

Australian Catholics and the development of professional social services in Australia

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Australian social work lacks a reading of its history that places it within the social reforms and movements of the 19th century. Australian social work historians have concentrated on professional associations and ignored social activists who pre-date professional social work. The effect of this concentration on professional social work in Australia has been to write women activists, including religious women, out of the few social welfare histories written about Australia.

This paper sets out the contributions to professional social services in Australia by the Australian Catholic Church which has been a major provider of social services for over 150 years. The Church is purported to be the largest provider of personal social services in Australia. The paper outlines the contribution of Catholic social services in Australia for personal social services including family welfare services and social justice and advocacy issues.

The Australian Catholic Church, through its various agencies, has been a major provider of social services for over 150 years. Indeed, the claim is made that the Catholic Church is currently Australia's largest provider of personal social services (Smyth, 1995). The St Vincent de Paul Society, for example, is Australia's largest charitable organisation with 40,000 volunteers, members and auxiliaries ('The Society of St Vincent De Paul', 1998). Catholic agencies, however, are not centrally controlled: there are many different church agencies, administered by dioceses, religious and lay leaders catering to a wide range of social needs.

Catholic social welfare ministry in Australia in the 1990s . . . provides a large range of specialised support, counselling and advocacy services to the Australian community. Services are provided in a context of a commitment to wider structural change in society that will provide all people, but particularly the disadvantaged, with fair and just access to all necessary goods and services, as a human right (Cappo and O'Connor, 1992, p. 4).

At the 1996 census, Catholics were 27% of those 75% of Australians who indicated a religious affiliation (ABS, 1999). The range of Catholic social services is vast. Not counting Catholic educational systems from primary schools through to University, there is a Catholic health system including 57 public and private hospitals, 83 Catholic nursing and convalescent homes, 201 homes for the elderly, 93 for children and 157 other homes (Dixon, 1996). All 32 Catholic dioceses in Australia provide individual and family welfare services, usually under the name 'Centacare' (Dixon, 1996).

However, Catholic social services in Australia have not been well documented (Smyth, 1995). General histories of the Catholic Church in Australia, such as Campion (1987) and O'Farrell (1992), do not tend to focus on Catholic social services but rather on the broad sweep of political issues that detail the long history of Catholic minority status in Australia. The histories of individual Catholic orders who have provided social services are more concerned with the work of their own members than seeing connections with the work of other orders. There are, therefore, a growing number of 'vertical' histories that set out the work of each order or congregation while there are no 'horizontal' histories to show the breadth of and connections between the work of the different orders.

The general Australian scene in regard to social welfare history is not much better; Catholic or other religious social services hardly get a mention. In Australian social welfare histories, 'there is in fact almost no literature on religion, particularly Christianity, and social welfare' (Graycar, Horsburgh and Wyndham, 1988, p. 358). The three major writers on 19th century colonial welfare in Australia, Dickey (1986 and 1988), Horsburgh (1988) and R. Kennedy (1985) have focused on either secular benevolent societies or societies related to the Church of England. It can be said that major Australian social welfare writers 'fail to discuss religion of any kind in the context of social welfare' (Horsburgh, 1985, p. 54). This is surprising given that a history of education in Australia is defined by the 'state aid' debate and the role of Catholic schools is central to understanding the development of the Australian education system.

The alleged history of Australian social work

Australian social work also lacks a reading of its history that places it within the social reforms and movements of the 19th century. The little Australian social welfare history that has been written has been very narrowly focused. Australian social work historians such as Lawrence (1965) and Martin (1983, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1990) concentrate on professional associations, ignoring social activists, particularly women, who pre-date professional social work (Marchant (1985). The same criticism has been made of Dickey (1980), who wrote the first and so far only general history of social welfare in Australia.

'[Dickey's] limitation was that he almost totally excluded women's charities operating separately in the women's sphere and therefore not only underestimated the influence of women in philanthropy but also of denominational institutions' (Godden, 1982, p. 97).

Hughes (1998), too, notes the lack of denominational institutions in social welfare histories.

