

Australian Heroes and Saints

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Those revered as heroes in Australian society reflect essential elements of the Australian identity: the Aussie Battler, individualism, exceptional courage or commitment and links to the Bush heritage with its tradition of hospitality. The ideals of mateship (incorporating citizenship and helping others in times of crisis), as well as egalitarianism are prized. How do these angles on the Australian Identity relate to traditional views of Saints within the Catholic Church? I believe that many Australian heroes display the characteristics traditionally linked to saints: their stance for truth, willingness to sacrifice life for an ideal, opposition to misguided authority and willingness to extend practical charity without judgement or expectation of return. Ned Kelly and Mary MacKillop will be considered as exemplars of saints and heroes.

Australians crave heroes. The sporting pages of daily papers contain many examples of the achievements of sporting stars; those who won medals in the Olympic Games have been the focus of parades around Australia before huge crowds. The values we admire in heroes can be seen as essential elements in the Australian identity. This identity has developed over the years as Australians have adapted and reconstructed the typical Australian hero according to the needs of successive generations and differing cultural contexts. It is interesting to compare the qualities revered in Australian heroes with those identified in the formally recognised saints of the Catholic Church.

In this paper I shall examine a range of studies about Australian identity and the search for national heroes to detect key characteristics admired by Australians. Information will then be given about the formal definition of Saints in the Catholic Church and about the qualities required for such an honour. In the final section, I shall use examples of inspirational Australian characters and some traditional Saints to draw comparisons between both groups. Through the identification of common qualities, I will suggest that Australian heroes can be considered versions of secular saints. The example of Ned Kelly will be used to show how some Australians have ascribed a version of sainthood to this bush ranger while that of Mary MacKillop will demonstrate how a formally recognised saint can also be identified as an Australian hero.

Australian Heroes

Culture is not just a summary or listing of external signs but rather the totality

of the life shared by those who live in a group. It encompasses thoughts, actions, emotions, and above all, values that are prized and inspire hope for the future. The outward expressions of culture – the symbols and icons revered – are reflections of the reality experienced within individuals and the group. Such symbols have a unique meaning for those within the culture and are subject to frequent changes or constructions from both within and without the boundaries of the group. A person constructs an identity by the internalisation of those elements of the shared culture which provide a basic meaning to life: such an identity is viable when it is given acceptance by the wider group.

The wider community in its turn also seeks to define its boundaries. Many books have been written about Australia's search for a national identity. An analysis of academic studies of this question written (or revised) over the last 25 years shows that several texts are seen as pivotal in the discussion. The works of Ward (1988); White (1981); and Horne (1964; 1980; 1989; 1998) reflect stages in Australian cultural analysis. Their contribution has been re-examined more recently by Melleuish (1995) and Thornhill (1992) as well as in edited studies such as those of Carroll (1992b).

In his summary of this topic, White (1981) describes the search for a national identity as a 'national obsession' and suggests that any such identity is really 'an invention' within a certain cultural framework, aided by the work of 'the intelligentsia' and for a specific social function. In this paper, I have focused on the way that various writers have explored the issue of a hero as one aspect of the Australian identity. I have not addressed the functional question raised by White.

The term, 'Australian icon' has also emerged in recent years to describe persons and objects, which Luck (1992:v) identifies as having 'had some sort of hallowed connotations'. These 'icons', often classed by museums as relics, 'have a mystical, sometimes even spiritual significance that only an Australian can really understand.' Since no definition is given as to whom is an Australian, it is presumed that recognition of Australian icons is an indicator of national identity. In his discussion of the term, Horne (1989:60) notes that it is not used in any religious sense, but rather to convey 'an image of magically rich explanatory power.' For the purposes of this paper, I have taken 'icon' to mean a sign, object or person who represents some essential element in the Australian cultural identity: something (or someone) recognised as uniquely Australian. A hero, on the other hand, is a distinguished member of the community, who has displayed noble qualities, courage or performance at an exceptional level.

