

In 1979, Sr Kathleen also introduced a leadership training camp in the final week of the school year for all Year Eleven students. At that time, few schools in Brisbane offered leadership camps aimed at developing cooperation, leadership and conflict resolution among students. As the initiative spread, many other secondary colleges began to offer similar programs.<sup>72</sup>

## **8.9 CREATIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS**

### **8.9.1 Public Speaking and Speech and Drama**

With a new hall in which to present student productions, the performing arts at St Rita's prospered. Students could study speech and drama as a Board subject or as an AMEB subject with an external examination. Many St Rita's students gained outstanding achievements in speech and drama, as well as public speaking. A brief list of such attainments from 1981 to 1984 gives an indication of the depth of talent that was nurtured in the student body during that time. In 1981, Maryanne McCormack won the Queensland Public Speaking Award and the Quota Student of the Year Award, entitling her to a scholarship of \$500 over two years. Kathryn Scott won the Lord Mayor's Public Speaking Competition and reached the semi-finals of the Voice of Youth competition. Katrina Murphy appeared on the televised Queensland Finals of Youth Speaks for Australia. Carmel Tierney gained the highest grade in the Southern Hemisphere for her Trinity College speech examination. Mary-Anne Danaher was named 'top of the State' for her fifth grade speech and drama examination. Two other St

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<sup>69</sup> Villanova, Coorparoo, ended its prefect system in 1978. See Ryan, *One Mind, One Heart*, 94

<sup>70</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1979.

<sup>71</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1981, 44.

<sup>72</sup> See *SRC Annuals*, 1979, 55 and 1984, 3

Rita's students, Susan Splatt and Therese Sherlock, also gained 'A's' in the same exam.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, a St Rita's student, Katrina Murphy, was State Finalist in the English Plain Speaking Competition in 1982.

### 8.9.2 Formation of a Performing Arts Group

An abundance of theatrical and musical talent came to the fore at St Rita's during the 1980s. In 1981, the college produced the musical extravaganza, *Rock Nativity*, which involved sixty-nine students on stage and many others backstage or in design work while ten staff members supported the cast and crew.<sup>74</sup> A performing arts group was formed to bring together members of the various art, culture, drama and music groups who collaborated in such major productions. A series of large-scale musicals followed, including *The Hobbit* in 1982, *Thank Zeus it's Friday* in 1983, and *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* in 1985.<sup>75</sup> Ms Laura Duffield, Mr Pat Sharry and Mr Michael Lynch directed the productions. The musicals were held at the Twelfth Night Theatre in Bowen Hills until Trinity Hall became available in 1983. The new hall also enabled the addition of a Year Twelve drama evening to St Rita's calendar of cultural events. Whilst still at school, a number of St Rita's speech and drama students were active members of various Theatre companies in Brisbane. For example in 1984, Monica Kruger, Michelle Rochester and Christine Jackman, were members of the Brisbane Arts Theatre at Petrie Terrace. Dominique Hunter performed in the Playhouse Troupe, and Lou Anne Duel was a member of the National Young Company Talent School.<sup>76</sup>

### 8.9.3 Music Education

The expansion of the music department at St Rita's followed the introduction of music as a Board subject at that time. The increased number of music classes accounts for there being so many students involved in musical productions during the 1980s. Specialist music teachers were employed to best serve students.<sup>77</sup> A stage band and a wind ensemble were formed and the orchestra revitalised under the directorship of Mr Koss Siwers. These groups regularly competed in the Queensland Festival of Music and the Brisbane Jazz Festival. They also performed at many concerts, college functions and liturgical celebrations, including the end of year Mass held at Festival Hall in Brisbane. The stage band played at a number of Brisbane shopping centres and became well known in the local community. In 1986, for example, the band performed a concert at the University of Queensland.<sup>78</sup> Such linking with the community

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<sup>73</sup> *SRC Annual, 1981*, 64.

<sup>74</sup> *SRC Annual, 1981*, 46, 47.

<sup>75</sup> See *SRC Annuals, 1985*, 30; and *1987*, 61.

<sup>76</sup> *SRC Annual, 1984*, 45.

<sup>77</sup> St Rita's music teachers were Mrs Anne Willey, Mr Koss Siwers and Ms Heather Burton.

<sup>78</sup> *SRC Annual, 1986*, 92.

exhibited elements of the musical tradition of the convent high school that characterised colleges like St Rita's.

St Rita's music groups were successful and popular. Six members of the school orchestra also played in the Queensland Youth Orchestra.<sup>79</sup> St Rita's instrumentalists often performed at the Pine Rivers Cultural Competition and various eisteddfodau at which they often received honorary mentions. Singing too remained an important component of St Rita's music program with the school choir being directed by Sr Fay Pook until the mid-1980s, after which St Rita's French teacher Miss Melissa Cloake formed St Rita's Choir in 1988.

#### 8.9.4 Art

The new art centre erected to one side of the home science building was opened in March 1978. Planned by Sr Pamela Bright, herself a recognised artist, the centre provided a studio, sculpture-courtyard, theory room, mezzanine floor, dark room, ceramic corner and enclosed exhibit areas. The new facility enabled the school to offer courses in photography, printing, sculpture, weaving, pottery and painting. In narrow vocational terms, such courses prepared students for employment in those areas.<sup>80</sup> The exhibit spaces of the centre housed an array of items produced by students and, from 1981, students were able to fire their own pots in a kiln. St Rita's art students received noted recognition. For example, Meredith Barry and Dominique Hunter won prizes in the Royal National Association (R.N.A) Art Competition in 1983. Felicia Stockdale submitted art in the National Art Award in 1983 and Janine Chapman exhibited in the Young Queensland Artists' Exhibition at Griffith University in 1984. St Rita's art exhibitions maintained links with the local community. The annual "Art Show" was a major fundraising and cultural event that attracted works from a number of prominent Brisbane artists.<sup>81</sup>

#### 8.10 LANGUAGE EDUCATION

The 1986 *Annual* noted that the current diminishing of interest in foreign languages at many Queensland schools was not apparent at St Rita's. French, German and Japanese were described as 'vibrant' subjects at the college.<sup>82</sup> St Rita's foreign language teachers continued the Presentation tradition of inducing a love of subjects through activities that motivated students to learn. Such activities included restaurant outings, language camps, speaking

<sup>79</sup> See SRC Annuals, 1983, 32, 47; and 1984, 45.

<sup>80</sup> On visual arts curricula and art in Catholic schools, see Lindsay Thomas Farrell, "A Study of the Visual Arts in Christian Religious Schools in Queensland, Australia," PhD Thesis, Griffith University, Qld, 1999, 178-236.

<sup>81</sup> See SRC Annuals, 1981, 66; 1982, 30; 1988, 43; and 1985, 14. In 1985, St Rita's P & F revived the Art and Craft Exhibition which had fallen into abeyance.

<sup>82</sup> SRC Annual, 1986, 94.

competitions, cultural exchanges and tours, as well as extravagant school banquets to celebrate national feast days such as French Bastille Day, German Oktoberfest, and the Japanese Hanami, known as the spring festival. In some years, language tours were also arranged with other Catholic girls' secondary schools. For example, in 1982, students from St Rita's joined Loreto College, Coorparoo, on a French language tour to Noumea in New Caledonia.

St Rita's language students were encouraged to pursue excellence in their studies, and many gained language awards and scholarships throughout the 1970s and '80s. Included among these students was Gabrielle Russell who won a Rotary scholarship to Japan in 1979.<sup>83</sup> School records reveal that St Rita's students who competed in the annual Goethe Society German Verse Speaking Competition "almost always" gained a place or received honourable mentions.<sup>84</sup> 1983 was a typical year, when twenty-six of the thirty-two entries from St Rita's obtained awards, and two students gained first place in their respective sections amongst 1,150 entrants from fifty-seven schools.<sup>85</sup>

Clearly, the pursuit of educational excellence characterised St Rita's College. In her time as principal, Sr Marlette Black, continued to give shape and definition to such aspirations for progressing women's education, as the following section will demonstrate.

### **8.11 SR MARLETTE BLACK, PRINCIPAL (1986-1988)**

Canadian-born Marlette Black came to St Rita's as a student in 1963. In 1967, in her Senior year, Marlette's impressive contribution to the life of the college earned her St Rita's highest award, the *Prix d'Honneur*, based on the vote of the students.<sup>86</sup> During Sr Moira Creede's time as principal, St Rita's was strongly involved in the YCS. Marlette became a dedicated and influential YCS leader at the college. Her student experience at St Rita's was seminal. She recalled:

The sisters who taught me were all young, vibrant, energetic women totally dedicated to what they were doing. They had a love for teaching and for helping us to grow and develop as young women who would have confidence in doing anything we wanted to do... I'm sure that being so surrounded by sisters and prayer and a Catholic ethos ...I was very drawn towards that search for God and for transforming society at the same time. I think I saw religious life as a way of combining those two things.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1979.

<sup>84</sup> See *SRC Annuals*, 1981, 64 and 1982, 32.

<sup>85</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1983, 32.

<sup>86</sup> Honour Board, Trinity Hall, St.Rita's College, Clayfield.

<sup>87</sup> Black, interview, Brisbane, November 3, 2003, AP.



The search for God and desire to transform society to its full potential remain Sr Marlette's chief motivating forces, as will be seen. In 1968, Marlette's family moved to Sale in Victoria and she worked in the national YCS offices in Melbourne for a brief period. Having imbibed the Presentation Sisters' vision of Catholic women's education, she entered the Presentation novitiate at Manly later that year. Upon completing her novitiate training she undertook the secondary teachers' program at the University of Queensland in 1971. On her Senior pass she had been awarded a Commonwealth Government Teacher's scholarship entitling her to one year of university study followed by a second year at the Mt Gravatt Teachers' Training College in southern Brisbane.<sup>88</sup> Sr Marlette also completed a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Queensland with majors in English, French, history and European literature.

Sr Marlette began teaching at St Rita's in 1973 and was transferred to St Ursula's College, Yeppoon, in 1979. In June 1980, Sr Andrea McGrath, then Superior General of the Queensland Presentation Sisters, sent Sr Marlette to Boston College in the USA to further her studies in religious education. She was among the first Australian religious educators to go to Boston College, which had a distinctive reputation for higher education in religious studies. There she focused on adult faith education and completed a Masters of Education in 1981. Sr Marlette then taught at St Rita's from 1982 to 1986 and was the Religious Education Coordinator from 1983 in that period, as previously noted. At the same time she lectured in adult education and youth ministry at Pius XII Seminary in Brisbane which, though founded for the education of Queensland diocesan priests, is now the site of Australian Catholic University. In the 1980s, Sr Marlette was recognised as a leading Catholic educator in Queensland and her contributions to national discourse on the future of Catholic education in Australia were highly influential.<sup>89</sup>

Sr Marlette was appointed principal of St Rita's in 1986. She remained in that role until December 1988 when she was elected to the Congregational Council of Queensland Presentation Sisters (later known as the Congregational Leadership Team). She was a member of the Council during Sr Kathleen Tynan's term as Congregational Leader (1988-94), and was then elected Congregational Leader herself (1999-2004). In 1994, Sr Marlette commenced a Doctorate in Philosophy (PhD) which she completed in 1999. At the time of writing, Sr Marlette was working for the International Presentation Association (IPA) and advising

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<sup>88</sup> Sr Marlette was among the second group of Presentation Sisters to obtain a secondary teaching certificate from Mt Gravatt. Srs Bernadette Aberdeen and Mary Franzmann were in the first group. Black, interview, Brisbane, November 3, 2003, AP.

<sup>89</sup> As recalled by Fr Laurence Mooney, principal of Villanova College, Coorparoo (1976-87) and Provincial of the Australian Province of the Order of St Augustine (1990-98) in discussion with the author, October, 2006.

religious institutes, policy makers and bishops on discernment processes regarding the future sponsorship by congregations of schools such as St Rita's, as will be seen.

## **8.12 RELIGIOUS EDUCATION - A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE (1985-1988)**

In 1985, Sr Marlette Black and Mr Geoff Gowdie co-shared the role of coordinating religious education. One of the duo's chief aims was to enable students to judge what was of value in a society that was rapidly changing. In 1984, St Rita's student, Marguerite McCarthy, summarised the challenges that confronted youth at the time:

Many young people, as they look to the future, feel threatened by the prospect of a third and decisive World War, feel restricted by the possibility of unemployment, and anxious over the increasing crime rate and abuse of alcohol and drugs.<sup>90</sup>

The era was characterised by unprecedented excess with large corporations producing and encouraging mass consumption and waste. Television screens proffered bleak images of a looming nuclear war and the mass destruction of life. World governments relied on the concept of 'Mutually Assured Destruction' (MAD), a deterrent to war that offered little reassurance or hope. A major nuclear catastrophe at the Chernobyl power plant spread radiation over Europe, heightening world anxiety about the production, stock piling and disposal of nuclear waste. The communication or information revolution and the concept of 'the global village' captured the imagination of youth who enjoyed much greater access to world news and current affairs than did earlier generations. Concentrated media coverage of the raging conflicts in Northern Ireland, parts of Africa and the Middle East defined the world as troubled and fractured. The discovery of the AIDS virus undermined global confidence in modern medicine. The United Nations published *Our Common Future*, a report on the state of the environment and a call for immediate action, but it drew little response among world leaders.<sup>91</sup> As 1984 approached, commentators revisited George Orwell's book, *1984*, and drew haunting parallels between Orwell's fiction and the reality of life in a highly mechanised and technological world. It seemed that Australia's major institutions could offer little hope to youth as they faced a world in chaos and a personal future overshadowed by unprecedented levels of unemployment.

One of the aims of St Rita's religious education program was to respond to the high levels of anxiety and the sense of hopelessness that threatened to overwhelm youth at that time. Sr Marlette reported in the 1985 *Annual* that St Rita's adopted a critical approach to religious

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<sup>90</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1984.

<sup>91</sup> "Marking Time," *New Internationalist*, June, 1989, 26-7, and October, 1989, 22-3.

education and encouraged students to critique dominant values in society with the view to bringing about positive change:

St Rita's endeavours to educate people to an understanding of themselves as creative co-partners in God's purposes, not merely as uncritical receivers of the dominant culture.<sup>92</sup>

Mr Gowdie added:

There has been a social revolution that has made values, lifestyles and religious beliefs the object of human choices in a way that preceding generations did not experience. The need for wise choices is at the heart of the need for a critical education. We have to dig into our tradition to find the riches that are there...<sup>93</sup>

A strong theme in religious education in Brisbane Catholic schools at that time was the building of a collective vision for the Church, a theme discussed at the annual Conference of Religious Education Coordinators in Brisbane in 1986.<sup>94</sup>

### 8.13 EDUCATING FOR JUSTICE

The hallmark of Sr Marlette's leadership at St Rita's was her overarching vision of both educating young women to their full potential and empowering them to bring about justice in society. Sr Marlette insisted that Catholic education should "offer some critical distance from which to view culture." She stated in 1986:

The role of the Catholic high school is to offer quality education in the context of counter-cultural values based on the Gospel. One of the problems all schools face is that they tend to induct the rising generation into the values of the culture and to be inextricably entangled in the systems of that culture.<sup>95</sup>

She emphasised the wide view of education espoused at St Rita's:

We must see the purpose of Catholic education as being much broader than TE scores, academic success and the acquisition of the necessary social skills to be a success in society.<sup>96</sup>

This broad view of Catholic women's education was concerned with empowering and preparing girls for life and for the workplace, but above all it prepared them to live out transformational Christian ideals. Sr Marlette made this clear in 1987:

Nano Nagle is a powerful example of a woman of faith who heard the Gospel message and acted to transform her small corner of the world. Faced with injustice, oppression and despair in Irish society in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, she committed herself to transform the situation by her personal living and teaching of Gospel values and by challenging the unjust social structures of her time. The same challenge is ours today.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> *SRC Annual, 1985, 2.*

<sup>93</sup> *SRC Annual, 1985, 18.*

<sup>94</sup> See Geoff Gowdie's report on issues raised by delegates at the conference. *St Rita's College Annual, 1986, 65.*

<sup>95</sup> "From the Principal," in *SRC Annual, 1986, 5-6.*

<sup>96</sup> *SRC Annual, 1986, 5-6.*

<sup>97</sup> "From the Principal," in *SRC Annual, 1987, 5.*

Nano Nagle was held up as a transformative woman and a powerful example of women's agency in achieving social alleviation. In 1987, Sr Marlette borrowed the original design of an elegant lead-light mural of Nano Nagle from the Melbourne Presentation Sisters at Windsor in Melbourne, and had a copy produced for St Rita's.