'The general history of Catholic welfare endeavours has been neglected more than it should. Consequently, there has been a lack of analysis of the role of the Catholic Church in social welfare. Such an analysis is needed in the current climate of re-appraising the general arrangements between the state and voluntary organisations in welfare provision . . .' (Hughes, 1998, p. 170).

When a social welfare historian of the 19th century such as Richard Kennedy (1985) does write about the beginnings of social work in Australia, he sees Australian social work as only originating in the conservative Charity Organisation Society in Melbourne, part of the broader Protestant evangelical movement, with its emphasis on parsimonious 'scientific charity'.

Charity Warfare is primarily a history of the first and most important decade, from 1887 to 1898, of the Charity Organisation Society of Melbourne; a period which saw the forging of ruling class Social Work into an instrument to help slay the rising 'threat' from the organising working class. Thus it contains an argument about the origins of professional Social Work in Australia vastly at odds with what is often taught to students in mainstream departments of Welfare and Social Studies (R. Kennedy, 1985, pp. vii-viii).

The argument that the COS was the intellectual and practical forerunner to social work is accepted in England (Woodruffe, 1962) and the United States (Poppo and Reid, 1999). To claim this heritage for Australian social work in particular and the Australian welfare system generally is problematic. Australia was not a fertile breeding ground for the charity organisation movement. Australia's early colonial period is marked by considerable government intervention in the provision of services. Throughout the 19th Century, social services for major social

problems such as child neglect, homelessness, disability and poverty were provided by large church-based or philanthropic organisations. Colonial governments supported these programs financially but rarely provided direct services (Industry Commission, 1995).

Catholics and the development of professional social services

A necessary condition for understanding Catholic social services in Australia is an understanding that religious sectarianism was a feature of Australian society from 1788 until the 1960s (Dixon, 1996). In the 19th and early 20th centuries, therefore, Catholics developed denominational services for the care of children, education, services for women, services for the sick and destitute, family welfare services and social justice and advocacy issues.

The care of children. Often controversial, systematic Catholic services for children have been significant since the 1830s. Although state support of institutional care of children ceased in 1886, Catholic concern for the spiritual as well as material wellbeing of Catholic destitute, neglected and delinquent children in the early 19th century has continued and developed until the present day (Fox, 1997). Catholic institutions such as foundling homes, orphanages, industrial and special schools for disabled (for example, deaf and blind) children were established from the 19th century (Fox, 1997). Some of these were early leaders in their field (RCPC, 1874; Burke, 1974). An historical feature of the care of children by the Catholic church was the emphasis on institutionalisation despite public debate and government moves to do away with this practice from the 1870s (Fox, 1997). Catholic opposition to 'boarding out' seems to have stemmed from a concern that the large numbers of Catholic destitute children and the poverty of potential foster parents obviated any large scale closure of institutions (McGrath, 1991). Recent reports have tended to emphasise instances of physical and sexual abuse in some institutions. One of the most emotive episodes has been the fate of the child migrants from the United Kingdom. From 1938-1956, about one thousand British child migrants were transferred to Catholic agencies in Australia (Fox, 1996), mainly to Western Australia (Coldrey, 1993). Abuse of and stunted prospects for many of these children, plus the forced separation of Indigenous children from their families (HREOC, 1997) have rightly placed a pall over Catholic institutional services to children.

Services for women In 1838 the first Catholic nuns, Irish Sisters of Charity, emigrated to new South Wales. The nuns' first work was with the 730 women and 180 children of the Female Factory at Parramatta, two thirds of whom were Catholics. Subsequently, the Sisters established a female hospital (and later St Vincent's Hospital in 1858) and began visiting the sick and poor in their homes (Raymond, 1977). From 1841, the Sisters of Charity established a women's refuge in Sydney (MacGinley, 1996) and, in the same year, Chisholm established a female immigrants home and began finding work for female immigrants (Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath and Quartly, 1994) as well as a number of services aimed to assist women to become financially independent, through vocational training, assistance in finding employment and the establishment of convent industries (Godden, , 1983; Gregory 1984; Hughes 1998b; Kiddle, 1990; Ryan 1996;). Among many such initiatives, six women's refuges for female ex-convicts, reformed prostitutes, the frail aged and unmarried mothers were established by Mary MacKillop's Josephite Sisters, between 1867-1891 (Foale, 1995). With the deinstitutionalisation movement of the 1970s, services provided changed to adult education, especially for migrant women, short term residential crisis care, community development and individual counselling (Gregory, 1984). Other Catholic services for women have included the Young Women's Association at Darlinghurst in Sydney for servant girls (O'Carrigan, 1999) and The Catholic Women's League founded in Sydney in 1913 to promote 'the moral, intellectual, social and material welfare' of working class Catholic women (McDonald, 1981, p. 5). Lay Catholic social action/social justice organisations for women were also established between the World Wars (S. Kennedy, 1985).