To Ward, the Australian heroes were those celebrated in bush ballads: they were the bushmen and frontiersmen of early history. In looking at the way that 'history-makers can be image-makers', White examines such heroes as the Diggers and 'The National Type.' In his discussion of Anzac Day, Horne (1989:163) notes that 'the Diggers added to the concept of bushman-hero the Irish concept of larrikin and the fraternal concept of mateship.' From their works, as well as those by Luck (1992); Mackay (1999); Price (1991) and Schaffer (1988), I have identified several major

themes or key elements which highlight the qualities I believe are most admired by Australians in their heroes. While other strands related to Australian heroes could also be identified, these are of minor importance or can be subsumed into one of my four categories which I have described as follows:

The Aussie Battler

Individualism leading to conflict with authority

Exceptional courage and commitment

The bush heritage of hospitality

Each Australian hero may not display elements from all of these areas but may have sufficient fame in at least one, so as to become renowned to the Australian public. My understanding of these themes is part of the 'collagelike creation' (see Denzin and Lincoln 1994:3) that incorporates my own personal history, biography and study as I present my understanding of Australian heroes and saints.

Aussie Battler

The 'Aussie Battler' is highly regarded in Australian literature and folklore. Australians respect those who struggle against the odds, the little people who rise above the difficulties of their lives, those who can stubbornly continue to battle against adversity whilst at the same time maintaining a sense of humour, being optimistic and working hard. These are often venerated as heroes – mostly unsung and unrecognised except for the epithet and compliment of, 'You're a real Aussie Battler.'

Individualism leading to conflict with authority

Individuals in positions of leadership who show a sense of fair play and genuine concern for others are respected in their own right, not because of the office they bear. Within the Australian culture there is often an irreverent regard for those in authority, especially if such authority is based on a struggle for power rather than genuine respect and the common good. Individuals who stand for a principle or who make a point against mindless bureaucracy can fall foul of authorities. The saying that someone is 'agin the Government' is seen as a positive quality, especially when such a stance is taken against the oppression of battlers. Tension between officialdom and a battler invariably leads to great sympathy for the underdog on the part of Australians. There is an underlying thread of egalitarianism that supports this Australian trait.

Exceptional courage and commitment

Ordinary Australians who risk their lives for others in daring displays of courage during wars or natural disasters are recognised as heroes. Others who spend themselves in charity work, as volunteers or who in some way work quietly for the betterment of humankind are held in high respect. Their stories are retold as inspiration and encouragement as examples of mateship in practice.

The bush heritage of hospitality

Australia is a vast continent with extremes of temperature, unique flora and fauna and many natural wonders. While most of the population lives on the eastern seaboard, for others there are huge distances between settlements. Long journeys of exploration have led to heroic deeds. Many Australians live in very small regions that are remote and difficult to access, except by air. Forced back on their own resources, Australians in such places have often become larger than life in the legends that have developed over the years: hospitality and mateship are essential for survival. Those who can survive against the elements; the pioneers who inspire others to love the environment in all its harsh beauty and who develop as well-rounded individuals acting as mentors for others, are true heroes to Australians.

Before proceeding to elaborate on these elements of Australian identity, I shall provide an overview of what constitutes Sainthood within the Catholic Church so that, in the final part of this paper, I can draw some parallels between the two groups.

The meaning of saints in the Catholic Christian Tradition

In the early Christian writings the term 'saint' or 'hagios' was used in a fairly general way to describe those who followed the teachings of Jesus Christ (see Frend 1985; Kieckhefer 1988; Wilson 1983a). It is used extensively by the apostle, Paul in writing to Christian communities in Rome (Romans 1:7); Corinth (1 Cor 1:2, 2 Cor 1:1) and Ephesus (Eph 1:1).

Over the past two thousand years, the Roman Catholic Church has gradually refined the definition of sainthood. In the process, as Delooy (1983:189) notes, the Catholic Church is providing a reflection of its own 'structural evolution.' Those designated as saints are seen as ideal types for their particular period of time and place.

From the earliest days of Christianity, those who were revered as Christian saints were considered to be individuals who enjoyed a special intimacy with God and who could therefore intercede on behalf of other human beings. The persecutions of the early Christians meant that for many centuries the only saints recognised were those who had died as martyrs. It was believed that these saints were in heaven and could intercede on behalf of those still on earth.

Initially saints were simply decided by public acclamation or by a decree of a local bishop. Lists of these saints were called 'canons' and such lists were read out during religious celebrations. 'The act of putting a saint's name into the canon is where the word "canonization" (declaring that someone is a saint) was originally used' (Dunn-Mascetti 1994:61).