More explicitly than in previous years, St Rita's girls throughout the 1980s were encouraged to reject oppressive social structures and to be ambassadors of positive change in order to create a just world. Sr Marlette recalled:

The teachers worked from the philosophy of Presentation education and the emphasis on holistic education, and the belief that as Presentation people you are called to transform society... From Year Eight, girls were called to be transforming agents in society and to change the way things were... I suppose in many ways this transforming ideal was more about encouraging girls to have confidence in their own ability to be able to bring about change.<sup>98</sup>

She also said whimsically that her maxim while principal was:

Be anything but don't be a blob. Make a mark, do something with your life. If you must write graffiti... make sure it means something and spell it correctly!<sup>99</sup>

The school's aim of leading girls to think critically was incorporated in St Rita's Mission Statement at a time when the critical learning movement in Australian education was still considered innovative.<sup>100</sup> Sr Marlette recalled that critical thinking and critical literacy were therefore encouraged wherever possible by St Rita's teachers. Accordingly, Sr Marlette formed a curriculum 'structural analysis group' at the college that assisted teachers to address with students the social justice issues inherent to their subject material. English teachers, for example, chose literature that critically explored social issues, and in Year Eight students examined Nano Nagle's counter-cultural ideals.

Recognising that educating for justice was a political activity, Sr Marlette recalled that teachers and students were cautioned against promoting political agendas:

One of the positions that I held was that you should not impose upon children, albeit secondary school children, political positions.... While I would be very involved in political activism on some issues, I do not think that it is something you can demand of secondary school students. I think that is manipulative.<sup>101</sup>

This did not mean that St Rita's students were politically unaware. To the contrary, they participated in various forms of social action. For example, in 1984 the College Council

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<sup>98</sup> Black, interview, Brisbane, November 3, 2003, AP.

<sup>99</sup> Black, interview.

<sup>100</sup> Black, interview.

<sup>101</sup> Black, interview.

organised peaceful demonstrations in the city centre to raise awareness of 'Nuclear Free Pacific Week.'<sup>102</sup>

#### 8.14 NEW ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES

In 1986, in her first year as principal, Sr Marlette introduced the administrative role of Assistant to the Principal Religious Education (APRE) and Mr Geoff Gowdie was appointed to the position.<sup>103</sup> This was the first time that someone other than a Presentation Sister assumed administrative leadership in the operation of the college and also of the religious education curriculum. In 1987, the deputy principal position at St Rita's was advertised for the first time, as there were no Presentation Sisters available to undertake the role. Consequently, Mrs Kay Herse was appointed the first lay deputy principal at St Rita's. In the following year, Sr Marlette added a fourth member to the administration team in the new role of Assistant to the Principal for Pastoral Care (APPC). Mary Sayer, a former Presentation Sister who had been the Pastoral Counsellor at St Rita's up to that time, was appointed APPC in 1988. Hence, for the first time in St Rita's history, the principal was the only Presentation Sister on the Senior administration staff of the college. This arrangement continued until 2009 when Mrs Dale Morrow was appointed the first lay principal of St Rita's.

The introduction of the roles of APRE and APPC to St Rita's administrative structure was innovative. It divided the role of the Religious Education Coordinator into two separate areas of responsibility, that of overseeing the religion curriculum and that of providing for the spiritual development of students and teachers. Sr Marlette recalled that this constituted a significant change in administrative structure that other Catholic schools in Australia gradually adopted:

As far as I know we were the first school to employ someone in the position of Assistant to the Principal Pastoral Care.<sup>104</sup>

Furthermore, the role of business manager was created at St Rita's in 1986. Up until that time, the principal had complete control of the school finances, but as the financial management of the college became more complex, a separate business manager was necessitated. Sr Peta Ann Molloy performed the role between 1986 and 1988 but since then lay professionals have been appointed to the position.

The collaborative or team approach in administration at St Rita's from 1986 reflected the leadership styles of those women who led the college in the 1980s, Sr Marlette Black and her

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<sup>102</sup> *SRC Annual, 1984*, 15.

<sup>103</sup> *SRC Annual, 1986*, 65.

<sup>104</sup> Black, interview, Brisbane, November 3, 2003, AP.

predecessor Sr Kathleen Tynan. Key responsibilities were shared, thus lessening the workload of both the principal and deputy principal who in the past had dealt with all matters of school administration, religious education, curriculum development and finance.

#### **8.14.1 A Team Approach across the Board**

The ideal of shared leadership fostered during Sr Kathleen Tynan's administration was continued under Sr Marlette Black. Student leaders took up portfolios to lead various student groups including literary, art, music, drama, fundraising, social and health care groups and a reinvigorated YCS. Students also formed a liturgy group to create meaningful school liturgies, a group to raise awareness of global social issues, and an environmental group that drew attention to school litter.<sup>105</sup>

For Sr Marlette, school leadership entailed collaboration on many levels. Her genuine respect for the diverse talents that each teacher brought to the school produced harmonious relationships between herself, other members of the administration team and the teaching staff. Sr Marlette's following recollection sheds light on the empowering effects intrinsic to her collaborative style of leadership at that time:

Teachers came to me with ideas and I used to say "well go and try it and then tell me if it worked," rather than making a decision about it myself... Many teachers had such good ideas for improving the educational offerings of the college... I was keen for people to use their gifts.<sup>106</sup>

The decision to replace the 'Principal's Report' with a collective report 'From the Administration Team' likewise expressed the ideal of collaborative school leadership.<sup>107</sup>

### **8.15 TRAILBLAZING NEW PATHWAYS –**

#### **MAINTAINING THE FEMINIST TRADITION**

Throughout the 1980s, Sr Marlette kept abreast of educational issues pertaining to girls' education and introduced programs accordingly at St Rita's. In fact, she was often at the forefront of developments in women's religious activism in Australia that sought to promote the advancement of Catholic women. In 1982, she co-founded the influential national organisation Women and the Australian Church (WATAC) and established a branch in Queensland. St Rita's students were enthused by Sr Marlette's founding role in WATAC and were kept informed of issues raised by the movement. For example, in 1987 the students produced a document entitled "Women and the Church" which reported and explored the ideas generated at the WATAC National Conference held that year. Interestingly, the students

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<sup>105</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1986, 87-90.

<sup>106</sup> Black, interview, Brisbane, November 3, 2003, AP.

<sup>107</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1988.

concluded in that report that a greater role for women was needed in decision-making processes within the Church.<sup>108</sup>

Also at that time, Sr Marlette was part of an influential group in Queensland of mainly female educators who met regularly regarding girls' education. The group produced the bumper sticker, 'Girls can do anything,' that was displayed on many cars in Brisbane in that period and became a defining icon for the advancement of girls' education in Australia.<sup>109</sup>

The empowering message emanating from St Rita's that 'girls can do anything' aimed to broaden both parental and social expectations about women's career options. Such a transformational aspiration led to tangible outcomes for young women at St Rita's. As in previous decades, success was evidenced in the breadth of outstanding academic, musical, artistic, and sporting achievements gained at the college. In 1988, *The Catholic Leader* featured the personal and professional stories of two St Rita's past pupils, Maryanne McCormack and Therese MacDermott, who were among five St Rita's students to enter law at the University of Queensland in 1981. The *Leader's* report entitled, "Trailblazing law girls make impact," celebrated the fact that in 1988 McCormack won the Kobe Steel postgraduate scholarship to Oxford University, and MacDermott, who had graduated with first class honours in law in 1987, was working as a Judge's Associate in the Federal Court. McCormack acknowledged the significance of her secondary schooling at St Rita's during the 1970s and early 1980s:

There was always the implicit message that it was natural for women to be in leadership roles and positions of authority.<sup>110</sup>

Such messages were significant likewise for girls who did not wish to pursue the professions because they would one day also exert their influence in families, workplaces and local communities.<sup>111</sup>

In 1988, St Rita's conducted a project entitled "Women Celebrate 88" led by Sr Marlette Black and funded by the Australian Bicentennial Authority. The project's stated aim was to deepen students' understanding of the:

...breadth and availability of formal education for girls and to heighten their awareness of the achievements of women who have experienced a similar educational environment and tradition as they have.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1987, 73.

<sup>109</sup> Black, interview, Brisbane, November 3, 2003, AP.

<sup>110</sup> "Trailblazing Law Girls Make Impact," *The Catholic Leader*, January 17, 1988, 4.

<sup>111</sup> SRC past pupils (1966), group interview, Brisbane, September 10, 2002. Clare Campbell née Coman (past pupil, 1979-1983) in discussion with the author, Brisbane, August 2010.

<sup>112</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1988, 42.

Consequently, an eight-page booklet entitled *Portfolio: Their Past...Our Future* was produced. It highlighted the achievements of prominent St Rita's past pupils and described them as a "growing group of aware women in the community." Therese MacDermott and Therese Wilson were noted as women entering "fields wrongly felt to be the preserve of the male."<sup>113</sup> Therese Wilson was then employed as a Teaching Fellow with the Division of Environmental Studies in mathematics and statistics at Griffith University in Brisbane.

## 8.16 EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

### 8.16.1 The New Tertiary Entrance System

By the mid-1980s, there was widespread concern in Queensland about the way in which secondary school students qualified for tertiary entrance. Most students completing Year Twelve sought admission to tertiary courses but supply of places did not keep up with demand. In 1985, the BSSS established a Committee to review all aspects of entrance to tertiary institutions in Queensland.<sup>114</sup> The Committee's recommendations for change were based on data drawn from 220 submissions by individuals, educational institutions and unions. The review concluded that eligible students at the end of Year Twelve should receive an Overall Achievement Position in Senior secondary school studies. The BSSS decided that only results in accredited subjects known as 'Board subjects' were to be included in compiling Overall Achievement Position Profiles. This new system came into effect in 1992. Importantly, the BSSS review documents referred to the comprehensive submission put by Sr Marlette Black, in consultation with the teaching staff at St Rita's College.<sup>115</sup> Clearly, such a contribution by a Catholic women's educational institution helped shape the present tertiary entrance system in Queensland.

### 8.16.2 Computer Education

The growing need for computer literacy made it important for colleges like St Rita's to keep pace with this rapidly changing field. In 1986, St Rita's original BBC network was upgraded to a floppy disk system for storing data. By 1988, St Rita's had sufficient computers and terminals to offer a board-registered subject known as practical computing. After eighty-three Year Nine students enrolled in the subject it became clear that an additional computer room was required. Within twelve months, the P&F raised \$10,000 to

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<sup>113</sup> St Rita's College, *Portfolio: Their Past, Our Future*, 7.

<sup>114</sup> BSSS, *Tertiary Entrance in Queensland: A Review, Report of the Working Party on Tertiary Entrance, established by the Minister's Joint Advisory Committee on Post-Secondary Education and Board of Secondary School Studies at the request of the Queensland Minister for Education* (Brisbane: BSSS, July 1987), 7.

<sup>115</sup> *Tertiary Entrance in Queensland: A Review*, 234-37.



provide another computer laboratory with fifteen new CCS IBM compatible personal computers.<sup>116</sup>

### 8.17 SPORT (1979-1988)

The array of sporting activities at St Rita's during the 1980s was the widest offered in the school's history. As girls became increasingly interested in team sport, inter-school competitions began to include sports such as hockey, softball, basketball and volleyball. Games such as captain ball that were traditionally played at St Rita's were eventually discontinued. At that time, St Rita's competed with All Hallows', Lourdes Hill, Loreto, Soubirous, Brigidine, St Mary's in Ipswich and St Ursula's, Dutton Park. In its weekly afternoon activities program St Rita's offered touch football, softball, basketball, netball, squash, tennis, indoor cricket and volleyball.<sup>117</sup>

Volleyball had been introduced at St Rita's in 1980 when one team was entered in the Catholic Sports Association Inter-school Volleyball Competition. By 1984, St Rita's gained third place in that competition. Two years later, there were sufficient players to field six volleyball teams. Hockey was introduced at the college in 1981 and by 1983 St Rita's was placed third in the inter-school hockey competition. The college then entered the inter-school softball competition in 1985 with one Year Nine team, and in an extraordinary display of determination that team won the premiership in its section.

Tennis remained a popular sport at the college throughout the 1980s; however the multiple tennis premierships of a previous era eluded St Rita's in 1979 when the Archbishop Duhig Shield passed to Lourdes Hill College, Hawthorne. St Rita's 'A' grade team eventually won the Shield in 1985 after a six year hiatus.<sup>118</sup> The following year, St Rita's had the largest number of teams (seven) to represent one school in the finals at that time. Consequently, the college won three premierships and the Archbishop Duhig Shield for the second year in succession, thereby regaining its former dominance in tennis.<sup>119</sup> St Rita's tennis co-ordinator at this time was past pupil Sr Assumpta O'Flynn, who represented the college in tennis during the 1930s.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1988, 43.

<sup>117</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1987, 79.

<sup>118</sup> All SRC tennis teams in 1982 gained a place in the finals and the 'C3' and 'E1' teams won their competitions. In 1984, nine of the ten teams secured a place in the finals and four teams, 'C3', 'D3', 'E2', and 'E3', won their sections. *SRC Annual*, 1982, 64-5.

<sup>119</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1986, 81.

<sup>120</sup> O'Flynn, interview, Brisbane, October 30, 2001, AP.

Netball was by now a popular sport and in 1980 St Rita's fielded sixteen netball teams in the Catholic Sports Association Inter-school Netball Competition. With this abundance of players, numerous premierships were assured between 1980 and 1986.<sup>121</sup>

In most sports, particularly swimming, All Hallows' School remained St Rita's principal rival. To some observers it seemed that St Rita's students were more concerned about winning against All Hallows' than improving their overall position in the competitions. Nerida McDonald, St Rita's sports captain, indicated this in 1984:

St Rita's was pitted not so much against the other schools, but one in particular, All Hallows'.<sup>122</sup>

Nevertheless, from 1979 to 1981, St Rita's maintained its position among the top three schools in the Catholic Girls' Colleges Inter-school Swimming Competition. In 1982, the event was held for the first time at the Brisbane Commonwealth Games venue, Chandler Aquatic Centre. Over the next three years, however, St Rita's fell to fourth and fifth place in the field of eight schools. In athletics, St Rita's gained either second or third position in the inter-school competition from 1980 to 1982 but subsequently was unable to improve on fifth place until 1986 when it was placed third in the competition.<sup>123</sup>

The development of sport and sporting facilities at St Rita's was given serious consideration both by the teachers and St Rita's P&F Association. St Rita's P&F announced in 1985 that the school's sporting performance would improve with "the establishment of a wider parent-teacher network."<sup>124</sup> Consequently, a sports sub-committee was formed to raise funds towards the employment of specialist coaches in tennis, swimming and athletics. St Rita's had previously employed elite athlete and Australian heptathlon champion Glynis Saunders (later Glynis Nunn and Olympic gold medalist) as a physical education teacher and athletics coach in 1981.<sup>125</sup> Accordingly in 1985, the sub-committee engaged Mr Ken Steward, former Australian Olympics coach at the 1972 Munich Games, to specifically prepare the college for the Catholic Girls' Colleges Inter-school Athletics Competition that year.<sup>126</sup>

The concerted efforts of parents, teachers and students at the college came to fruition in 1987 when impressive results were again gained by many of St Rita's sports teams. It is of

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<sup>121</sup> See SRC Annuals, 1980-1986.

<sup>122</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1984.

<sup>123</sup> Outstanding SRC athletes Sharon Ellis, Margaret Hall and Carolyn Demartini broke several inter-school records in both track and field events. *SRC Annual*, 1986, 80.

<sup>124</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1985, 14.

<sup>125</sup> Glynis won the gold medal in the Olympic heptathlon at the 1984 Los Angeles games. *SRC Annual*, 1981, 54; "Glynis Our Star for April," *Courier Mail*, May 27, 1984, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>126</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1985, 57.

historical interest to list the school's unprecedented sporting successes that year (See Table 2 below).