Services for the sick, aged, destitute. The Catholic health system, from small beginnings in visiting the sick, now includes 57 public and private hospitals, 83 Catholic nursing and convalescent homes, 201 homes for the elderly, 93 for children and 157 other homes (Dixon, 1996) including the numerous group homes catering for people with developmental disability and HIV/AIDS. The Sisters of St Joseph founded by Mary MacKillop have provided aged care services for 132 years (Foale, 1995). Home nursing of the sick poor has been undertaken by women religious since the first half of the 19th century and material assistance or 'emergency relief' has been undertaken on both an organised and ad hoc basis over a similar period. The St Vincent de Paul Society was established in Sydney in 1881 (Gleeson, 1996) and is now in virtually every diocese in Australia. It provides food and clothing to poor families and shelters for destitute men and in 1998 provided services to 1.6 million people ('The Society of St Vincent De Paul', 1998). It is Australia's largest charitable organisation with 40,000 volunteers, members and auxiliaries. The services the St Vincent de Paul Society provide include home, hospital and prison visitation, drug and alcohol centres and women's, youth and family refuges and crisis centres as well as the better known clothing stores and emergency relief ('The Society of St Vincent De Paul', 1998). Immigrant communities, too, have established social welfare agencies closely allied with the Church (Jamrozik, Boland and Urquhart, 1995).

Personal social services including family welfare services. There are 33 Centacare organisations in the 28 territorial dioceses around the country. The first of these, known then as Catholic Social Services, was founded in Melbourne in 1935 on the initiative of Norma Parker and Constance Moffitt, two of the pioneers of Australian social work. In 1957, the National Catholic Welfare Committee was formed with the director of each Centacare being a member of the national committee (Linehan, 1997). A separate body, the Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission was formed in 1973 to be a national lobby and advocacy group for the Australian bishops.

Centacare services are very diverse, encompassing emergency and youth accommodation, adoptive services, aged care, AIDS/HIV care and counselling, children's services, pre-marriage and marriage education, disability services, pregnancy counselling, parent education, employment training and so on. Services provided by Church welfare agencies are offered to any person in need, not just to Catholics (Dixon, 1996, p. 41).

Social justice and advocacy issues. In the early colonies, the social issues were those that affected Catholics as such: religious freedom for Catholics, Irish immigration, the franchise, access to Catholic convicts and orphans (O'Farrell, 1992). But, in 1838, the same year as the Irish Sisters of Charity landed in Sydney, Caroline Chisholm, perhaps best known for assisting immigrant women in colonial New South Wales, began work in Sydney. From 1838-1846, 'confronted by the neglect of newly arrived immigrants generally, and particularly distressed by the spectacle of the single females drifting into prostitution, she determined that, as no others seemed willing to begin to help, she would' (O'Farrell, 1992, p. 84). From 1838-1846, she personally settled 11,000 people on the land. From 1846-1854, she returned to England and lobbied successfully for the formation of the Family Colonisation Land Society to assist the poor to emigrate as families (O'Farrell, 1992). More controversially, in the early 1860s, she delivered a series of public lectures in Sydney on the topic of opening squatters' lands to free selection for smallholdings.