By the thirteenth century (1234), Pope Gregory IX restricted all declarations of individuals as canonised saints to the papacy itself. In 1588 Pope Sixtus V created a more formal mechanism for canonisations by the establishment of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. In 1727 Prospero Lambertini (who became Pope Benedict XIV) provided a very detailed summary of the procedures for canonisation. According

to Tvard (1990:41), this 'was more a reaction against Protestantism than the harmonious development of accepted theological principles.' More recent amendments to the process were made by the revision of the Code of Canon Law, most recently in 1983, so that the process for canonisation at the present time remains a very complex, rigorous and bureaucratic process.

The English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) defines saints today as those who are 'authentic witnesses' (par 2030) and who have lived lives of 'exemplary fidelity to the Lord' (par 2156). It also describes them as people who 'practised heroic virtue and lived in fidelity to God's grace' (par 828). The term 'heroic virtue' is a key term in the formal approval of saints who were not martyrs. Woodward (1990:393) traces this phrase to the 'translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in 1328 by Robert Grossteste, bishop of Lincoln, and one of the witnesses to the signing of the Magna Carta.' For Aristotle, the term implied 'moral virtue on a heroic or godlike scale' and, once St Thomas Aquinas adopted the phrase, it continued in the official documents and procedures of canonisation. From a sociological perspective, 'it is not virtue itself which is important, but the way in which people interpret behaviour in terms of virtue' (Delooz 1983:203). The implication of this is the possibility that such interpretations could be open to influence, politics or error.

Within the Catholic Church, therefore, saints are part of a long tradition of a belief in the significance of the individual. Saints are recognised as individuals chosen by God for a special purpose. Their response to God is shown by a life of heroic virtue and faithfulness, despite all the difficulties encountered. Saints during their lifetimes can be used by God to demonstrate power, for example through visions or miracles. Such manifestations can continue after death as a sign that the saint is in heaven and he/she can continue to display the power of God. Saints have an impact on the community: they inspire devotion and are remembered through celebrations and story telling. Their graves and places of significance in their lives often become places of pilgrimage.

The making of saints today

The history of the process of saint making has been documented by writers such as Cunningham (1987); Head (1990); Dunn-Mascetti (1994); Farmer (1997) and Woodward (1990). Through his research within the Vatican, Woodward gained access to many of the *Positiones*, the actual documents by which candidates for sainthood are judged by Vatican authorities. Using these materials as sources, Woodward shows how the lives of potential saints are investigated and interpreted, how miracles are proved or rejected, and identifies some of the political forces from both papal and secular areas which have a profound influence on those who are eventually declared saints. Many current examples are given of men and women from recent times who have been considered for sainthood.

The system by which a saint is made was revised on January 25, 1983. As

summarised by Dunn-Mascetti (1994:71-73) from the work of Woodward (1990), a bishop can begin an official enquiry if there is sufficient evidence of a holy life and some local cult. At this stage, the person can be given the title, 'Servant of God'. Further investigations, proof of miracles and the preparation of a lengthy *Positione* for presentation to the Vatican Congregation for the Causes of Saints, are all necessary before the saint in waiting is declared to have the title 'Blessed'. This enables official veneration of the saint to occur in the country where the petition for sainthood was commenced. Before the formal canonisation takes place, an additional miracle and further evidence that the person is the subject of an inspirational cult leading others to reflect and live holy lives are required. Only when this final stage is completed, can the term, 'Saint' be applied to the person's name.

Possible parallels — saints and heroes

Australians who have attended Catholic Schools have had many opportunities to learn about various saints. Inspirational stories are told to teach Christian virtues and it has been the custom for those preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation (for many this would have been when they were aged 10-12 years) to choose a saint as a special model. Other members of the community would know at least something of saints because of the names given to many Catholic churches, schools and other church organisations. Australians who may have been born overseas would be familiar with saints such as the patrons of countries and those who commenced religious orders. These would include Saints Patrick, Dominic, Francis of Assisi, Anthony of Padua, George, Andrew, Benedict, and Teresa of Avila. Many with no formal links to a church have had confidence in St Christopher, the patron saint of travellers. Literature and films have also presented saints to a wide audience: T S Elliott's play, *Murder in the Cathedral* about St Thomas a Becket and the film, *A Man for All Seasons* about St Thomas More would be examples of these. Some knowledge about saints is therefore part of the cultural framework within which the search for an Australian identity takes place.