Table 2: St Rita's College - Sporting Achievements, 1987

<b>Sporting Competition</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
Athletics	First in the Beirne Cup
Tennis	First in the Archbishop Duhig Shield First in the Archbishop O'Donnell Trophy with four premierships
Swimming	First in the Percentage Points Trophy Second in the Archbishop Duhig Cup
Basketball	Three premierships
Cross-Country	Third in the Beirne Cup

Source: *St Rita's College Annual, 1987*

St Rita's was still a relatively small school with around 600 students, thus much of its sporting achievement in 1987 was due to high student participation in the various sports. For example, there were fourteen teams in the tennis competition of which ten reached the semi-finals and four attained premierships. Consequently, St Rita's won the Archbishop O'Donnell Trophy for the first time in ten years. Swimming success was also due to the depth of talent in each age group. Similarly, the cross-country competitors in 1987 made up full teams in each age group, a situation which St Rita's Sports coordinator, Ms Glenys Massey, described as a 'first'.<sup>127</sup> In another historical first in 1987, St Rita's entered five basketball teams in the Independent Sports Association Saturday Basketball Competition. The Association comprised teams from Loreto, Stuartholme, John Paul College, Redeemer and St Peter's. Though it was St Rita's first year in the basketball competition, it won three premierships, again due to the breadth of student involvement. Ms Glenys Massey concluded that sport at St Rita's had come to the fore in 1987.<sup>128</sup> A greater number of sports had become available at St Rita's in the 1980s than in previous decades, and participation levels in each were extraordinarily high relative to the student population of the college.

<sup>127</sup> *SRC Annual, 1987, 79.*

<sup>128</sup> *SRC Annual, 1987, 79.*

## CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrated that in the decade from 1979 to 1988 St Rita's College had achieved substantial positive educational outcomes for girls. Over that period, immense changes at the college had established foundations on which further progress was assured. To enhance women's capacity to transform and renew a 'fractured world', St Rita's teachers encouraged girls to perceive themselves as powerful agents of change. This chapter revealed that throughout the 1980s, the empowerment and transformation ideals of the convent school tradition were strongly embraced and developed at St Rita's. Furthermore, the St Rita's distinctive credo "girls can do anything" assisted girls to reconceptualise female identity. The multi-dimensional view of womanhood advanced by the sisters at St Rita's since 1926 continued to influence generations of Queensland women and would do so to the present point, as will be seen in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER NINE

### MOVING FORWARD

1989 - 2008

#### INTRODUCTION

This chapter will demonstrate that the same transformational ideals threaded through the history of Catholic women's education remained evident at St Rita's, Clayfield, in the period from 1989 to 2008. It will consider how the Presentation Sisters at St Rita's, with support from teachers, parents of the school, and loyal friends, ensured the continuity of the college up to the present period. It will show that the extensive building activity which dominated the period was achieved through an ambitious strategic plan. The analysis will reveal that educational excellence in all aspects of school life was a priority for St Rita's teachers and families of the school.

#### 9.1 SR ELVERA SESTA, PRINCIPAL (1989-2008).

Born in Brisbane in 1938, Elvera Christie's first connection with St Rita's was as a Grade Five boarder in 1947. Her Greek parents ran a fashionable café in Brisbane and were Greek Orthodox in religion. When her father died, her mother married again, this time an Italian Catholic, Mr Sesta, and Elvera's surname was changed to Sesta. Elvera became a Catholic while at school. She recalled being deeply inspired by the Presentation Sisters at St Rita's, especially Srs Barbara Houlihan and Anita Quinn. Having developed a strong connection with these women, Elvera entered the Presentation novitiate at Manly in 1957. She was later professed as Sr Clement, but returned to her baptismal name in 1973, in keeping with post-Vatican II changes to religious life.<sup>1</sup>

Sr Elvera obtained her qualifications under the Presentation teacher-training system, and began teaching at St Rita's in 1960. In 1961, together with Sr Bernadette Fleming, Sr Elvera undertook a Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Queensland. Mother Gabriel Hogan, then superior of the Queensland Presentation Congregation, encouraged the two to upgrade their qualifications with the aim of introducing the then new science syllabus at St Rita's.<sup>2</sup> Up till this time, the sisters studied by correspondence, so Srs Elvera and Bernadette were the first Brisbane Presentation Sisters to leave the convent enclosure to attend the university in person. They joined the small group of women who majored in chemistry and

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<sup>1</sup> Sesta, interview, Brisbane, January 16, 2002, AP.

<sup>2</sup> Fleming, interview, Brisbane, February 12, 2002, AP.

mathematics at that time. Upon completing her degree, Sr Elvera coordinated science, chemistry and biology in the Junior secondary classes at St Rita's.

Sr Elvera was deputy principal at St Rita's from 1979 to 1986.<sup>3</sup> She spent the following two years completing a Master's degree in pastoral theology at Loyola University in Chicago. Upon her return to St Rita's in 1989, she was appointed principal. Sr Elvera described her leadership style as "hands on"<sup>4</sup> and she fostered strong relationships with and among students in particular.<sup>5</sup>

In the few years from her appointment to 1992, the school's senior administration team was entirely reconstituted. Ms Janice Provan replaced Ms Mary Sayer as the Assistant to the Principal Pastoral Care; Mr Michael Humphrys replaced Mr Geoff Gowdie as the Assistant to the Principal Religious Education; and finally, Ms Alison Terrey was appointed deputy principal following the departure of Mrs Kay Herse who took up the position of principal at Lourdes Hill College, Hawthorne. Mrs Kay Herse recalled that Sr Elvera was "absolutely connected to the school in very fundamental ways."<sup>6</sup> How St Rita's responded to the far-reaching educational and technological changes that impacted on its development during Sr Elvera's administration will now be examined. These changes included the restructuring of the Queensland secondary school curriculum, the internet revolution and the expansion of vocational education.

## **9.2 PLANNING FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY – INCORPORATION OF ST RITA'S AS A COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE**

With the number of Presentation Sisters at St Rita's declining in the late 1980s, the Queensland Presentation Congregation moved to the incorporation of the college and the formation of a board of directors, steps particularly urged by Sr Marlette Black, who was then a member of the Congregational Council of Queensland Presentation Sisters. Few precedents being available in Queensland, Sr Elvera travelled to Sydney, Melbourne, Hobart and Adelaide to seek guidance from school principals whose colleges were already incorporated.<sup>7</sup> St Rita's was in consequence legally incorporated as a Company Limited by guarantee on January 20, 1992. The Company initially comprised seven Presentation Sisters including Sr Kathleen Tynan, then Congregational Leader, who became the Company chairperson. That same year, the Company appointed St Rita's first board of directors that comprised Srs Marie

<sup>3</sup> Tynan, interview, Brisbane, October 29, 2003, AP.

<sup>4</sup> Sesta, interview, Brisbane, January 16, 2002, AP.

<sup>5</sup> Fleming, interview, Brisbane, February 12, 2002, AP.

<sup>6</sup> Herse, interview, Brisbane, November 17 2002, AP.

<sup>7</sup> Sesta, interview.

Griffin, Marlette Black and Elvera Sesta and six parents from within St Rita's school community. The board's role was to plan the future direction of St Rita's in consultation with both the school community and the Queensland Presentation Congregation. All the board's members had expertise in recent fields and committed themselves to preserving the Presentation education tradition and ideals, as indicated by the board's chairman, Dr Bob Hardingham, at a meeting with the school community in August 1992:

We are mindful of [St Rita's] long tradition of excellence. There is a Christian spirit, a feeling of community, of care and concern among the staff, the students and the parents of this institution. There are many good things about St Rita's and these things need to be identified and preserved. The fundamental principles that have guided the college throughout its history will continue to underpin current initiatives and future directions. It is imperative that we retain and enhance the spirit, ethos and educational practices valued by the Presentation Sisters, the staff and the parents of this community.<sup>8</sup>

The breadth of experience offered by St Rita's board members enabled the board to focus primarily on the development of broader educational policies and not merely on managing the school economy or assessing financial reports. To that end, the school employed a part-time accountant, and the responsibility for reviewing St Rita's accounting and financial needs was deferred to an outside firm, KPMG Peat Marwick.<sup>9</sup> The board managed the financial development and policy making of St Rita's College Ltd., but did not intrude on the day to day running of the school, which remained the responsibility of the principal and staff of the college. This development came in the wake of documentation produced by both the National Catholic Education Commission and Brisbane Catholic Education Centre to assist Catholic school communities seeking their own renewal.<sup>10</sup>

### 9.3 IMPLEMENTING THE WILTSHIRE REFORMS (1994)

Throughout the 1990s, several landmark governmental reviews impacted on Queensland secondary colleges. The Wiltshire Report (1994) entitled *Shaping the Future* arose from a Review of the Queensland School Curriculum chaired by Kenneth Wiltshire, then Professor of Public Administration at the University of Queensland.<sup>11</sup> This comprehensive review shaped the State Government's educational plan for the 21st century. The plan focused on curriculum continuity from Pre-school to Year Twelve (P-12), on assessment and accreditation, and on employment skills. Two statutory bodies introduced to design, implement and oversee curriculum development throughout Queensland were the Queensland

<sup>8</sup> SRC Annual, 1992, 5.

<sup>9</sup> SRC Annual, 1994, 4.

<sup>10</sup> See Brisbane Catholic Education, *Self Renewing Catholic Schools: Implementation and Resource Documentation* (Brisbane: Catholic Education Centre, 1989); National Catholic Education Commission, *Celebration and Challenge* (Sydney: St Paul, 1989).

<sup>11</sup> Queensland Review of the Queensland School Curriculum, *Shaping the Future: Review of the Queensland School Curriculum: overview* (Woolloongabba, Qld: Goprint, 1994).

School Curriculum Board (QSCB), and the Queensland Curriculum Accreditation and Quality Assurance Agency (QCAQA).<sup>12</sup> Since the Queensland Department of Education now assumed greater responsibility for school curricula, the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies was abolished.

St Rita's curriculum planners considered the Wiltshire initiatives and adopted recommendations from the report that best responded to the educational needs of girls. At that time, the Queensland School Curriculum Office convened meetings of parents from schools participating in the process to discuss the Wiltshire plan, and one of these meetings was held at St Rita's in 1996.<sup>13</sup> At the end of that year, the Queensland School Curriculum Council (QSCC) was established to "provide for the development of high quality curricula for Queensland schools."<sup>14</sup> The agency consulted with State and Catholic authorities and Independent associations. A common curriculum for all Queensland schools was defined in terms according to eight key learning areas agreed on nationally - the Arts, English, Health and Physical Education, Languages Other Than English, Mathematics, Science, Studies of Society and Environment, and Technology.

Technology was the new frontier for curriculum planners. How St Rita's answered the need to resource this new key learning area will now be examined.

#### **9.4 FORMULATING A STRATEGIC PLAN (1995)**

In the 1990s, Australian educationalists planning for the 21<sup>st</sup> century generally believed that secondary students were "ill prepared for an increasingly technological job market and society."<sup>15</sup> In 1994, in response to such concerns, St Rita's new board commissioned the firm Parups Waring to develop a strategic plan for the college that addressed the growing demand for technological training.<sup>16</sup>

St Rita's strategic plan that emerged in 1995 clearly aimed to position the school at the forefront of curricular developments and technological change.<sup>17</sup> With the computer age rapidly approaching, St Rita's had already introduced the Board subject Information Processing and Technology (IPT) in 1990 for Years Eleven and Twelve. Computing teachers, Colin Thompson and Denis Bridger, were employed as well as a support person, Gail Molson.

<sup>12</sup> Queensland School Curriculum, *Shaping the Future*, 11.

<sup>13</sup> See SRC newsletter, *Verbis*, April 24, 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Queensland School Curriculum Council, *Inter Link Queensland School Curriculum Council*, no.10 (Brisbane: Queensland Government, 1998), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Queensland School Curriculum, *Shaping the Future*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> *Verbis*, February 8, 1996, 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Verbis*, August 10, 1995, 4.



Denis Bridger was encouraged to take study leave to complete a Master's degree in Information Technology at the Queensland University of Technology. St Rita's continued to ensure that its teachers were well qualified to pursue educational excellence. Denis Bridger was appointed College Computer Facilitator in 1993. In keeping with contemporary terminology, computing at St Rita's then became Information Technology (IT). The 1993 *Annual* reported:

St Rita's is certainly at the cutting edge of the technology and the students are feeling the obvious benefit of increased access to the hardware in different subject areas.<sup>18</sup>

An increase in enrolments in Junior and Senior computing subjects necessitated two additional computer laboratories and consequent building expansion.

### **9.5 PHASE ONE OF 1995 STRATEGIC PLAN - PRESENTATION CENTRE (1996)**

The first major building development in St Rita's 1995 strategic plan was the construction of a Technology Centre.<sup>19</sup> Sr Elvera explained in her 1995 annual report:

Businesses, industry and factories...even the professions demand a high degree of technological expertise....We have to equip our girls with skills to function well in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to be creative and lateral thinkers and to work interdependently with others. It is for this purpose that we are embarking on our building project, the Technology Building.

Brisbane architect Mr Lawrie Bertoldi designed and oversaw the 1.8 million dollar building which was commenced in March 1996. The college received a Commonwealth Government capital grant of \$540,500.00. Parents and past pupils gave generously through fundraisers like the "buy a brick" campaign in which donors paid a minimum of \$100 per brick for the new building.<sup>20</sup>

The new technology building was named the Presentation Centre. It was opened and blessed on August 25, 1996 to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the purchase of Stanley Hall by Mothers Ursula Kennedy and Patrick Madden. The new facility provided four computer rooms equipped with the latest networks, high-speed file servers and connections, as well as three business education classrooms, a catering centre with dining and food preparation areas, a textiles section, library extension and a counselling area. A large amphitheatre and modern canteen were built beside the new Presentation Centre. Sr Elvera named the canteen Panayia's Pantry - *Panayia* being the Greek word for Our Lady. Her choice of this name reflected her own Greek heritage and knowledge of Greek, as Sr Elvera

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<sup>18</sup> *SRC Annual, 1993*, 68.

<sup>19</sup> The Board formed a Building Project Committee to project manage the construction of the Technology Centre and of subsequent stages of the Master Plan.

<sup>20</sup> *Verbis*, 9 November, 1995, 3.

explained.<sup>21</sup> Panayia's Pantry was reportedly one of a few school canteens in Australia at that time that employed a qualified chef to serve freshly cooked, nutritious and well-presented food.<sup>22</sup>

The provision of a technology building clearly expressed St Rita's desire to be in the vanguard of educational change. In a report in 1997, Sr Elvera emphasised:

Technology will revolutionise education. However, it is difficult to see the revolution when one lives at its centre. Consequently, it is not a frightening change. One step is taken at a time, but the important thing is to keep taking that step. There is a need for continual teacher in-service so that we can fully utilise our excellent technological facilities.

In 1997, St Rita's IT department boasted seven computer laboratories and 280 on-line workstations. Students could now access the school network from their homes and all computer room connections were upgraded to a networked, comprehensive multimedia laboratory.<sup>23</sup> By 1998, it was evident that the college had moved in a logical direction. Sr Elvera reported at that time:

The 'industrial style' classroom is making way for the 'technological.' St Rita's is at the cutting edge technologically. Business education, information technology, music, film and television are areas that are almost 100% computerised. The internet is a common tool across the curricula.<sup>24</sup>

Although the school community readily adapted to technological change, the process did not occur without required reflection. The teachers at St Rita's recognised that technological progress contained within itself extensive moral and ethical implications for students. Hence, students were encouraged through the Junior curriculum to evaluate the effects of technology on society and to critically examine social and ethical issues associated with internet use.<sup>25</sup>

## 9.6 CURRICULUM INNOVATION

### 9.6.1 Developments in Vocational Education

In Queensland, the Wiltshire Report reflected State government pressure for major changes in secondary school curriculum offerings and its desire for schools to provide some integration between the general and vocational curriculum. At the Federal level, a number of governmental reports, responding to the wider demand for vocationally oriented courses, proposed a competency-based approach to education and training that would respond to labour market needs. In 1991, the Finn Report entitled, *Young People's Participation in Post-*

<sup>21</sup> Sesta, interview, Brisbane, January 16, 2002, AP.

<sup>22</sup> *Verbis*, July 18, 1996, 1-4.