In a lecture entitled 'Free Selection Before Survey', delivered to several hundred people at the Pitt Street Temperance Hall in 1860, Caroline Chisholm aligned herself firmly with the land reformers of the colonies . . . Colonial men had to stand up to men of property and wealth, she asserted, and take advantage of the recent democratic changes (which were working splendidly, overall) to wrench privilege from them. The

squatter opposed smallholding in a fashion that was ruthless and unprincipled, as Caroline once discovered herself when she promoted cooperative agricultural communities for unemployed men and their families. The rich were to be feared, not respected: the true future of the colonies lay with ordinary working men and women (Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath and Quartly, 1994, p. 108).

Despite criticism of Chisholm for seeing young immigrant women as vulnerable and needing 'a husband's protection from poverty and from the sexual aggression of other men' (Grimshaw et al., 1994, p. 89), she appeared to have the ability to link immigrants' personal troubles with politics, land reform, and the politics of production and reproduction.

The women's suffrage movement at the end of the 19th century 'shared many of the aims of philanthropy, particularly that of alleviating the results of the exploitation of women and children, and the majority of its leading members were also members of women's philanthropic organisations' (Godden, 1982, p. 95). Marchant (1985) has noted how social activists in national women's associations and industry were instrumental in the establishment of social work in New South Wales. The National Council of Women (NCW), founded in Sydney in 1915 and in Melbourne in 1917, 'epitomised the political activism of women post-suffrage' (Grimshaw et al., 1994, p. 197). The NCW was open to all women's organisations including charities. 'The NCW had a number of standing committees that promoted action and involvement in areas such as Public Health, Trades and Professions, Education, and Child Welfare' (Marchant, 1985, p. 37). One of the organisations initially affiliated to the NCW was the Catholic Women's Social Guild, founded in Melbourne in 1916. 'The CWSG immediately advocated a vigorous role for lay Catholic women in social and political reform in the community. Further, it adopted a feminist ethos which was early and consistently manifested in calls for equal rights for women in political, civil and industrial matters' (S. Kennedy, 1985, p. 10).

Catholic clergy and lay people were also involved in the establishment of trade unions and in the founding of the Australian Labor Party. Much of this commentary was carried out through Catholic newspapers, such as *The Freeman's Journal*, begun in 1850.

Significance

This paper has challenged current understandings of the development of professional social work in Australia by showing that, because Australian social work historians have concentrated on professional associations, Australian social work lacks a reading of its history that places its beginnings within the social reforms and movements of the 19th century. By concentrating on contributions by the Australian Catholic Church, the paper has sketched out its contribution to the development of professional social services in Australia.

Social policy analysts have failed to take into account church-based social service providers. This was perhaps understandable in the 20th century as the welfare state gradually centralised social services. Now, social service provision is beginning to resemble elements of 19th century charity services and this makes an understanding of church-based social services important for policy analysts. An historical analysis of Catholic social service provision in both the 19th and 20th centuries provides a more informed base for the assessment of policy issues in a period of devolution. Some of these issues include management and ethical tensions that may arise between government and church agencies, church concerns that accepting government funding may compromise their essentially religious aims and draw them into politics and government bureaucracy (Brennan, 2000), and non-Catholic/Christian clients' fears about accessing church-based service provision (Tingle and Gotting, 1999; Grace, 1999; Puplick, 2000).

These issues have historical antecedents. Irish Catholic ambivalence and resistance to government support/control of orphanages in the 19th century has been hinted at by Hughes (1998a) and clients' apprehensions about the religious moralism of church-based agencies has been noted by Wearing (1998). Catholic need for, but ambivalence over, government funding, especially government funding of Catholic schools, had been a contentious issue within the Church from the 1850s to the 1960s (O'Farrell, 1992). The sudden re-emergence of these issues since 1999 in debates that were last heard of in the 1960s shows that church-state issues are likely to dominate social services for quite some time.

The history of Catholic social services, therefore, is an important, albeit neglected, field of inquiry in itself as well as a neglected part of a wider Australian history of social welfare services and social policy. Such a documentation of history would go some way to addressing Marchant's (1985) concern about the neglect of social activism, particularly women's social activism, when historians focus only on social policies and professional associations.

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