Studies about sainthood and the qualities of saints are readily available (see Cohn 1987; Cunningham 1987; Deloos 1983; Dresen-Coenders 1987; Dunn-Mascetti 1994; Eliade 1987; Elliott 1987; Finucane 1977; Frend 1985; Head 1990; Kieckhefer 1988; McGinley 1970; Wilson 1983b; Woodward 1990). From my reading of the literature cited, I have chosen four common themes I shall use to provide points of comparison with the four areas identified earlier for Australian heroes. These are:

- Long suffering saints
- The experience of opposition from Church Hierarchies
- Courageous and committed lives
- Exemplars of hospitality and charity

As with the characteristics of heroes, there are many other aspects of saints which could be considered. I have selected the above because they show that what Australians revere in their heroes (secular saints) can also be found in the traditional

saints. Not all saints will display all four themes, but, as with the heroes, each will be remembered for at least one area in which he or she made a significant contribution to the society of their time.

These themes will be outlined using the examples of the cult of some well known (and a few less well known) saints. While publications such as the *Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Farmer 1997) and *The Book of Saints* (Benedictine Monks of St Augustine's Abbey Ramsgate 1989) have been utilised for some information, most of the following section is based on my accumulated knowledge acquired over many years. My examples of saints will be mostly from the European tradition since this has the largest number of officially canonised saints.

Aussie battlers and long suffering saints

What has come to be known as the 'Aussie Battler' is a stereotype encompassing many dimensions. The harsh physical environment of Australia (especially in the early days of European settlement), along with the isolation of vast distances, forced many pioneers to become very ingenious. The development of the Stump Jump plough, Southern Cross windmills, the Pedal Wireless were all made by Australian inventors battling against the odds (Luck 1992).

There are numerous examples from Australian literature where characters exemplify aspects of the Aussie Battler. These include many of the writings of Paterson (1980), Lawson (1966) and the poetry of Dennis (1988). Hirst (1992:23) would argue that Lawson and Paterson 'were making a tradition as well as reflecting one.' In White's terms, they were helping to 'invent Australia' though a presentation of characters who rose above their circumstances and reflected stoicism, inventiveness and humour, whilst at the same time, supporting their 'mates.'

The publication of the handwritten manuscript by Facey (1981) led to the author being described as 'the classic Aussie Battler' (see University of Western Australia 1999). His description of experiences at Gallipoli, during the Great Depression and in the early days of rural settlement led to the work being described on this web page as 'an Australian icon'. Despite the odds, he remained optimistic as is shown by the title of his autobiography, *A Fortunate Life*. To some he would be considered as a hero because of steadfastness in the face of great adversity: a quality prized by Australians.

Jim Banks provides another unique dimension of the Aussie Battler in the comic strip, *Ginger Meggs*, identified by Luck (1992) as an Australian icon. The attitudes of, 'You might as well have a go,' 'I've got nothing to lose,' coupled with a shrewd sense of irony and mischief, led to this character being very popular with the Australian audience. As a stereotype of the lovable larrikin living through endless soap operas in the days before TV, this character provided escapism and hope to many ordinary battlers.

It is significant, according to Mackay (1999:9) that the Melbourne Cup is such a national event for Australians: this horse race is:

...a handicap event in which some of the most popular winners have been rank outsiders, battlers, who symbolise the idea that this is a place where you can come from nowhere and succeed.

To many Australians, the celebration of Cup Day, no matter the distance from Melbourne, is an icon, reminding them of the possibility of instant fame and fortune for the ordinary person. It is the horses, jockeys and at times the trainers and owners who can be described as heroes. In the minds of some, they are the secular saints who inspire hope and who can work miracles for the benefit of the community!

Australians revere as heroes those who display ingenuity, inventiveness and maintain their optimism despite the odds being against them. Those who can show a sense of humour and persevere in their faithful devotion to duty, particularly in the care of their families, are held in high regard. Many saints also are remembered for these qualities. My own personal favourite would be St Joseph, the foster father of Jesus and husband of Mary. Although he played an integral part in events central to Christianity, he has a very low profile in Scripture. As someone trying to provide for and protect a family, Joseph was a battler who endured misunderstandings, great danger, stress and poverty.

Another saint remembered for her faithfulness and belief in a wayward son is St Monica who lived in North Africa in the fourth century. She is now considered a special patron saint for mothers because her son, Augustine, led a very dissolute life while Monica prayed for more than forty years for his conversion. Eventually Augustine did repent his ways and went on to become a famous bishop and a saint himself.