<sup>23</sup> *Verbis*, February 6, 1997, 7; *SRC Annual*, 1997, 48.

<sup>24</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1998, 3.

<sup>25</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1998, 55.

*Compulsory Education and Training* proposed national targets and suggested ‘key competencies’ for employment or further education for all students.<sup>26</sup> The influential Mayer Report further developed the concept of employment-related key competencies recommended in the Finn Report.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the Carmichael Report entitled, *The Australian Vocational Certificate Training System*, presented recommendations for competency-based vocational education nation-wide.<sup>28</sup>

In 1992, as the Queensland Government endorsed the Carmichael Report and “approved in principle Queensland’s participation in that scheme,”<sup>29</sup> Sr Elvera made clear that while St Rita’s curriculum reflected the required vocational thrust in education, the school’s emphasis on the holistic formation of women would continue:

Because of the present economic climate in the world, we want our youth to be competently trained to enter the work force. To do this a vocational thrust in education is required. At the same time it is necessary to educate the whole person so that self-acceptance and self-confidence are enhanced. Such a general education is directed towards inner growth of the spirit, the gentle, the non-violent, the beautiful; it searches for understanding and meaning.<sup>30</sup>

St Rita’s work education program included the vocational certificate course as well as careers education in Year Ten, and work experience programs in Years Eleven and Twelve. The certificate course offered students the option of then moving immediately into the workforce, of accepting a traineeship, or of choosing among university courses such as primary teaching, arts, business and hospitality, or pursuing TAFE courses that included hospitality, recreation management, childcare and business. The term, ‘technical and further education’ (TAFE) that had been used since 1973 was changed in the mid-1990s to ‘vocational education and training’ (VET), reflecting growing diversity in the sector.<sup>31</sup> Ms Sharlene Walton oversaw St Rita’s implementation of the vocational certificate course. By the mid-1990s, the demand for skills training in the fast growing areas of food research, production and marketing, led to the introduction of both a food science and technology subject, and a hospitality practices course at St Rita’s. Sr Elvera recalled that St Rita’s work education program was considered

<sup>26</sup> Australian Education Council Review Committee, *Young People’s Participation in Post-compulsory Education and Training: Report of the Australian Education Council Review Committee*, chaired by Brian Finn (Canberra: AGPS, 1991).

<sup>27</sup> Australian Education Council, *Key Competencies: Report of the Committee to advise the Australian Education Council and Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training on Employment-related Key Competencies for Post-compulsory Education and Training*, chaired by Eric Mayer (Melbourne?: Australian Education Council, 1992).

<sup>28</sup> Employment and Skills Formation Council, *The Australian Vocational Certificate Training System/Employment and Skills Formation Council*, chaired by Laurie Carmichael (Canberra: AGPS, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> Queensland Parliament, *Parliamentary Debates*, Queensland Legislative Assembly, May 14, 1993, column 2640 (Hon M. J. Foley, Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations).

<sup>30</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1992, 6; *Verbis*, March 6, 1997, 1.

<sup>31</sup> “Look How Far We’ve Come,” 4-10.

innovative and exemplary for other colleges.<sup>32</sup> Clearly St Rita's school community perceived itself at the forefront of contemporary curricular developments in Queensland.

### 9.6.2 Business Education

The 1990s saw further broadening of St Rita's curriculum, a commerce department being formed in 1989. The department incorporated accounting, business principles, typing, business studies and secretarial studies. Its name was later changed to business education, which reflected its focus on innovation and technology in business. There followed the establishment of the Business Education Centre in 1992.

Again in terms of curriculum innovation, St Rita's was among the first schools in Australia to offer the National Office Skills Modules in 1995 as part of a national curriculum in business education. The college also offered adult evening classes outside school hours in all levels of word processing and spread sheeting in keeping with the Presentation tradition of providing skills training for the wider community. Another innovation was St Rita's Business Week (introduced in 1993) that included a 'Women in Business' breakfast held initially at the Hilton Hotel in Brisbane.<sup>33</sup> Keynote speakers at such events were businesswomen who addressed topics such as careers and women's employment opportunities. Over the years, teachers and students from other independent girls' colleges in Brisbane attended these breakfasts.<sup>34</sup> For example, in 1995, participating schools included Mount St Michael's College, Brisbane Girls' Grammar School, Brigidine College and Clayfield College.<sup>35</sup>

### 9.6.3 Integrated Social Science

In 1991, St Rita's introduced its newly accredited course, Integrated Social Science (ISS), in the Junior school. Ms Marilyn Savage coordinated the subject that included study of heritage, citizenship and the environment. As a committee member of the Queensland Schools' Constitutional Conventions (QSCC) in 1998, Ms Savage encouraged St Rita's students to participate in conventions being held by the Federal Government to revise the preamble to the Australian Constitution.<sup>36</sup> St Rita's students submitted 50 of the 383 constitutional preambles that were entered in a national competition. Their high level of participation was reported in *The Australian* newspaper, which described St Rita's students as:

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<sup>32</sup> Sesta, interview, Brisbane, January 16, 2002, AP.

<sup>33</sup> *Verbis*, July 27, 1995, 6.

<sup>34</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1996, 45.

<sup>35</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1995, 51.

<sup>36</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1999, 57.

...four years shy of casting a vote, but when it comes to having a say on Australia's future through the wording of a new preamble to the Constitution, these teenagers are anything but silent.<sup>37</sup>

The *Courier Mail* included a comment by St Rita's Year Ten student Hannah Byrne who said "we can't vote, but we are informed and we want to take part in the process."<sup>38</sup> In recognition of her work in civics education at St Rita's, Ms Savage was awarded a Parliamentary teaching fellowship in 1999, and was commissioned to develop a study unit for the Parliamentary Education Office in Canberra.

In addition to curricular initiatives, the college was also accepted as a pilot school to trial the new film and television syllabus and the National Office Skills Modules in business education. St Rita's was also selected to participate in a Queensland University of Technology trial teacher project on internet usage. Furthermore, St Rita's was among the few colleges to implement the new Senior music syllabus in 1996, one year prior to its introduction in most secondary schools. Then in 2000, the college was a pilot school for the new Senior English Syllabus. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, St Rita's was indeed at the forefront of curriculum development in Queensland.<sup>39</sup>

#### **9.7 PHASES TWO TO FOUR OF 1995 STRATEGIC PLAN: ADMINISTRATION CENTRE (1997), EIRENE CENTRE (2000), AQUA ROSA CENTRE (2003)**

In 1997, St Rita's architect, Mr Lawrie Bertoldi, commenced design of phase two of the 1995 strategic plan, which called for the refurbishment of college facilities. Upgrading work was completed by Melcrest Constructions at an estimated cost of \$550,000.<sup>40</sup> The Administration Centre was modernised, the undercroft upgraded, the main driveway reconstructed to provide two lanes and a car park, a new portico was built with access to Panayia Place, and the foyer of Trinity Hall was tiled. The most striking feature of the refurbished Administration Centre was the new main entrance to the college. Tall stained glass panels enclosed the foyer and allowed filtered sunlight to illuminate the entrance. The eastern glass panel featuring an icon of Nano Nagle was donated by the Presentation Congregation in honour of the sisters who had taught at St Rita's from 1926 onwards. The combined 1998 Senior class and 1997 Student Council donated the western panel depicting the Sacred Heart. The refurbished areas were officially opened on March 1, 1998 with the Nano Nagle icon the centrepiece of the celebrations.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> "Students Rewrite History - an Eye to the Future," *The Australian*, February 25, 1999, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>38</sup> *The Courier Mail*, February 25, 1999, clipping, SRCA.

<sup>39</sup> See SRC Annuals, 1994, 41-45; 1996, 40; 2001, 39.

<sup>40</sup> *Verbis*, May 29, 1997, 3.

<sup>41</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, March 1, 1998; *Northern News*, April 2, 1998; *Verbis*, February 5, 1998, 1.

There were 730 students enrolled at St Rita's in 1998.<sup>42</sup> The college had outgrown its assembly hall and additional space for school gatherings and sporting facilities was now required. At that time, phase three of the strategic plan came into effect with the construction of a multipurpose hall. In 1998, a small parcel of land at the top of Hunter Lane between the music room and old tuck shop was purchased from the Brisbane City Council at a modest cost.<sup>43</sup> The purchase enabled the construction of a building of sufficient size for St Rita's current requirements. The building housed an art centre that was equipped with studios, office space, dark room facilities, wet areas for clay work, a kitchenette, and a modern art gallery named the Kathleen Tynan Gallery, in which student work was later exhibited. Additionally, the new facility provided film and television classrooms and studios. The builders, Kinakon Pty Ltd., completed the work at a cost of 4.4 million dollars. A "buy a beam" fundraising campaign for the new building was conducted along similar lines to the successful earlier "buy a brick" appeal for the Presentation Centre. Valuable support from St Rita's P & F enabled the new multipurpose centre to be outfitted for its various uses.

Sr Elvera named the building the Eirene Centre. Her choice of the Greek word *Eirene*, meaning peace, again reflected her Greek family background. Sr Elvera said that she oversaw the design of the landscape and environs of the new centre and incorporated a traditional Japanese Garden that evoked peace and harmony.<sup>44</sup> In keeping with such a theme, the three stained glass windows at the entrance to the main portico of the centre display symbols of Peace, Hope and Truth and all three panels were designed by an art student at the college, Luisa Rositto. Other innovations at St Rita's included installation of a recycled storm water reticulation system with an 80,000 litre tank built under the car park of the Eirene Centre. The college received a Queensland Government Environmental Protection Agency grant of \$25,000 in recognition of the school community's efforts to conserve water.<sup>45</sup>

On May 26, 2000, the Eirene Centre was officially opened not by a bishop as in past eras, but by Sr Kathleen Tynan, then President of the Society of the Presentation Sisters in Australia. In her opening address she drew upon St Rita's transformation tradition as reflected in the school motto:

A measure of the success of the education that takes place here can be encapsulated by your school motto and the themes illustrated in the three windows – peace, truth and hope....What our world needs are people who will not only speak of peace, truth and

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<sup>42</sup> *Verbis*, April 30, 1998, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Sesta, interview, Brisbane, January 16, 2002, AP.

<sup>44</sup> Sesta, interview.

<sup>45</sup> *Verbis*, October 18, 2001, 1.

hope but who will put into actions these ideals. That is what your school motto and these three themes call us to.<sup>46</sup>

As early as 2001, the college had discharged the debt on the Eirene Centre, and implementation of the strategic plan's phase four could commence. Construction of a new swimming complex, the Acqua Rosa Centre, began and was officially opened in May 2003. The centre features stained glass windows depicting the life of St Rita which were designed by past pupil Luisa Rossitto. The rose, a symbol of hope associated with St Rita, is incorporated in the windows and is featured in the centre of the pool's floor. The name of the complex is derived from the Italian for 'rose water,' in honour of the Italian saint.

### **9.7.1 Continuing Parental Support**

St Rita's parent body continued to give strong support to St Rita's educational aims and programs. A music committee established in 1995 facilitated the purchase of computer software and musical instruments, among which was a grand piano for the new Eirene Centre. Fundraising by the committee enabled computers in the Presentation Centre to be equipped with musical instrument digital interface (MIDI) and software for composing musical scores. From 2001, parents were involved in marking St Rita's practise tests for the short response item of the Queensland Core Skills Test (QCST). Parents also formed groups such as 'Event Catering' in 2003 which operated as a successful catering business based at the college. Two of its organisers, Mrs Karen Forbes and Mrs Susan Bartlett, received the Lilley Australia Day Award in 2005 and 2006 respectively in recognition of their valued contribution to the wider community and to St Rita's.<sup>47</sup> These initiatives sustained by parents of the school expressed and strengthened the school's commitment to girls' education.

## **9.8 MAINTAINING THE IDEALS OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION**

In 1996, Mr Michael Humphrys, then the Assistant Principal for Religious Education, conducted a formal review of religious education at St Rita's. The review was validated by representatives of the Brisbane Catholic Education Office (BCEO) and the Education Committee of St Rita's College Board. A survey of parents, staff, students, Presentation Sisters, religious education teachers and past pupils revealed there was overwhelming support for the school's religious education program. The community also indicated that teachers were committed to nurturing faith, clarifying values and preserving the religious heritage of the college. In 1999, Mrs Mary Kelty, head of religious education, told parents:

We are called upon to nurture all members of our community while at the same time preserving the distinctive Catholic character of the school...It takes great sensitivity to

<sup>46</sup> *Verbis*, June 8, 2000, 1.

<sup>47</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, August 28, 2005, 8.

respect the opinions of all members of the community while at the same time representing the integrity of the Catholic tradition.<sup>48</sup>

That year, St Rita's religious education program was modified in keeping with the new BCEO Guidelines for religious education. Interestingly, three of the ten BCEO team members who developed this landmark syllabus in consultation with teachers in Brisbane Catholic schools were women trained in the Presentation tradition. They were Sr Mary Foster, former principal of St Rita's, Ms Bernadette Fleming, former deputy principal of the college, and Sr Mary Hansen.<sup>49</sup>

The Presentation social justice tradition was expressed by St Rita's school community throughout the 1990s, as high levels of student participation in the school's service groups and in related initiatives clearly demonstrate. For example, over one third of Year Twelve students in 1994 were members of the school's Amnesty International group. In the *Annual* that year, Mr Michael Humphrys referred to St Rita's commitment to justice:

Our young women display a generosity of spirit, an active concern for justice, and a willingness to take action for the benefit of others....The girls' year after year participation is evidence of their capacity to look beyond themselves and serve the wider community...it is our commitment to justice, freedom and equality of opportunity that translates into tangible action to make our world a better place.

In response to the Federal Government's invitation to all Australians to participate in a formal reconciliation process with indigenous Australians, following the landmark 1992 Mabo decision on native title, St Rita's students formed action groups such as Earthwalk and the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program (ASSPA) to raise awareness of indigenous rights, culture and heritage. The Nano Nagle Grant established by the Queensland Presentation Sisters in 1992 linked St Rita's students with indigenous groups elsewhere in Australia, and enabled a 'Sister Schools Project' with Holy Rosary School at Windsor, Brisbane, where thirty per cent of the children were of Aboriginal descent.<sup>50</sup> In 1993, the *Northern News* reported that Aboriginal elders from Windsor led a one-day program at St Rita's on the topic of indigenous culture.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the Brisbane *Sunday Mail* in 1994 noted that the issue of Aboriginal land rights was given priority by St Rita's students participating at the Queensland Schools' Constitutional Conventions.<sup>52</sup> St Rita's involvement in the reconciliation process continued in 1996 when students and teachers produced and

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<sup>48</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1999, 67.

<sup>49</sup> Graeme Barry and Damien Brennan, ed., *A Syllabus for Religious Education for Catholic Schools* (Brisbane: Brisbane Catholic Education, 1997), 2.

<sup>50</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1994, 5.

<sup>51</sup> *Northern News*, May 20, 1993, clipping.

<sup>52</sup> "Republicans in School Uniform," *The Sunday Mail*, July 24, 1994, clipping.



signed a 'Sorry Book' that was accepted by the National Sorry Day Committee and presented to indigenous elders.<sup>53</sup>

Anti-nuclear projects organised by St Rita's students at that time also attracted media attention.<sup>54</sup> In 1995, St Rita's earth-walk group invited student representatives from neighbouring secondary schools to a peaceful rally in King George Square to protest against French nuclear testing in the Pacific. When organisers of the extremist student movement Resistance called for a mass walkout at Brisbane schools to join the rally, Brisbane Lord Mayor Jim Soorley offered the use of City Hall to help St Rita's regulate numbers and conduct the event peacefully.<sup>55</sup> Sr Elvera recalled that St Rita's students were the first to sign a petition from the people of Brisbane to President Chirac that denounced French nuclear testing.

