

MacKillop Women: The Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, Aotearoa New Zealand, 1883–2006. By Diane Strevens. David Ling Publishing, Auckland, 2008. 356pp. NZ price: \$39.99. ISBN 978-1-877378-23-2.

IN 1966, THE SISTERS OF ST JOSEPH OF THE SACRED HEART (the Brown Josephites) celebrated the centenary of their foundation in Adelaide. To prepare for the concert in Christchurch, I and other pupils of St Paul's School, Dallington, had to learn *Scotland the Brave* to honour the Scottish heritage of the foundress, Mary MacKillop, and *Waltzing Matilda* to recall her Australian birth and upbringing. South Island sisters and their pupils also gathered for a procession and outdoor Mass in Temuka, where the first New Zealand Josephite convent had been established in 1883, while a parallel celebration for the North Island was held at several locations in Auckland.

It is surprising to learn from Diane Strevens's new book that, on the eve of the centenary, the sisters themselves knew little about their foundress, who is now poised to become Australasia's first canonized saint (she was beatified in 1995). MacKillop's endeavours had been encouraged by Father Julian Tenison Woods, with whom she shared the vision of a sisterhood living among and serving the poor, especially in education. To maintain unity while living in small, isolated communities, the congregation was to be independent of episcopal control. The Bishop of Bathurst's objections led to the separate development of the Sisters of St Joseph of Nazareth (the Black Josephites), whose New Zealand history is the subject of Strevens's 2001 book, *In Step with Time*.

MacKillop herself visited New Zealand four times between 1894 and 1902, and even after a New Zealand province was established in 1905, the ethos of the congregation long remained Australian, in part because novices continued to train in North Sydney. For most of their history, the New Zealand Josephites worked in parochial primary schools, particularly in the Christchurch and Auckland dioceses but spreading to other parts of the country — some of them poor, rural areas with predominantly Māori populations. They also established four secondary schools.

Written at the request of the congregation, this is, naturally, a celebratory history, reflecting the perspective of the sisters rather than the pupils they worked among. Mary MacKillop may have 'regarded corporal punishment as a last resort', but Strevens acknowledges that 'Strapping and caning were often applied for the smallest misdemeanor [sic]' (p.85). Indeed, I vividly remember Sister Anne, who daily stamped her foot on the floor and threatened us with 'a thousand cuts', often breaking a yard ruler or a stick on the legs or hands of some unfortunate child. She was perhaps extreme, but not unique.

Before the 1970s, sisters were recruited at a tender age, had limited education and lived ascetic, rule-bound lives of obedience to their superiors and loyalty to the hierarchical church. They were discouraged from mixing with 'seculars' — even their own families — and could not go out in public alone. It would have been good to learn more about the motivation of young girls who entered the convent (some, one suspects, unwisely), but there is a very fine chapter on recruitment and formation before 1965.

As part of the centenary programme in Christchurch, the spiritual formation of a young sister was represented by girls from the Juniorate in Shirley (a secondary school for pupils aspiring to join the congregation) dressed successively as a postulant, a novice and a professed sister. The latter, I recall, said that she hoped to wear this religious habit for the rest of her life. Ironically, it was just at this time that the changes initiated by the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) began to take effect in New Zealand, and the most visible was a long period of experimentation in the congregation's attire — leading ultimately to its replacement by secular dress. Yet, as Strevens points out, 'In reality the changes to the habit paled into insignificance beside the gradual metamorphosis of religious life over these years' (p.193). Not least among the changes were the devolution of authority, an appreciation of individuals' gifts and aspirations, and receptiveness

to movements and ideals originating from beyond the church, such as feminism and ecological awareness.

There were never enough sisters to staff all the schools they were asked to run, and the lifestyle increasingly lost its appeal from the 1960s. Not only did far fewer young women join up, but even a number of professed sisters left, so the church moved from employing a few lay assistants to depending entirely on lay staff to manage its schools. In the 1980s, the schools were integrated into the government system and the teachers received state salaries — but had to retire at 65. Meanwhile, like all Catholic religions, the sisters were required by the Vatican Council to reassess their lifestyle and ministry in the light of their founder's charisma — the spiritual gift equipping her for a particular kind of service and subsequently embodied by the religious congregation itself.

In consequence of these developments, in recent decades very few sisters have been full-time school teachers; they have served in numerous other ministries including catechetics, educational administration, social and pastoral work, care of the elderly (not just members of the congregation) and chaplaincy. Sisters recruited in Ireland have been permitted to return to their native country, where they have undertaken similarly varied ministries, while a few have volunteered for work in Peru and Samoa. By 2007, the New Zealand province was reduced to 81 sisters, only ten of them aged under 60 years. However, the development of various forms of lay association has broadened the 'Josephite Movement' beyond the vowed sisters themselves.

Stevens draws on letters and other archival sources, and, for more recent times, the story is enriched by first-hand accounts collected by the author. It is illustrated throughout with many photographs of the sisters and their work. The Josephites' story is placed in the wider frameworks of Catholic, educational, women's and more general New Zealand social history. It contributes to all of them.

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History Boy: A Memoir. By Nicholas Tarling. Dunmore Publishing, Wellington, 2009. 277pp. NZ price: \$29.95. ISBN 978-1-877399-45-9.

SEVERAL NEW ZEALAND-BASED HISTORIANS have penned their memoirs. In addition to G.H. Scholefield's manuscript account (in the Alexander Turnbull Library) are the published autobiographies of W.P. Morrell, Michael King, Keith Sinclair, W.H. Oliver and now Nicholas Tarling's *History Boy*. Most of Tarling's career was spent at The University of Auckland, where he arrived as Associate Professor in 1965, rapidly rising to full professor (on his 37th birthday). His autobiography holds much promise, which is partly realized. Tarling was never an academic *pur et simple* but was involved in opera, repertory and arts administration as well as being a humane university administrator and doughty upholder of academic freedom. In 1974, at an interview for one of the two deputy vice-chancellorships at the University of Adelaide, Tarling stated 'that people in such posts were there to make it possible for staff to give of their best' (p.238).

The various autobiographies have distinctive authorial 'voices'. Tarling comes closest to Morrell in his dry wit. With ironic understatement, he relates a life and career that spans hemispheres as well as decades, beginning with an English upbringing and his undergraduate years at Cambridge, which he largely disliked. A switch to South-east Asian history for his PhD, duly awarded, was followed by the familiar enough pattern of struggling to find gainful employment, and this despite the patronage of J.H. Plumb, whose reputation for mentorship emerges unimpaired. With nothing suitable on the English horizon, Tarling took a leap in the dark and in 1957, as a 26-year-old, took up a