It is hard to find examples of saints who displayed a sense of humour, perhaps because this quality did not feature in the 'heroic virtues' deemed essential for canonisation. One story which seems to reflect the Australian delight in irony concerns one of the early martyrs in Rome, St Lawrence. He is said to have been killed by being roasted on a gridiron and, just before he died, is reputed to have told his executioners to turn him over as he was done on one side! Graphic representations of the death of this saint were highly prized amongst collections of holy pictures by Catholic school students when I was at school!

Two English saints who displayed great enjoyment in life, despite many difficulties, were Thomas More and Margaret Clitherow. Thomas was a happily married man at the time of the English Reformation. He was learned and popular, a personal friend of Henry VIII and was appointed by him as Lord Chancellor of England. Thomas' opposition to the king's desire to divorce his wife eventually led to his execution. Amongst his final words to those who condemned him to death was the wish that they would 'all meet merrily together' in heaven. Margaret is described by contemporaries as 'good-looking, witty, and merry'. In the times of English persecution of the Catholic Church, she was active in her support for her faith. At one stage she was imprisoned for two years because she refused to attend the local Protestant Church. Eventually she was condemned to be crushed to death because of

the shelter and safe haven she provided for Catholic priests.

Relationship to authority and church hierarchies

In his summary of what he terms, 'The Coming Australian' White (1981:77) notes that a 'certain disrespect for authority' is generally accepted as 'distinctly Australian'. The recognition by Australians of *Waltzing Matilda* as the unofficial national anthem supports this view (see Ward 1988). The popularity of illegal gambling, especially the game of two-up, is another indicator of the way that Australians have displayed this trait. According to Luck (1992:167) this game has traditionally been played on Anzac Day when police have turned a blind eye. It is almost as if the police too were seeking hero status and acceptance on this day at least, by their willingness to ignore the strict letter of the law.

Schedvin (1992:107) and King (1978: 17) both trace this quality back to the convict origins of this country: it arose as a survival mechanism in the face of brutal authoritarianism. By the time of the Australian participation in the First World War, it had become such an integral part of the Australian identity that, as Ward (1988:232) notes, 'stories and jokes about the Australian soldier's reluctance to salute his officers are legion.' In reflecting upon this characteristic, Sir John Monash, one of the commanders of the Anzac forces is quoted in White (1981:133) as saying about the Australian soldier that he was 'easy to lead but difficult to drive'. He also noted that the soldier 'required a sympathetic handling, which appealed to his intelligence and satisfied his instinct for a "square deal"'. In a converse way, this quotation shows why Monash himself is seen as a hero by many: he could see the goodness in individuals rather than expecting blind obedience and obeisance.

Unity against authority has led to the development of 'mateship' which is another quality revered in Australian heroes. Sharing hospitality, even when resources are scarce; remaining loyal to friends; being prepared to go to extraordinary lengths to help comrades in need are all praiseworthy characteristics in Australian culture (Ward 1988:2). Those who can flaunt their disregard for authority in some sort of flamboyant manner amongst their mates are often recognised as heroes by their peers. Dawn Fraser would be an example of this when she incurred severe penalties from Australian authorities for marching in the Opening Ceremony and not wearing a regulation swimming costume in Tokyo. Her hero status could be traced more perhaps to this episode than to the three gold medals she won in swimming (Fraser and Gordon 1965).

Saints by their very definition are meant to be in a positive relationship with the Catholic Church as an organisation. As Chittister (1997) remarks, 'the theologically safe, the intellectually orthodox, the morally flawless, and the ecclesiastically docile' provide the majority of the officially recognised saints. She also refers to them as 'the bland, the safe and the compliant'. In some instances, however, those who seemed in conflict with the organised Church during their lifetime are recognised as saints after their death.

One such person was Joan of Arc. In fifteenth century France she maintained that she had been told by the voices of Saints Michael, Catherine of Alexandria and Margaret of Antioch to save France in the war against the English. After many misgivings on the part of the Dauphin and military authorities, she led the French army to some victories. Later battles were not so successful and when the English captured Joan, she was accused of witchcraft and heresy. As a woman holding out against the male dominated court, army and Church, she did not have an easy life. An ecclesiastical court convicted her and she was burnt at the stake. Later examinations of the circumstances of her death led the Catholic Church to recognise her holiness and the error of the judgement against her. She was finally declared a saint in 1920, leading to an increased recognition of her as someone who maintained a stance for truth, despite opposition from the Church.