In 2001, Mrs Mary Kelty, St Rita's religious education coordinator, highlighted the counter-cultural values she saw embedded in the Presentation education tradition:

We face the challenge of providing our students with values that are counter cultural...The challenge for us is to give life to our theoretical framework and to teach students not only to critique our culture by the standards of Christianity and the St Rita's spirit, but to live according to that understanding.<sup>56</sup>

In the new decade, with the number of Presentation Sisters at the college declining, lay teachers were primarily responsible for passing on the Presentation ethos and Catholic values that together underpinned the faith environment of the college. Mrs Sue Bunkum, who was appointed the Deputy Principal Pastoral and Spiritual in 1997, recalled that in 2001 thirteen of St Rita's seventeen religious education teachers had formal religious education qualifications, an indicator of the depth of commitment among staff at that time.<sup>57</sup>

## 9.9 COMMEMORATING THE QUEENSLAND PRESENTATION STORY

Throughout St Rita's history, school celebrations provided important opportunities for the college community to pronounce, appropriate, and strengthen the Presentation educational mission and charism. On the occasion of St Rita's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1996, computing students developed an internet homepage that would link Presentation schools throughout the world.

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<sup>53</sup> *Verbis*, July 30, 1998, 6.

<sup>54</sup> *Northern News*, July 13, 1995; *The Courier Mail*, October 5, 1995, clipping.

<sup>55</sup> Sesta, interview, Brisbane, January 16, 2002, AP.

<sup>56</sup> *SRC Annual*, 2001, 38.

<sup>57</sup> Sue Bunkum, Deputy Principal Pastoral and Spiritual (1997-2007), interviewed by the author, Clayfield, Brisbane, February 27, 2002, AP.

In 2000, St Rita's celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Presentation congregation in Queensland by way of a Eucharistic service in the Brisbane Botanical Gardens. Visitors came from Longreach, Toowoomba, Murgon, Wagga Wagga, Lismore and Sydney. During the Mass, Archbishop John Bathersby expressed the Church's gratitude for the Presentation Sisters' enduring educational mission in Queensland:

We give thanks for the manner in which God has blessed this remarkable group of women as they participated in the history of Queensland, in both Church and State. We give thanks for the good they achieved as they expanded and liberated young hearts and minds in education, enriched those same hearts and minds with culture and gave purpose and meaning to those same hearts and minds by faith, in areas as rural as Isisford, or as urban as Clayfield.<sup>58</sup>

In 2001, celebrations to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of St Rita's assumed an outward focus when a group of students and staff travelled to Papua New Guinea in support of the Presentation school in Malol, near Aitape.<sup>59</sup> Accordingly, St Rita's school community with its far-reaching educational mission continued to participate in the history of Malol. Malol was one of many coastal villages devastated by a tsunami in 1998. After the tsunami, Sr Margaret Conway<sup>60</sup> transformed part of the Presentation convent in Malol into a needed school for youth who wished to continue their education to secondary level.<sup>61</sup> Sr Margaret Conway was awarded the Order of Australia (AO) in 1999 in recognition of her valued contribution to the reconstruction efforts. St Rita's students during their visit in 2001 assisted Sr Margaret's work by teaching students to read.

In 2006, to mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the college, the first comprehensive history of St Rita's, *Acorn to Oak*, was published. The book, written by the present author, was launched at the school by then Congregational Leader Sr Mary Franzmann. The book's title provided the theme for the year's celebrations. A Jubilee Mass was held in August at St Stephen's Cathedral in Brisbane where again Archbishop John Bathersby praised the educational work of the Presentation Sisters in educating young women in the Brisbane archdiocese over that eighty year period:

They have contributed significantly to the mission of the Church in this archdiocese, to the promotion of the reign of God in our midst, to the common good of society, and ultimately to the greater glory of God whose presence we need more than ever today.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, May 14, 2000, 1.

<sup>59</sup> It was a toilsome journey involving a twelve hour boat voyage from Wewak where they had arrived by plane. See *SRC Annual*, 2001, 34.

<sup>60</sup> Sr Margaret was the first principal of Stella Maris primary school, Maroochydore, which the Presentation Sisters opened in 1980.

<sup>61</sup> *SRC Annual*, 2001, 34.

<sup>62</sup> *The Catholic Leader*, September 10, 2006.

After the mass, a bronze cross to commemorate the anniversary was unveiled at the college and installed in the Eirene Centre. The cross bore scenes depicting the lives of St Rita and Nano Nagle, as well as images of the holistic education of St Rita's students, one of the themes that emerged in *Acorn to Oak*.

### 9.10 RECONCEPTUALISING THE TEACHING PROFESSION

One of the greatest challenges that Catholic school administrators in Australia faced during the 1990s was that of reconciling the vocational dimension of Catholic education with the industrial rights of teachers. At that time, the dominant industrial relations' issue was Enterprise Bargaining (EB) – the process of wage fixation adopted by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission in the National Wage Case of October 1991. The goal of EB was agreements registered with the Industrial Commission between employers, unions and employees.<sup>63</sup> In 1995, the Queensland Association of Teachers in Independent Schools Union of Employees (QATIS) together with teachers in Catholic systemic schools in Brisbane insisted that the Wiltshire reforms would result in additional workloads for teachers. Consequently, QATIS recommended that tasks associated with implementation of the Wiltshire initiatives should be negotiated as part of the EB Process.<sup>64</sup>

St Rita's completed three EB stages between 1995 and 2000. EBIII was not initially accepted at the college because teachers remained dissatisfied with the disparity between superannuation contributions paid by employers on behalf of staff in the government sector and that paid on behalf of staff in Catholic schools. During 2001, industrial tension rose at Catholic girls' colleges in Brisbane. Teachers at St Rita's and at Mt St Michael's College, Ashgrove, withdrew from activities deemed 'voluntary and honorary.' At Mt St Michael's, the then principal, Mrs Narelle Mullins, sought Queensland Industrial Relations Commission's (QIRC) intervention in the dispute.<sup>65</sup> At St Rita's, negotiations between QATIS and Sr Elvera broke down. With diminishing support from her staff, Sr Elvera called upon parents and Senior students to conduct the co-curricular activities to which teachers had ceased to devote their time. Sr Elvera announced in the college newsletter, *Verbis*, in 2001 that:

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<sup>63</sup> Queensland Catholic Education Commission, *Enterprise Bargaining in Queensland Catholic Education: Briefing Paper: Memorandum to Congregational Leaders of Religious Teaching Orders, Principals of Order Owned Schools, Diocesan Directors*, no.80/94 (Brisbane: Queensland Catholic Education Commission, 23 August 1994).

<sup>64</sup> Queensland Independent Education Union (QIEU), *The Independent Teacher* 16, no. 3 (May 1995): 7.

<sup>65</sup> Queensland Independent Education Union (QIEU), *The Independent Voice* 2, no. 2 (April 2002): 10-11.

older girls are coaching the younger girls in sport and debating...parents are coaching the debating and sporting teams, and assisting with the college magazine ...then there are my loyal supporters: members of the P & F and [others].<sup>66</sup>

The ensuing discord between Sr Elvera and St Rita's teachers was without precedent in the school's history. St Rita's students were drawn publically into the dispute. College Captain, Sarah Brady, stated in the 2001 *Annual*:

The teachers and ancillary staff who treat St Rita's not as a workplace but as a place where they can have an effect on the lives of those under their care, have guided us through the most significant part of our journey here. To them St Rita's is a home away from home.

Similarly, College Vice Captain, Marianna O'Gorman, stated:

I've come to the realisation that teaching at St Rita's College is not a form of employment. For our teachers it is more than that. It is becoming attached to students like a parent and caring not only about their academic development but their life at home outside of school, their problems and their talents and helping them to succeed or even survive.

Conflicting ideas about the nature of the teaching profession were at the core of the dispute. Increasing agitation for teachers' industrial rights in Catholic schools was considered by some as challenging the Church's long held view that teaching was a vocation. Indeed, the vocational model of teaching predominated in colleges founded by religious teaching institutes like the Presentations. However, both perspectives, the vocational and industrial, are clearly complementary, as many Presentation Sisters would undoubtedly affirm. Indeed several St Rita's teachers insisted that their commitment to the ideal of vocation remained strong as they negotiated just work policies at that time.<sup>67</sup> St Rita's story instances the disharmony that erupted in Brisbane Catholic schools when one perspective on the teaching profession was seen as exclusive of the other.

Despite St Rita's celebrated community ideal, the experience of deep fracture and disunity among St Rita's staff was unsettling at the time and endured beyond the dispute. Consequently, St Rita's senior administration team arranged an in-service in early 2001 to address the immediate need for harmony, reconciliation and unity of purpose. Sr Elvera summarised the experience, thus:

We looked at the true meaning of Eucharist and what it means to be 'community'. This emphasised the importance of the relationships that we have with one another...This was followed the second day by either a retreat or a meditative look at the meaning of 'teaching' as 'vocation'.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *Verbis*, April 5, 2001, 1.

<sup>67</sup> St Rita's religious education teachers, in discussion with author, Brisbane, October 2002.

<sup>68</sup> *Verbis*, February 8, 2001, 1.

Such full expression of the vocational approach to teaching, however, had yet to be reconciled with the industrial entitlements of teachers at St Rita's.

### 9.11 MAINTAINING HIGH ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Throughout St Rita's history, teachers clearly strove for educational excellence while maintaining the holistic ideals of Catholic women's education. In 1998, the following tribute to St Rita's teachers was written by nursing graduates of the Australian Catholic University who were past pupils of the college:

We received outstanding academic schooling from excellent teachers who supported, encouraged and challenged us [to achieve] the high academic standards expected. St Rita's gave us grounding in acceptance, tolerance and understanding which are vital in the nursing profession. In Study of Religion we were encouraged to understand other religions. Pastoral care groups and sport gave us opportunities to accept others' talents and limitations and to build self-esteem in ourselves and others. Without these opportunities I doubt whether we would have chosen the people-based profession of nursing.<sup>69</sup>

As in previous decades, St Rita's students were frequently among the top students in the State. At the national level, Kathryn Galvin, was in 1990 one of nine recipients of the new Federal Government national award for excellence in schooling.<sup>70</sup>

From 1992, senior students in Queensland received an OP instead of a TE score. The new tertiary entrance (TE) system established a student's overall position (OP) in the State by ranking students from a 'Band 1', the highest, to 'Band 25', the lowest. To be eligible for an OP, St Rita's students mainly studied subjects approved and registered by the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies. However, it became possible for students whose program combined Board and vocational subjects to enter tertiary bodies without an OP. The teaching position of Advisor to the Principal Tertiary Entrance was created at St Rita's in 1994 to assist teachers in preparing students for the Core Skills Test that was used in the calculation of OPs.<sup>71</sup> Such initiatives again reflected the school's commitment to best serving the educational needs of its students.

The *Courier Mail* first published its League Tables of schools and OPs in 1993 giving rise to considerable controversy over how OP results should be judged. Some principals criticised the release of the data which they considered did not assess a school's performance accurately. Despite individual students receiving OPs and not schools as such, the tables were

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<sup>69</sup>Jennifer Taylor, Leanne Kluver, Kathryn O'Brien and Melissa Vincent (Seniors 1994), recollections. *Verbis*, April 30 1998, 3.

<sup>70</sup>"Kathryn Gets PM's Praise," *The Courier Mail*, 1990, clipping in "Across the Years," 1: 147.

<sup>71</sup>*SRC Annual*, 1994, 6.

used by many parents as a guide to the success of a school.<sup>72</sup> Schools came to be judged on the number of students who gained OP1, and there developed a climate of school competitiveness not seen since the public examination era. However, from the late 1990s, League Tables were no longer published.

In the three years that the League Tables were published in the *Courier Mail* the outstanding academic success of St Rita's students was noted. For example in 1995, the paper reported that forty St Rita's students received OPs between '1' and '7' in 1994, amounting to around forty per cent of the Senior class, and that four achieved an 'OP1', representing the top two per cent of students in Queensland.<sup>73</sup> In the following year, the *Courier Mail* reported that almost fifty per cent of St Rita's 1995 Senior class received an OP of 7 or better with seven students receiving an OP1 (See Table 3).<sup>74</sup> The report highlighted the choices of two of those OP1 students, Michelle Spanevello and Sue-Anne Spedding, who had undertaken a Bachelor of Physiotherapy at the University of Queensland as a pathway to medicine, which was no longer offered in an undergraduate program in Queensland.

**Table 3:** Academic Outcomes: St Rita's College, 1994 - 2001

Year	Number of students who took the OP course	Number of OP 1 students	Percentage who received OP 1-7	Percentage who received first round offers to a tertiary body	Percentage of Vocational students who received first round offers to a tertiary body
1994	102	4	40	94	91
1995	109	7	47	95	100
1996	114	4	38.6	98	100
1997	113	5	36.3	90	92
1998	110	9	42.8	96.4	95.3
1999	123	8	38.2	96	77
2000	132	7	44.7	96.3	78
2001	126	3	38.1	95.2	91.6

Source: St Rita's College newsletter, *Verbis*, 8 February 1996, 2; 6 February 1997, 2; 5 February 1998, 2; 4 February 1999, 2; 8 February 2001, 2; 7 February 2002, 2.

<sup>72</sup> *The Courier Mail*, March 22, 1995, clipping; See also League Tables in "Across the Years," 2: 37.

<sup>73</sup> *The Courier Mail*, May 23, 1995, clipping.

<sup>74</sup> *The Courier Mail*, January 16, 1996, clipping; *Verbis*, February 8, 1996, 2.

Table 3 indicates that around forty per cent of students who undertook the OP course each year between 1994 and 2001 received an OP of 7 or better and around ninety per cent received first round offers to a tertiary body.

In the decade from 1996 to 2006, St Rita's students were often recognised publically for their academic achievements. Not surprisingly, St Rita's students were often recipients of the annual Queensland Premier's Award for academic achievement and leadership, which in time became the T. J. Ryan Memorial Medal. By 2004, St Rita's had gained the distinction of being the only school in Queensland in which five students had won the medal in the history of the award.<sup>75</sup> An outstanding record was achieved in 2005, when ten St Rita's students received an 'OP1', and almost fifty per cent of the Senior class gained an OP of '7' or better.<sup>76</sup>

While many St Rita's students achieved at high levels academically, the Presentation education tradition of preparing girls for life was also maintained at the college. A report from the principal in 2001 stated:

We do not have an entrance examination, but each student is expected to do her best. Last year, two students received Commonwealth Awards, three received public recognition for their outstanding efforts in their QCST and 53% received an OP score of 8 or better. At school, students take advantage of being able to pursue traineeships in the business and hospitality areas. Technology continues to advance and our students progress with it. We are learning what it means to learn for life.<sup>77</sup>

Furthermore, St Rita's administration team upheld the convent tradition of forming capable and responsible women, regardless of their occupation in life:

Whether our girls become prime ministers, teachers, Supreme Court judges, accountants, doctors, lawyers, business entrepreneurs and/or homemakers, it is imperative that they first become women of character. They need to respect themselves and one another; they need to be honest and ethical.

### **9.11.1 Maintaining the Emphasis on Science and Mathematics**

Even in the early 1990s boys in Australia were more likely to study physics in secondary school than girls were.<sup>78</sup> However the strong emphasis on science at St Rita's from the 1940s onwards reflected the time-honoured tradition of gender equitable education in Catholic

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<sup>75</sup> Recipients of the award were: Katrina Smith in 1995, Anita Macedo in 1997, Rachael Nugent in 1998, Anna Keenan in 2002 and Yvette Buse in 2004. Anita Macedo also received the Prime Minister's Award presented to the top five hundred students in Australia, and a "Letter of Excellence" awarded to the top 0.3 per cent of students in the QCST. See *Northern News*, February 13, 1997; *The Courier Mail*, March 13, 1998, clippings; *University News* (QLD) March 24, 1998, 1.

<sup>76</sup> *Verbis*, February 2006.

<sup>77</sup> *SRC Annual*, 2001, 2.

<sup>78</sup> See Malcom J. Rosier, and Michael G. Long, *The Science Achievement of Year 12 Students in Australia*, ACER Research Monograph Series 40 (Hawthorn, VIC: ACER, 1991).

women's educational institutions and in the national view that scientific development was essential for economic growth and prosperity. A renewed emphasis on science at St Rita's during the 1990s also reflected governmental policies aimed at reducing the gender gap in school science achievement. The Federal Government's *National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools* in 1987 announced:

Schools have a role and responsibility in contributing to the achievement of equality between the sexes and in improving conditions of life for girls and women. All Australian schools should ensure that what is being taught and learned does justice to girls and women, taking account of their cultural, language and socio-economic diversity, and is equally valuable for girls and boys.<sup>79</sup>

Such aspirations for advancing women through education were already embedded in colleges like St Rita's that shared a common European convent high school tradition, as has been seen.