Other now famous saints who had difficulties in their relationships with the official Church of their day were John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila in sixteenth century Spain. Both were members of the Carmelite Order and had grave concerns that observance of the religious rule had become somewhat relaxed. Their attempts to introduce a return to a stricter life style and a greater emphasis on prayer and poverty led to much opposition from others within the Church. At the same time, Teresa maintained a common sense approach to life and valued hard work, intelligence and good judgment. She is reported to have exclaimed at one stage, 'God preserve us from stupid nuns!' John was taken prisoner by factions within his Order and kept in virtual house arrest. The extensive writings of both of these saints are still referred to today and have kept their memories alive.

Courage and Commitment

In his discussion of Australian heroes, Mackay (1999:89) provides a definition of the two ingredients he considers essential for genuine heroes:

They make personal sacrifices – in the form of risk or sustained devoted work – in pioneering new frontiers of human endeavour.

They stir in the rest of us an expanded sense of human potential; they heighten our sense of *what we can do and who we can be*.

Along with these elements, those who can display exceptional courage and commitment are revered for their humility in the face of their talents. The quiet dignity of Don Bradman, referred to by Mackay (1999:92) as 'possibly the greatest batsman the world has ever seen,' has led to his continued veneration as a hero to many generations who never saw him play cricket. Carroll (1992a:233) suggests that it is not just his genius that makes Bradman a hero, but the fact that 'his story stresses the ordinariness of his background and the typicality of his character, its unassuming urbanity.'

The Australian love of sports has led to the identification of many heroes:

those who succeeded at the Olympic Games in Sydney have been awarded civic receptions and public parades in all states of Australia. Their commitment to long and arduous training in the hope of a Gold Medal has been held up as an inspiration to all. Those who excel in cricket, tennis and the various codes of football are rewarded with star status by the media and adulation by fans while Mackay (1999:7) notes that 'Peter Brock is, for Holden fans, about as close to sainthood as Mary MacKillop.'

War times have led to the identification of many heroes displaying exceptional courage. These include Simpson who, with his donkey, braved sniper fire to rescue the injured at Gallipoli. The exploits of Edward 'Weary' Dunlop in a prisoner of war camp during the Second World War have led him to be revered as a hero: his courage, restraint and willingness to sacrifice himself for others earned him the respect of both friends and enemies.

Explorers and adventurers have always featured strongly in the list of Australian heroes: from my own school days, I can remember the tales of Captain Cook, Charles Sturt, Burke and Wills, Douglas Mawson and the Smith Brothers, to name just a few. Mackay (1999:93) makes the point that with those opening new frontiers today, 'we are more likely to be impressed by sacrifice made in the name of social progress than in some grand feat of human endurance.' He describes some of the spectacular and daring feats of endurance which can be called the 'heroics of self-indulgence': the activities are for personal reasons such as being the first to do something, rather than for the common good. His conclusion about a new definition of heroism today can also be interpreted as a reason for the continued public interest in modern day heroes:

Responsiveness, not just to the urge for adventure but to the needs of others, has become the crucial test of heroism in the postmodern world. When all around are bent on serving their own ends, and when materialism has a society in its grip, it is the small voice of service – the whispered expression of non-material values – that begins to sound heroic (Mackay 1999:94).

With this definition, medical humanitarians such as Victor Chang or Fred Hollows are accorded heroic status, although, as Mackay (1999:91) points out, the publicity given to the latter included many aspects of Hollows' life that were less than perfect so 'perhaps his death saved him from overexposure.'

One of the most well known saints is St Francis of Assisi, an Italian saint from the thirteenth century. Born into a wealthy family, he abandoned his riches and opted for a life of extreme poverty. He commenced the Franciscan Order and led his followers in preaching tours throughout Italy, challenging others to give alms to support those in need of practical charity. The stories of his simplicity, love of nature, interaction with animals as well as his great holiness, have provided inspiration to many who have gone on pilgrimage to Assisi. St Francis is also remembered for the speed of his elevation to sainthood: he was canonised two years after his death.

Massam (1996) describes St Thérèse of Lisieux as 'arguably the best known and most consistently honoured twentieth-century saint.' She was a Carmelite nun

who died in 1897 after a short and largely hidden life. Her autobiography, published after her death, played a significant part in the development of her cult in Australia. She was canonised in 1925, only 28 years after her death, which was very fast by Vatican standards. Another saint whose name is familiar to Australians is St Vincent de Paul because of the various shops and social work continued in his name. 'Vinnie's Boutique' is common parlance for an opportunity shop which can be relied upon for clothing bargains. Vincent was a French priest who worked tirelessly to give practical assistance to those in need whilst at the same time maintaining relationships with wealthy members of society who could provide funds for his work.

The bush heritage, hospitality and charity

Australians generally are very conscious of the vastness of this country. Journeys of exploration, attempts to survive and prosper in a difficult environment have led to the development of many bush characters who are larger than life. They prize mateship and egalitarianism. Films and the television industry do a great deal to keep Australia's bush heritage alive (see Turner 1993). The portrayal by stars such as Chips Rafferty and Paul Hogan of the laconic Australian male able to cope with any emergency in the bush, have provided role models for many within Australia as well as perpetuating a stereotype to overseas viewers.

In days when literacy was low and rote memories were trained to recall long epics as the only form of entertainment, the works of AB 'Banjo' Paterson and Henry Lawson became very popular. Paterson was a 'dispossessed squatter's son' whose first book of verse, *The Man from Snowy River*, was first published in 1895 and then reprinted in 1902, 1917 and 1924 (Ward 1988:4, 223). The success of a film version of the story told in the poem as well as a film sequel have helped to keep modern Australians in touch with this version of bush heritage. In her analysis of the role of women and the bush, Schaffer (1988: 34) cites a wide body of opinion that holds it is Henry Lawson who is the 'founding father, the author of the Australian tradition' because of his 1890s short stories of the bush and bushmen. More recent literature, for example, *The Thorn Birds* (McCullough 1977), and autobiographies by writers such as Sara Henderson (Henderson 1993), continue to remind Australians of the vastness of this country and the characteristics of bush types who can be larger than life.

Just as hospitality is a practical virtue in outback Australia, it was also given high priority in early monasteries and by succeeding generations of saints. The willingness to sacrifice to provide meals, clothing and accommodation to travellers was seen as a form of ascetism. St John Vianney was said to have lived on potatoes so that he could give food to the poor; St Martin of Tours cut his own cloak in halves to share it with a beggar; St Louise de Marillac, a contemporary of St Vincent de Paul, joined with him to found the Daughters of Charity, and devoted her life to nursing the poor; St Margaret of Scotland was famous in the eleventh century for her almsgiving to those in need.

In writing of this aspect of sainthood, Kieckhefer (1988:19) includes Mother Teresa of Calcutta amongst the examples cited of the willingness of saints to make sacrifices for others. Her dedication to the poorest of the poor in India and in other places throughout the world, led her to be considered by many to be 'a living saint' (Vardey 1995:15) and the 'Saint of the Gutters' (The Advertiser 1996). Like many others, she had left her home (in Albania) to go as a missionary to India. Since her death in 1997, Vatican authorities have fast tracked her cause for formal recognition as a saint by the Catholic Church.

Ned Kelly — secular saint or folk hero?

Of all Australian bushrangers, it is Ned Kelly who is remembered most today. According to McIntyre (1992:52), Ned Kelly has become a figure larger than life because of his aspirations to invulnerability. As an individual with charismatic leadership qualities, he had a grandiose self-image, took a flamboyant stand against the authorities of the day, boasted of his skills in shooting and horsemanship and made dire threats against anyone who opposed him. When he was finally captured and sentenced to death, he still enjoyed great popularity: a petition of 32,000 signatures called for his reprieve.

Ned Kelly may be dead but he is certainly not forgotten: the tourist trade around the Victorian town of Glenrowan acts as a pseudo shrine for pilgrimages of the faithful. His conflict with authority, his spectacular final battle, trial and death have become part of the Australian legends of heroes: in his discussion of the Australian character, White (1981:154) describes Ned Kelly as being:

... canonised in Douglas Stewart's verse play in 1942, Sidney Nolan's first Kelly series of paintings in 1945 – 47, and the Borovansky ballet, 'The Outlaw,' in 1951.

Another writer who explores the notion of Ned Kelly as a secular saint is Dunstan (1980), whose book is entitled, *Saint Ned: the near sanctification of an Australian Outlaw*. While not ascribing sainthood to this bushranger, Carroll (1992c:150) does admit that, even today, 'a large majority of Australians when asked to name the national hero answer Ned Kelly.'