During the 1990s, science continued to be promoted at St Rita's as a pathway to enable more girls to enter male-dominated fields of employment like medicine:

Increasing emphasis is being placed within the sciences at St Rita's on the development of an awareness of the employment opportunities available to all, irrespective of gender.<sup>80</sup>

It was noted in the 1992 *Annual* that:

With increases in enrolments and support from the school administration, the study of physics by girls will continue to grow and enable our students to play an ever increasing role in traditionally male dominated professions.... Students are studying physics to help them in a number of career pathways, including medicine, veterinary science, architecture and engineering.<sup>81</sup>

In 1993, twenty-eight Year Eleven students studied physics, a record number for St Rita's. Similarly, in 1994 there were almost twice as many girls studying biology than in the previous year. These trends were also evident in work experience placements that showed a significant preference for science-related fields.<sup>82</sup> St Rita's science teachers strove for educational excellence not only by developing progressive programs and providing up-to-date facilities for chemistry and physics, but also by encouraging girls to enter science competitions and to succeed creditably at both state and national levels. For example, chemistry students participated annually in the University of Queensland Titration Competition gaining consistently high grades, as did St Rita's entrants in the annual Australian Science

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<sup>79</sup> Commonwealth Schools Commission Australia, Preamble to *A National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools* (Canberra: Australian Schools Commission, 1987), quoted in Shelley McInnes, "Promoting Gender Equity Through Schools: Twenty Years of Gender Equity Policy Development," Research Paper 24, 1995-96 (Canberra: Department of Parliamentary Services, Parliament of Australia, 1996), last modified October 26, 2007, <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/rp/1995-96/96rp24.htm#POLICY>.

<sup>80</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1991, 51.

<sup>81</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1992, 49.

<sup>82</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1992, 71.



Competition.<sup>83</sup> In 1993, St Rita's had the largest contingent of students from any secondary college attending the Seimen's Science Summer Schools at the University of Queensland and Queensland University of Technology. In the following year, nine Year Eleven biology students qualified to participate in the notable Australian National University Science Summer Schools in Canberra. Two of the nine St Rita's girls were offered sought-after student 'places' under a CSIRO Student Research Program to work with practising scientists at Brisbane's Griffith University.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, St Rita's girls participated annually in the CRA National Youth Science Forum in Canberra. Then in 2005, a St Rita's student, Rachel Effeney, was encouraged by her teachers to travel to Spain as part of the Australian team for the International Physics Olympiad. She was awarded a Bronze Medal in the competition.<sup>85</sup>

In the same period, St Rita's students were also encouraged to appreciate the value of mathematics. Parents were offered workshops on the current mathematics syllabi to enable their support of home study. In addition, talented students were encouraged to apply for various extension programs conducted at the Queensland University of Technology and the University of Queensland's Mathematics Winter School.<sup>86</sup>

Thus, in recent decades, St Rita's familiar credo "girls can do anything" was clearly embraced and fulfilled through the concerted efforts of the school's administration team, teachers, parents and students.

### 9.11.2 Maintaining Excellence in English and the Performing Arts

As in the past, St Rita's teachers kept abreast of current ideas in English language education and they adapted programs to girls' modern needs. In the late 1990s, St Rita's English teachers responded with alacrity to changes in the Queensland English curriculum. They undertook professional development in the evolving fields of functional systemic grammar, linguistics, and discourse theory, textual transformations, reading practices, Internet use and critical literacy.<sup>87</sup> St Rita's seemed well prepared for the new Senior English Syllabus in 2000 for which it was again a pilot school. Indeed by 2001, it had produced a new Senior English program in line with the new syllabus, and gained accreditation with the BSSSS.<sup>88</sup>

St Rita's teachers actively encouraged students to participate in all major English competitions conducted by newspapers, language teachers' associations and universities, and

<sup>83</sup> SRC Annuals, 1993-98; *Verbis*, August 1, 1996, 5.

<sup>84</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1993, 63; *SRC Annual*, 1994, 39.

<sup>85</sup> Rachel Effeney, reminiscences; Barbaro, *Acorn to Oak*, 261.

<sup>86</sup> *Verbis*, July 31, 1997, 2.

<sup>87</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1999, 63.

<sup>88</sup> *SRC Annual*, 2001, 39.

the girls frequently gained places in regional finals. Inter-school public speaking competitions included Lions' Youth of the Year, Rostrum Voice of Youth, Jaycees' Youth Speaks for Australia and Plain English Speaking. Public speaking and debating remained popular at St Rita's as was evidenced by the number of debating teams entered in the Queensland Debating Union (QDU) Schools Competition. In 1999, seven teams reached the qualifying finals, a landmark for debating at the college.<sup>89</sup> Students were also encouraged to attend language workshops like the Meanjin Writers' Camp, an extension program conducted by prominent Queensland writers and speakers. Parallel programs aimed at developing student confidence as writers were also initiated. In 1997, a 'Language and Literature Day' was instituted and became an annual event that provided workshops by visiting professionals including drama specialists, university lecturers, writers, broadcasters and newspaper editors and journalists. 'A Writer in Residence' program was also introduced at St Rita's whereby published writers shared their craft with students.<sup>90</sup>

St Rita's reputation for high standards in music was assiduously maintained over the years. Mr Robert Burrell came to St Rita's in 1992 as 'Composer in Residence' and later that year became music coordinator. A renewed emphasis on music education ensued. In 1993, tutors for guitar, flute and percussion were employed and three practice rooms were built to accommodate the expansion of the instrumental and elective music programs. Two additional music groups were formed in 1994 - a concert band and the stage choir, 'Viva La Voce.' St Rita's orchestra was also revived at this time. Major Laurie Young, a brass specialist, was employed to conduct the new concert band, which under his direction won several competitions that included the Pine Rivers Eisteddfod in 1996.<sup>91</sup> The concert band earned the particular distinction of winning first place in the Queensland Catholic College's Music Festival (QCCMF) for three consecutive years from 1999 to 2001.<sup>92</sup> A further sign of St Rita's musical prowess was evidenced when Viva la Voce won the bronze medal at the QCCMF in 2000, the silver in 2001, and gold in 2003. From 1991, musical productions were staged biennially and these included *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Pirates of Penzance*, and *The Matilda Women*. The first major school production performed by students in the Eirene Centre was the 2001 cabaret, *Viva la Dance*, which presented the story of dance through the ages.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> SRC Annual, 1999, 86.

<sup>90</sup> Verbis, March 5, 1998, 3.

<sup>91</sup> SRC Annual, 1996, 40.

<sup>92</sup> SRC Annuals, 2000, 17; 2001, 51.

<sup>93</sup> SRC Annuals, 1991-2001; Northern News, June 10, 1993, 1.

## 9.12 DEVELOPMENTS IN SPORT

St Rita's sporting program continued to expand at the start of the new century and it has contributed significantly to the lives of students. There remained few sports in which girls did not participate, and St Rita's Thursday afternoon list of activities lengthened to reflect this reality. New activities introduced included rock-climbing, sailing, fencing, indoor cricket, aerobics, and synchronised swimming. Judo became a compulsory subject in the Year Nine health and physical education program and was offered as an elective subject in the Year Eleven certificate course. Black belt instructors conducted after school classes that saw St Rita's girls achieve standards set by the Australian Judo Federation.

In addition to continuing involvement in the Catholic and independent colleges competitions, St Rita's joined the Queensland State Secondary School Sport Association (QSSSSA) in 1993. Girls competed in the Central District zone against Hendra State High School, Corpus Christi College, All Hallows' School, Kelvin Grove State High School, Wavell Heights State High School and Kedron State High School.<sup>94</sup> Thus, St Rita's students now participated more frequently and in a wider range of inter-school sports that included soccer, touch football and water polo. With the opening of St Rita's 25m x 25m x 2m heated swimming pool, the Acqua Rosa Centre, in 2003, swimming and water polo teams could now train all year round. The benefits of the new facility became evident in 2004 when, for the first time since 1976, St Rita's won the Duhig Cup Swimming Carnival, and in 2005 entered several teams in the Queensland Water Polo Association.<sup>95</sup>

In tennis, St Rita's was usually assured of at least one annual premiership, since up to fifteen teams were routinely fielded. In 1999, after a hiatus of eight years, St Rita's won the Archbishop O'Donnell Trophy for the highest number of premierships in the tennis competition. This success was repeated in 2003 and 2004. Among St Rita's outstanding sportswomen was elite athlete Clare Thompson, who in 1993 was selected for the Australian Athletics Team and competed in the Under-20 Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) competition. In 1994, she joined the Under-20 Track and Field Team in Europe and competed in various championships there. St Rita's records of the past two decades list numerous students who represented Queensland and Australia in their respective sports.<sup>96</sup>

In cross-country, St Rita's gained third position in the inter-school carnival in 1998, achieving the best placing of the school's involvement in the competition. In 2001, the squad's efforts

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<sup>94</sup> *SRC Annual, 1993*, 89.

<sup>95</sup> *SRC Annuals, 1993-2008*.

<sup>96</sup> *SRC Annuals, 1988-2008*.

consolidated and for the first time St Rita's won the Beirne Cup for cross-country. Premierships were also attained in the Independent Schools Association Basketball competitions as well as in the volleyball and soccer competitions.<sup>97</sup>

### 9.13 FUTURE OF ST RITA'S COLLEGE – AN INSTITUTION IN TRANSITION

In 2001, the Queensland Presentation Congregation, then under the leadership of Sr Marlette Black, began consultation to determine the future governance of its two Queensland colleges, St Rita's in Brisbane and St Ursula's in Yeppoon.<sup>98</sup> As the congregation entered the new century, planning for St Rita's future governance was considered a key priority. Sr Marlette explained at the time:

We believe that it will not be possible for the congregation to undertake responsible sponsorship of the college beyond the next five to ten years because of our ageing and diminished membership.<sup>99</sup>

The congregation engaged Sr Berneice Loch rsm to design the consultation process which was prudently applied at a time when both colleges were operating soundly in all aspects. A research paper for the Presentation Sisters was prepared by Sr Berneice in consultation with the Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) Governance Working Party, of which Sr Marlette was a member and later became chairperson.<sup>100</sup> The paper affirmed the importance of religious congregations in Australia in their role of providing diversity within a school sector and among school sectors. It also proposed that congregational schools, such as St Rita's, could adopt a model of school sponsorship that was alternative and complementary to the model utilised by the Diocesan Catholic Education system. (Sponsorship refers to the responsibility that a congregation has in church law for the oversight and administration of a school.)

At that time, Sr Marlette facilitated key discussions with many religious institutes working towards the transfer of canonical sponsorship of their apostolic works. This planning process which was initiated by women religious to assure the continuance of their apostolic projects, particularly those in girls' education, is a further example of powerful agency by women. In Queensland, the QCEC Governance Working Party identified several options for institutes unable to continue with the administration of their congregational schools.<sup>101</sup> In 2003, Sr

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<sup>97</sup> *SRC Annual, 2001*, 119.

<sup>98</sup> On this process see Barbaro, *Acorn to Oak*, 236-237.

<sup>99</sup> *Verbis*, May 31, 2001, 2.

<sup>100</sup> Berneice Loch, "A Reflection on the Principles of Unity and Diversity in Relationship to the Provision of Catholic Schooling in the Twenty-first Century - A Research Paper." (Brisbane: Queensland Presentation Sisters, 2001).

<sup>101</sup> Presentation Congregation Queensland, *Queensland Presentation Colleges: Governance for Future Mission* (Brisbane: Presentation Congregation Queensland, 2010).

Marlette chaired a QCEC Working Party that presented the Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes Queensland (CLRIQ) and the body of Queensland bishops, options for models of future sponsorship and governance of apostolic works that would be acceptable to both bodies. Also around that time, Sr Marlette led national workshops at the Australian Conference of Religious Institutes (ACLRI) on the topic of religious institutes in transition.

Since then, of the options identified by the CLRIQ Working Party, many religious institutes in Queensland have decided to transfer the sponsorship of their schools to either the bishop of the diocese through the relevant Catholic Education authority, or to a separate body formed as a public association of Catholic faithful with Public Juridic Person (PJP) status. PJP is the canon law designation of an incorporated company requiring legislative approval under civil and canon law. That is, a congregation that legally owns a school is a juridic person in canon law, and can thus act as an entity. This governance model for a once congregational school requires PJP status, to be negotiated with the bishop of the relevant diocese.

In November 2010, the Queensland Presentation Congregation opted to formally request Mercy Partners, a PJP established by the Queensland Mercy Congregations in 2008, to assume the canonical sponsorship of both St Rita's and St Ursula's.<sup>102</sup> As of October 2011, a series of meetings with all stakeholders, including with Mercy Partners,<sup>103</sup> have been held in which this proposal has been endorsed and further meetings are planned to discuss the implications of this move. The Presentation Sisters recognise that when they eventually transfer canonical sponsorship of St Rita's and St Ursula's they will "let go" of their "two cherished apostolic works," and that the letting go will be painful.<sup>104</sup> In considering what the future holds, the Presentation Sisters envisage that "while canonical sponsorship of the colleges will be new, the mission will be the same."<sup>105</sup> They expect both college communities will be challenged to continue "to live the Presentation charism" and "share in God's mission to work with and on behalf of the most vulnerable members of society in the spirit of Nano Nagle."<sup>106</sup>

St Rita's passing from a privately (order) owned college into an entity under the general operation of the Mercy Partners, which will oversee Mercy schools and possibly other congregational schools, raises the question of preserving St Rita's distinctive Presentation heritage. (Congregational schools such as St Rita's and St Ursula's are becoming increasingly

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<sup>102</sup> Congregations may apply to have one or more of their ministries transferred to Mercy Partners.

<sup>103</sup> See *Queensland Presentation Colleges*.

<sup>104</sup> *Queensland Presentation Colleges*, 13.

<sup>105</sup> *Queensland Presentation Colleges*, 14.

<sup>106</sup> *Queensland Presentation Colleges*, 14.

known as heritage schools.) While the two colleges will come under the ecclesial and civil ‘umbrella’ provided by the new Mercy Partners entity, they will retain their own distinctiveness and ethos. Such a transition would continue the story of change in Catholic women’s education from the medieval monastic schools through to the ground-breaking adaptations made by Jeanne de Lestonnac and the Paris Ursulines, to adaptations made specifically for the Australian environment and through to the present period. In 2011, Sr Berneice Loch (Congregational Leader of the Rockhampton Mercy Sisters and member of the Mercy Partners Council) stated:

Over time we should expect to see a vision for the future of Mercy Partners emerge, and this will become real for people as they begin to recognise that they are part of a new, emerging entity within the Church in Queensland.<sup>107</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This chapter made clear that by 2008, the ‘small acorn’ that was once St Rita’s convent high school had indeed grown into a large ‘oak tree’ – one of Brisbane’s leading girls’ secondary colleges. It demonstrated that St Rita’s teachers from 1989 to 2008 continued to strive for and achieve educational excellence in all aspects of school life. Furthermore, this chapter showed that St Rita’s students were prepared for life and they were also taught to critically examine the world in order to bring about positive social change. In a 1994 report, Sr Elvera stated:

Family and school work together to mould women, so that, like the mustard seed they will spread their influence far and wide....Whether it is [through] our Religious Education, English, social sciences, sciences, home economics or art program, we are challenged to look at the world, to critique it in the light of Gospel values and then to do something about it...Thus our students are being prepared to take an active role in society.<sup>108</sup>

Ms Alison Terrey, deputy principal from 1996 to 2001, enunciated St Rita’s transformational ideals:

We share the responsibility for building a community that respects the dignity of all...with recognition that through our education we have opportunities that open doors, not simply for ourselves, but to create a better world, indeed to transform our world.<sup>109</sup>

This chapter demonstrated that the continued aspirations and activities of St Rita’s school community express the empowerment and transformation traditions of convent high school education. The Presentation Sisters themselves have continued as inspirational role models for the bringing about of structural change in society. Reflecting on St Rita’s aspirations for women, Sr Elvera Sesta reported in 2001 that:

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<sup>107</sup> “Mercy Sisters Move to Secure Future,” *The Catholic Leader*, October 16, 2011, 5.

<sup>108</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1994, 5.

<sup>109</sup> *SRC Annual*, 1996, 6. Alison Terrey, in 2002, was appointed principal of Mt St Michael’s College, Ashgrove.

It was never doubted that women could do anything – and they did, both the sisters and their students. They treasured that tenacity of purpose, that determination that does not give up in the face of adversity. They valued education and plumbed its depths.<sup>110</sup>

Moreover, as this chapter has shown, St Rita's educational aims continued to focus on developing a range of competencies that prepared girls for successful and meaningful lives. The coming chapter will present conclusions and recommendations from this study as well as examine the implications for congregational schools like St Rita's that are seeking to secure the future of their educational enterprises and key traditions in the current period of transition.

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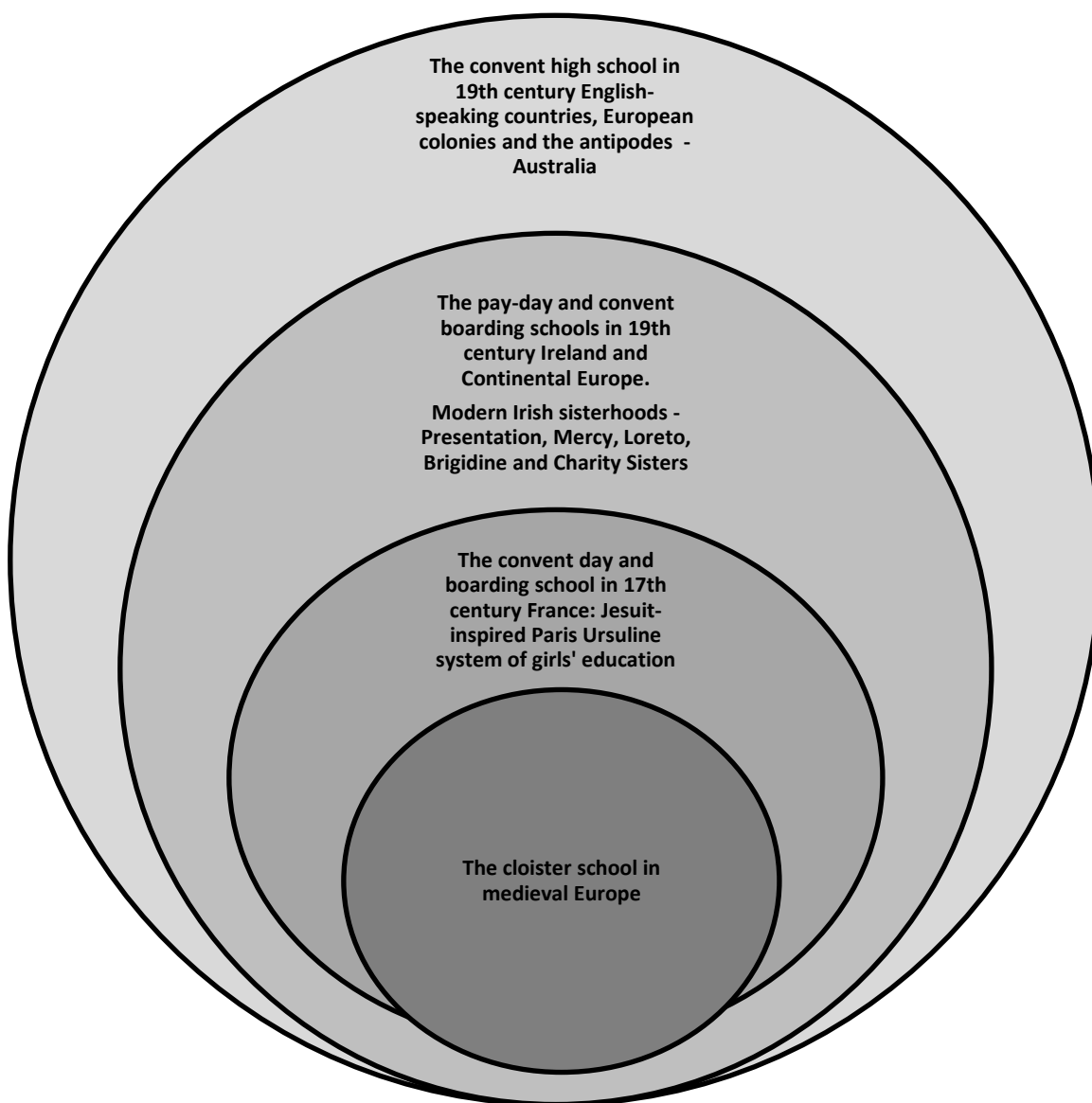
<sup>110</sup> *SRC Annual, 2001*, 1.

## CHAPTER TEN

### CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the origins of convent high school education in Australia. It presented St Rita's College at Clayfield, Queensland, as a case study of a Catholic girls' secondary college that has evolved within the long history of women's education. The contextual history of St Rita's College located the origins of the convent high school in early modern France. It then considered adaptations of the original French convent school model by women religious to socio-educational pressures in 18<sup>th</sup> century Ireland and 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia. Through this study, an extensive portrait of the evolution and translation of Catholic girls' secondary education from Europe to the antipodes has emerged to highlight threads of continuity as well as change (See Figure 3 below).

**Figure 3:** Evolution and Translation of Catholic Girls' Secondary Education from Europe to the Antipodes.





This study focused overall on the empowerment and transformation traditions of the convent high school, and asked how such traditions are expressed in the story of St Rita's College. It adopted the conceptual frameworks of feminist history and contextualism. The research produced rich data contributing to the knowledge of women's education in general and Catholic women's education in Queensland in particular.

## 10.1 MAIN FINDINGS

The main findings of the thesis are as follows.

Convent high schools and private ladies' colleges in 19th century Australia emerged out of one distinctive education tradition that originated in Continental Europe. Chapters Two to Four of this thesis demonstrated that similarities in the syllabi of such women's educational institutions have a common source that dates back to the Paris Ursuline methods of education in early 17th century France. Histories such as Marjorie Theobald's ground-breaking study, *Knowing Women*, suggest that the distinctive style of girls' schooling in colonial Australia could have originated in the late 18th century in England.<sup>1</sup> However, the thesis has demonstrated that this English influence was predated by that of the Catholic female teaching orders of early modern Europe.

A theme that emerged clearly in this thesis is that the convent high school traditions of empowerment and transformation are integral to the history of Catholic women's education. The research uncovered numerous examples of female agency which convincingly support the proposition that religious women established convent high schools for the advancement of women and for the betterment of society overall. This thesis, which examined different historical periods and national settings, clearly demonstrated that women in convent education were agents of intentional and liberative change. In this study, religious women emerged as forward-looking and resourceful pioneers of structured secondary schooling for girls.

This history acknowledged that women, like Mary Ward and Mary MacKillop, clashed with the Catholic Church hierarchy on certain issues; however it also demonstrated that religious women in Europe as in Australia, entered collaborative partnerships with clergy in order to achieve their educational goals.

Chapter Four demonstrated that the Catholic teaching sisters readily adapted European-style convent education to new socio-educational pressures in Australia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It showed that the sisters contributed significantly to the democratisation of education in

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<sup>1</sup> Theobald, *Knowing Women*, 15.

Australia by providing day and boarding schools for a wide segment of the female population, and offering affordable elementary schooling up until the introduction of free public education in all States by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The thesis established that the teaching sisters in Australia like their predecessors in the old world - the Paris Ursulines, English Ladies, and modern Irish sisterhoods – shared a vision for education that was broader than the evangelical aims of the Church. It revealed that 19<sup>th</sup> century convent high schools in Australia sought to form well-educated, socially responsible and competent women equipped to transform society and pass on the Catholic faith.

Convent high schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries have frequently been stereotyped as ‘accomplishment’ schools and their curricula accordingly trivialised.<sup>2</sup> This thesis, however, demonstrated that the Ursuline-derived convent curriculum offered academic, vocational, and cultural subjects that in fact responded to a wide diversity of women’s needs. Furthermore, this broad curriculum was rigorously taught to both day pupils and boarders, many of whom gained outstanding results in public examinations. In fact, the Catholic convents provided a system of education that enabled women later to campaign vigorously for suffrage and to enter professions that formerly were closed to them.

The thesis also proposed that stereotypes of the Catholic sisters as submissive subordinates in the wider Catholic educational project in Australia, as elsewhere, is not sustainable. It demonstrated that convent high schools were private enterprises which permitted autonomy for religious women. Additionally, the thesis rejected the view that Catholic girls’ colleges before the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century were more intent on “confining and refining women” than on promoting high educational ideals.<sup>3</sup> The research revealed that colleges like St Rita’s, Clayfield, sought to advance women beyond the confines in which society may have wished to contain them. The thesis revealed too that the educational intentions of Catholic girls’ colleges contributed to a much broader view of women’s education and Christian womanhood than has been recognised. The Australian teaching sisters’ liberative concept of women’s education is seen to have emerged out of the empowerment and transformation traditions of the convent high school.

The Case Study demonstrated that the aims, practices and educational choices underpinning St Rita’s development from 1926 to 2008 reflected the empowerment and transformation traditions of Catholic women’s education. These traditions, as argued in the thesis, were

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<sup>2</sup> Theobald, “Mere Accomplishments,” 15-28.

<sup>3</sup> As proposed in Kyle, *Her Natural Destiny*, 71.

evidenced in St Rita's holistic approach to girls' education, more specifically, in its musical, sporting and academic programs, its curriculum innovations, its teacher-training, and its fostering of social action groups, to name but a few examples. This Jesuit equivalent approach, holistic though rigorous, aimed to prepare women for their future societal roles, and especially to be agents of influence.

The thesis considered the current educational emphases at St Rita's in light of the college's history and its founding religious mission. Research revealed similarity and continuity, and therefore an unbroken link, between the Presentation Sisters who established St Rita's, Clayfield and the Paris Ursulines. The thesis confirmed that the constitutions and educational methods of the Presentation congregation derived directly from the Paris Ursulines. It established that the Presentation ideal of forming competent, self-reliant and socially aware women, as demonstrated in Chapters Three and Four, was at the heart of St Rita's educational purpose. On the whole, the thesis demonstrated that throughout its history, St Rita's served Queensland women by providing a broad, holistic Ursuline-based education that was empowering and transformational in both aspiration and outcome.

Chapters Five to Nine demonstrated that the competent leadership by St Rita's school principals from 1926 to 2008 assured both the school's continuance as a private enterprise and its significant effectiveness as an educational institution in Brisbane. As revealed in this thesis, the Presentation Sisters at each of their convent high schools in Australia worked collaboratively with their local clergy, parish and geographical community to best serve the educational needs of women.

The case study examined St Rita's educational outcomes against the sisters' aims to empower girls. Accordingly, it revealed the depth of student successes across many areas of school life over time. The highlighting of these successes at St Rita's and of the extraordinary achievements of the teaching sisters could be seen as hagiographic history; however the data was thoroughly documented and revealed the extent to which the sisters' empowerment goals were realised.

In this history, Mother Ursula Kennedy emerged as the chief impetus for the extension of the Queensland Presentation congregation beyond Central Western Queensland and its establishment at St Rita's in Brisbane in 1926. M Ursula's story gives a snapshot of women religious as institution-builders in Australia, though this role has been commonly assumed as belonging more to men. M Ursula's determination to build up St Rita's even through

financially difficult times exemplified the abiding commitment of Catholic sisters to women's education.

Chapter Five revealed that financial support for the Presentation Sisters at St Rita's initially came from pastoralists in Central Queensland and not from Catholic businesses in Brisbane. When M Ursula was unable to secure a Brisbane guarantor for the Stanley Hall loan she sought support from the Martin brothers in Emerald, friends of the congregation who readily obliged. The thesis confirms that the Presentation Sisters were largely unfamiliar to the people of Brisbane at that time since St Rita's was a convent high school founded from further north in the State and not from a well-known mother-house in the south.

In this history, St Rita's story parallels that of Queensland's own tentative formation of identity, in that Queensland itself developed in the shadow of New South Wales. Recently, Julianne Schultz contrasted the unsung progress of Queensland's intellectual tradition with the development of the more celebrated libertarian frameworks of the older southern States.<sup>4</sup> Shultz referred to the awareness by colonial Queenslanders "of a censorious southern eye" as they struggled to "tame the vast land to the west and north," and to a "'can do' attitude" as they courted disaster. This thesis demonstrated that in forming generations of Queensland women, Catholic girls' secondary colleges like St Rita's, and Catholic teaching sisters like the Presentations, contributed strongly to societal development and to the formation of a liberal intellectual tradition in Queensland.

Former Australian journalist and federal politician, Maxine McKew, in her first speech to Parliament in 2008 noted that her schooling at All Hallows' Mercy convent, Brisbane, was seminal for her in that her teachers were forward-thinking and influential women. McKew stated:

Civilisation depends, crucially, on spiritual prosperity: upon what we care about, on...what sorts of ideals and hopes we have. Part of what I care about - friendship, beauty and the life of the mind - was nurtured by my teachers at All Hallows' Convent...I was taught by women, by lay and religious staff, who seemed to me to know what was worth knowing. When one considers the deep provincialism of Queensland during this period, this seems extraordinary. But the best of these women were not bound by borders or prejudice. They did what all good teachers do; they took their charges on a journey and fired the imagination.<sup>5</sup>

There is scope for further research on the contribution of the Catholic teaching sisters to Queensland's intellectual and cultural heritage.

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<sup>4</sup> Julianne Schultz, "The Tail that Wagged the Dog," *Griffith Review* 21 (2008), 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> View Maxine McKew, "First Speech to Parliament," posted on February 14, 2008, <http://www.maxinemckew.com.au/2008/02/14/first-speech-to-parliament/>; Internet.

Chapters Eight to Nine of the thesis confirmed that over recent decades St Rita's teachers have generally understood the Presentation charism and maintained its influence on college life. These chapters demonstrated that the Presentation Sisters have effectively handed on their social and educational ideals to committed staff. In 2000, Sr Marlette Black expressed confidence that the Presentation charism remained alive at St Rita's, despite the diminishing presence of Presentation Sisters at the college:

Nano's dream is very much alive in the hearts, homes and workplaces of Presentation people throughout Queensland – including St Rita's College. The members of St Rita's College...are committed to keeping the Presentation tradition of justice and compassion alive in the college and in the hearts and lives of the young women who are the future citizens of Queensland.<sup>6</sup>

The thesis found that St Rita's teachers generally have appropriated the Presentation charism and promoted gospel values articulated in a theology of transformation.

The Case Study confirmed that the Ursuline-based ideal of forming the whole person in the many dimensions of her life remains at the heart of St Rita's educational purpose. Former students and their parents best attest to the success with which St Rita's has maintained this transformative ideal. One parent affirmed in 1996:

The college's balanced approach to developing the whole person through excellent study skills, healthy moral values, sport and personal development produces confident and well-adjusted young ladies with a positive attitude to life. This has been the case with our daughter who has blossomed into a young woman ready to take on the world.<sup>7</sup>

In 2001, College Vice-Captain Lisa Anthonisz wrote:

St Rita's has nurtured me in my progression to a confident, educated and driven young woman...St Rita's has allowed me to achieve my goals and shown me that women are able to achieve anything.<sup>8</sup>

The study revealed the historic changes that are taking place at this present point in the governance of secondary girls' colleges owned by the Presentation and Mercy Sisters in Queensland. These changes involve transferring the canonical responsibility for their ministries to a new emerging institution. Significantly, as the canonical sponsorship of congregational schools, like St Rita's, is transferred to new entities under different administration, a distinct period of the evolution of the order-owned convent high school in Australia will come to a close.

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<sup>6</sup> *SRC Annual*, 2000, 7.

<sup>7</sup> *Verbis*, November 14, 1996, 5.

<sup>8</sup> *SRC Annual*, 2001, 9.

## 10.2 CONCLUDING REFLECTION

This thesis found that Nano Nagle's religious, social and educational ideals provided the foundation for St Rita's College when it was established in 1926 and those ideals remain the basis for the school's future direction. The poem below composed in 2000 by Victorian Presentation Sister Raphael Consedine, highlights the constancy of faith of religious women when all else changes.

1950

Bright shone the star  
Its glory rose in our hearts  
What could we do but follow?  
Forsaking the main roads  
For a mysterious pathway  
Travelling beyond the dawn.

2000

The star has gone from sight  
It is full dark now:  
But our feet know the way  
Our hearts carry the light  
This is the last mile  
Come, let us run!

## 10.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Further research from this thesis could include a comparative study across Catholic girls' colleges in Australia in extension of the argument presented that the convent high school traditions of empowerment and transformation are reflected in the aims and outcomes of many such institutions. Such research would add significantly to knowledge of women's education.

A study could also be conducted across Catholic boys' secondary colleges to identify common education traditions that have shaped those schools' aims, policies and practices. Such research would place the modern Catholic boys' secondary school in Australia into a larger historical context, thereby complementing this history of St Rita's College and its investigation of the origins of Catholic women's education. Further, a comparative study of the educational ideals of Catholic boys' and girls' colleges would be a valuable addition to research.

This study has presented the contribution of the Catholic female teaching congregations to the professionalisation of teaching in Western Europe and in Australia, as significant to St Rita's prehistory as well as to the story of women's education overall. The study has established that this strand is expressive of the overall empowerment and transformation traditions of the convent high school. Further investigation of the professionalisation of teaching as it developed in Australian Catholic girls' colleges from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards would be an important contribution to research.

The transforming influence of the Catholic teaching sisters in convent high schools on the establishment and development of the arts and European culture in the history of Australia, as raised in this present study, merits further attention. Research that fully explores the extent and significance of the musical tradition of Catholic women's education in the artistic, cultural shaping of Australia is needed.

There is scope for broader investigation of the social outreach by the Catholic teaching sisters in Australia prior to the modern era of government welfare. Such research could assess the support offered by the sisters to less advantaged families in convent school communities, and shed more light on the role of conventual women in shaping the very social fabric of the country.

A comparative study across various institutes of women religious in Australia could also be conducted to more fully investigate how the knowledge of an institute's history can enable confident decisions regarding the future sponsorship of its congregational schools. Another important question is how a school like St Rita's might effectively preserve both its charism and its ethos under governance structures that may incorporate congregational schools of different charism and ethos.

#### **10.4 CONTRIBUTION OF THIS THESIS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CATHOLIC GIRLS' SECONDARY COLLEGES**

This thesis is a significant source for historians of women's education as it has compiled the necessary origins of Australian Catholic girls' secondary schooling, which hitherto have not been rigorously examined. The study has produced a contextual, analytical history of a Catholic girls' secondary school that expands the as yet under-developed literature on women's education in Australia in general, and literature on the education of Catholic, Queensland women in particular.

This thesis is timely in that religious institutes in Australia, as elsewhere, are currently at a midpoint in addressing the canonical transfer of sponsorship of their congregational schools and other apostolic works. It invites institutes of women religious in Australia working towards this transfer of sponsorship to focus consideration on the shared though unifying convent high school tradition out of which all of their secondary girls' colleges evolved. The author recommends that review and discussion be undertaken by such institutes to ascertain which elements within their common education tradition need to be identified, reviewed and

strengthened in order for their schools to fulfil their purpose and continue to serve women effectively.

This thesis has significant implications for the Queensland Presentation Sisters, whose two secondary colleges, St Rita's and St Ursula's, will soon experience a new form of canonical sponsorship. This transition will eventually see the congregation relinquish ownership of its prized institutions. In this situation, the thesis can assist policy makers, those who newly assume sponsorship of the two schools, the boards of directors, the principals and leadership teams of each college, the staffs, and whole school communities, to integrate the Presentation charism into the new governance model. It can also assist St Rita's school leadership teams in providing education for members of the school community regarding the empowerment and transformation traditions that shaped the school's aims and practices, so that these traditions can continue to enhance the college, the wider community and the Church.

It is expected that the research in this thesis will have broad applicability. It can assist institutes of women religious on the threshold of change to recover their mutual educational heritage. Congregations considering the transfer of sponsorship of their secondary girls' schools to Mercy Partners, as the Queensland Presentations have done, may find this thesis particularly valuable for reclaiming a common tradition of convent education as each congregation seeks to maintain its unique ethos in this present period of transition.

This history of St Rita's College is a timely contribution to the knowledge about Catholic women's education in Australia. The research provided new information about the history of convent high schools like St Rita's. It highlighted the contribution of Catholic women's educational institutions to Australia's development by their forming generations of well-educated and accomplished women. The transforming influence by such women on families, neighbourhoods, universities, workplaces and on culture generally has clearly shaped this country.



## APPENDIX A: INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS.



### Australian Catholic University

#### INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

##### THE HISTORY OF ST. RITA'S COLLEGE, BRISBANE.

**SUPERVISOR:** SR. ROSA MACGINLEY  
**STUDENT RESEARCHER:** ANNA BARBARO  
**PROGRAMME:** MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE

The purpose of this study is to produce a book for publication on the history of St. Rita's College in Brisbane. I am undertaking a Master of Philosophy Degree under a scholarship period funded by St. Rita's College in association with Australian Catholic University. My research involves accessing a wide range of archival material, including College records; identifying historical eras; and producing a history that reflects the tradition, character and philosophy of the College. Some past and present members of the College community will be interviewed. These interviews will follow a relaxed conversational style and any personal information will be treated in confidence. It will be necessary to use a tape recorder to assist the study and to achieve a free flowing interview.

In the interview, interviewees will be asked to recall stories and experiences of their time spent at the College. The time for each interview may be between one to two hours in duration.

The oral history obtained from these interviews will add greatly to the written history of the College and to our local history.

Participants are free to refuse consent altogether without having to explain that decision, or to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the study at any time without giving a reason.

Confidentiality will be ensured during the conduct of the research and in the history book or any other publication arising from it, unless the participant consents to the publication of their name or identity.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Supervisor and the Student Researcher:

Sr. Rosa MacGinley and Ms. Anna Barbaro  
 on telephone number: 3855 7294 or Anna on 33927560  
 in the School of Arts and Sciences  
 at Australian Catholic University, MCAULEY Campus, PO Box 247, Everton Park,  
 Qld. 4053.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University.

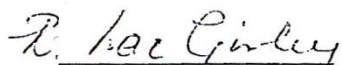
In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Supervisor and Student Researcher have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee at the following address:

Chair, HREC  
C/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
PO Box 247  
EVERTON PARK QLD 4053  
Tel: 07 3855 7294.

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the Student Researcher.

Yours sincerely,



Signature of Supervisor



Signature of Student Researcher

## APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM



### Australian Catholic University

#### CONSENT FORM

**THE HISTORY OF ST. RITA'S COLLEGE, BRISBANE**

**SUPERVISOR: SR. ROSA MACGINLEY**

**STUDENT RESEARCHER: ANNA BARBARO**

I ..... *(the participant)* have read *(or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: .....  
(block letters)

SIGNATURE ..... DATE.....

SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR:.....

DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:.....

DATE:.....

## APPENDIX C: HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL FORM



### Human Research Ethics Committee Committee Approval Form

**Principal Investigator/Supervisor:** Sr Rosa MacGinley / Professor Lindsay Farrell

**Co-Investigators:**

**Student Researcher:** : Ms Anna Barbaro

**Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:**

A History of St. Rita's College, Brisbane: A Case Study of the Origins and Development of the Convent High School from Europe to the Antipodes.

**for the period:** 24 September 2001 to 31 December 2005 (Extended to 31/05/2010)

**Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number:** Q200102 03

**Special Condition/s of Approval**

***Prior to commencement of your research***, the following permissions are required to be submitted to the ACU HREC:

N/A

**The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (2007) apply:**

- (i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
  - security of records
  - compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
  - compliance with special conditions, and
- (ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
  - proposed changes to the protocol
  - unforeseen circumstances or events
  - adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than low risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of negligible risk and low risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

Signed: ..... Date: ..... original date: 24.09.2001.....  
(Research Services Officer, McAuley Campus)



## APPENDIX D: SURVEY.

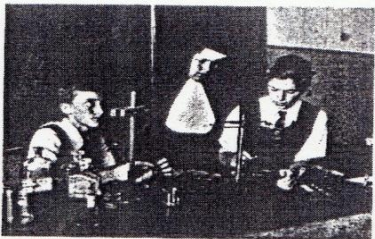
The following questions were used to confirm the findings of a group interview session with past pupils (Senior 1966). The survey instrument provided a blank space after each question for written comments.

### Survey Questions


1. When were you enrolled at St Rita's?
2. Why did your parents choose the school?
3. Who were your teachers and what were their subject areas?
4. Which teachers made a positive/limited/negative impact on you? In what way?
5. For each of the following areas of school life, describe at least one memorable experience: social; sporting; cultural – music, drama, art; community; religious; social justice; academic; vocational; examinations.
6. In what way did the social, political or religious happenings of the 1960s impact on your schooling? (eg. Vatican II, the Beatles...)
7. How would you describe the female role models which the sisters held up for girls to emulate?
8. Were you encouraged to succeed/excel at school? How did the sisters encourage you?
9. What educational opportunities enabled you to go out and earn your own living?
10. What do you remember about St Rita's standing or reputation as a school?
11. If you were a boarder, how would you describe your boarding experience?
12. What did you think then of the idea of the sisters going to university to obtain higher degrees? Was this activity publicised to students?
13. Would you say the sisters kept 'a tight rein' on the girls at St Rita's?
14. How much emphasis was placed on practical and useful education that enabled girls to find employment or manage life's daily tasks?
15. To what extent did the sisters encourage girls to be self-sufficient?
16. Were you encouraged to remain at school beyond Year 10, and if so, for what reasons?
17. Were you made aware of the range of career options available to women at the time?
18. How much guidance did you receive from your parents with regard to employment options when you finished school?
19. Over which issues or values were you likely to clash with the sisters?
20. Over which issues were you likely to clash with your parents?
21. Thinking back, what was your understanding of what the sisters were trying to do or achieve at St Rita's?
22. Were you involved in extra-curricular activities? Please share your recollections.
23. Were you involved in the social justice programs of the school?
24. It was said in the group session that the sisters in the secondary were well educated, mostly Australian, in tune with social and cultural trends and not severe disciplinarians. Are you able to elaborate further?
25. It was also said that St Rita's provided the foundation for your social awareness? Any further comments?

## APPENDIX E: EXTRACT FROM ST RITA'S COLLEGE 1955 PROSPECTUS AND A PHOTOGRAPH OF ST RITA'S SCIENCE LABORATORY IN 1971

The following extract from St Rita's 1955 Prospectus confirms the school's emphasis on science and academic achievement. It reveals how past pupils with university degrees in science were held up as role models for younger girls to emulate. Margaret MacGinley (below right) was the first science graduate from St Rita's College. She also won the Silvia Dixon Cup for the highest Scholarship pass, 1946, among pupils of the Queensland Primary Correspondence School. The 1955 Prospectus displayed a photograph (below left) of students, including a young Elvera Sesta (Sr Elvera), and their teacher conducting a science experiment. Sr Elvera went on to gain her science degree and subsequently developed the school's science program in the 1970s. The bottom photograph was also used in promotional material and shows chemistry students and Sr Elvera in the science laboratory in 1971.



An interesting experiment



Margaret MacGinley, B.Sc.

### Science

The modern trend towards Science is well catered for by a course in Physics and Chemistry from Sub-Junior to Senior. Some of our girls have acquired distinction in the field of Science, amongst them being Margaret MacGinley, who, after studying for Junior and Senior at St. Rita's, gained her Science degree at Queensland University in 1954 and was awarded a Research Scholarship in Minerals and Oils at the Adelaide University, where she is also part-time Lecturer.

Page Thirteen

St Rita's College, Prospectus, 1955, 13. QPA. Copy in St Rita's College Archives



Photograph: St Rita's Science Laboratory, 1971. Copy in St Rita's College Archives.

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Letters. M Aloysius Ryan to Archbishop James Duhig, 1951 and 1956. BCA.

Letter. M Gabriel Hogan to Archbishop James Duhig, November 26, 1962. BCA.

Letter Sr Evangelist Murtagh to Sr Rosa MacGinley, 21 July 1977. SRCA.

#### *Obituaries –*

M Patrick Madden. QPA.

M Aloysius Ryan. QPA.

Sr Angela Murtagh. QPA.

Sr Benignus O'Dea. QPA.

Sr Bernadette Hayman. QPA.

Sr Anita Quinn. QPA.

M Gabriel Hogan. QPA.

### ***Interviews***

The production and storage of transcripts and audio recordings of interviews of the following participants complied with the requirements of the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee. Transcripts and recordings are in the author's possession.

Past pupil = PP; past teacher = PT; past parent = PPT; deputy principal = DP

### ***Participants***

M Gabriel Hogan (PP) 1926-30 (Mother General, Qld Presentation Congregation) 1960-78.

Elaine Broad, née O'Mara (PP) 1926-33.

Dorothy McCormack, née Mackie (PP) 1927-37.

Sr Assumpta O'Flynn (PP) 1930-37 (PT) 1966 to early 1980s.

Sr Patricia McCarthy (PP) 1934-36.

Sr Moira Creede (PP) 1935-36; (PT) 1945-61; (principal) 1961-71.

Glynne Liddy, née Gibbons, (PP) 1945-55.

Sr Rosa MacGinley (PP) 1946-49; (PT) 1958-1970.

Sr Mary Foster (PP) 1946-47 (PT) 1956-71 and (principal) 1972-79.

Sr Elvera Sesta (PP) 1947-55 (PT) 1960 – 2008 (principal) 1989-2008.

Sr Marguerite Bartholomew (PP) 1947-52 (PT-music) 1960s.

Sr Kathleen Tynan (PP) 1949-62 (PT) 1969-75 (principal) 1979-85.

Bronwyn McKeering, née McDonald, (PP) 1950-62 (PPT) 1980s-90s.

Bernadette Fleming (PP) 1954-57 (PT) 1961-66, 1974-78, 1983, 1987-94 (DP) 1976-78.

Margaret Russell (PP) 1955-66.

Christine Purcell, née Mortimer (PP) 1962-64.

Sr Marlette Black (PP) 1963-67 (PT) 1973-78; 1982-85 (principal) 1986-88.

SRC (Senior 1966), eight participants interviewed as a group.

Kay Herse (DP) 1987-91.

Sue Bunkum (PPT) 1990s (DP Pastoral and Spiritual) 1997-2007.

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Joan Houghton, née Murphy (PP) 1927-35. Copy in SRCA.

Sr Assumpta O'Flynn (PP) 1930-37 (PT) 1966 to early 1980s. Memoir provided to the author, March 2002. SRCA.

Sr Immaculata Stubberfield (PP) 1930s-41. CCA, Book 2, 109.

Pauline O'Neill, née Ward (PP) 1930s-1940s. SRCA.

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Sr Consilia Ring (PP) 1944-48 (PT) 1956-62. Memoir provided to the author, December 2001. SRCA.

Betty Wallace (Graham Burrow teacher, 1940s). Reminiscences provided to the author, February 24, 2003.

Sr Rosa MacGinley (PP) 1946-49. Memoir provided to the author, February 17, 2003. SRCA.

Margaret Healy née MacGinley (PP) 1947-50. SRCA.

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Judith Arthy (PP) 1950s. *SRC Annual*, 1986, SRCA.

Frances Devlin Glass (PP) 1953-65. *SRC Annual*, 1986. SRCA.

Michael Lloyd (PPT) 1960s-70s. Memoir provided to the author, May 2002. SRCA.

Jenny Lee, née McEniery (PP) 1968-1972. Reminiscences provided to the author, January 28, 2004. SRCA.

Jane Bieger née Nixon (PP) 1971-75. *SRC Annual*, 1996, SRCA.

Monica Long (PP) 1976-80. *SRC Annual*, 1986, SRCA.

Therese Hamilton (PP) 1980s. *SRC Annual*, 1983, SRCA.

Marguerite McCarthy (PP) 1980s. *SRC Annual*, 1984, SRCA.

Jennifer Taylor (PP), Leanne Kluver (PP), Kathryn O'Brien (PP), Melissa Vincent (PP) 1990-1994. *Verbis*, April 30 1998, 3. SRCA.

Ashley Cotterell (PP) 1998-2002. Memoir provided to the author, 2005. SRCA.

Rachel Effeney (PP) 2001-2005. Reminiscences. In *Acorn to Oak*, Barbaro, 261.

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