The continued fame of Ned Kelly is an indication of the way that Australians revere bravery – even though in the wrong cause. He was a battler from the bush, took a courageous stand against authority and was larger than life in his assertions of invulnerability. Somehow, he has captured the imagination of many in this country for more than a hundred years. The inclusion of armour-clad depictions of Ned Kelly in the Olympic Games Opening Ceremony shows that he has become an icon reflecting aspects of the Australian identity. To many Australians, he would be considered a secular saint.

Mary MacKillop – saint and hero

The visit to Australia by Pope John Paul II in January 1995 for the beatification

of Mary MacKillop led to vast media coverage by newspapers throughout the country. Such reports can be interpreted as 'sensitive barometers of cultural change' (Fairclough 1995, p 60). The fact that an Australian born woman of Scottish immigrant parents had merited the honour of a significant step towards sainthood was taken by many journalists and commentators to be a noteworthy event for the whole country, not just for those within the Catholic Church. The editorial in *The Sydney Morning Herald* of January 19th, 1995 termed the event 'a matter of pride for all Australians' and referred to Mary MacKillop as 'a remarkable Australian woman, who devoted her life to the poor, who stood up to authority when necessary.' The editorial of *The Daily Telegraph Mirror* (20/1/95) highlighted her universal appeal to all Australians. Even though she was receiving recognition by the Catholic Church, it noted that she deserved the admiration of all because of her 'earthly qualities of kindness, of tenderness and selflessness in abundance.' *The Advertiser* editorial of the same date, under the heading of 'A great yet humble Australian,' described the beatification of Mary MacKillop as providing a great sense of pride for all because 'she is a marvellous role model for Catholic and non-Catholic alike.' This column also noted that 'she faced opposition and she had the resilience to overcome it...she defied hidebound male authority.'

An extract from one of the Pope's addresses was given wide publicity in newspapers (eg *The Daily Telegraph Mirror* 19/1/95, headlines on 20/1/95; *The Sydney Morning Herald* 19/1/95):

Mary MacKillop embodied all that is best in your nation and in its people: genuine openness to others, hospitality to strangers, generosity to the needy, justice to those unfairly treated, perseverance in the face of adversity, kindness and support to the suffering. Mary MacKillop's faith and commitment have become a part of your Australian heritage.

The Prime Minister of the day, Paul Keating, tapped into the bush heritage theme for Australian heroes in one of his speeches at this time: 'it is partly because she worked in the bush, the cradle of our tradition, that she became a legendary figure for Australians' (*The Daily Telegraph Mirror* 20/1/95).

Since 1995, Mary MacKillop has continued to receive a mention in the daily press and to attract the attention of public figures who seek popularity by identification with her. Once he retired from politics, Paul Keating made one of his first forays into public life at the launch of a book about those who have continued the work started by Mary MacKillop (Pitt 1997). Edna Everage has relinquished her damehood in honour of the Republican cause and because a check of her family tree 'showed she was related to Catholic pioneer, Mother Mary MacKillop' (Rodda 1999). Within South Australia, Mary MacKillop was nominated amongst the 100 heroes featured by the Adelaide *Advertiser* (Turner 1998) and was runner up to Lord Florey in a poll by the same paper (1/1/2000) to determine the South Australian of the Century. Her name has even been bestowed upon a Sydney Harbour SuperCat ferry (Hook 2000)!

The fact the Mary MacKillop continues to be featured in the popular press and

the popular imagination is to me an indication that she has developed into a new cultural icon for Australia. She identified herself with the battlers, especially those in country areas. Her travels throughout Australia and New Zealand to found new works and to encourage those within them, provided inspiration. Through the system of education she founded, in conjunction with Julian Tenison Woods, she left a legacy of hope. Her appreciation of the dignity of an individual, no matter what their circumstances or past actions, led her to develop a variety of social works for the homeless, the unemployed and the aged. She faced extreme opposition from the institutional Catholic Church but she remained true to the path she believed to be her calling. Her courage and commitment led to her being accepted and assisted by those of other faiths – and by those with no official links to religion. Since her death in 1909, Mary MacKillop's story has continued to be told: it is now part of the wider Australian culture where she is seen as both a hero and a saint.

Conclusion

As the stories of Australian heroes are re-told, Australians develop a deeper sense of identity. The values most revered in heroes are those considered essential within this identity: the fidelity of the Aussie Battler, respect for individuals rather than rank, courage, commitment to others and a resonance with the bush heritage of hospitality. The traditional saints of the Catholic Church are holy persons who are formally recognised for their virtues, heroism, and willingness to give their lives both in fact and through hard work for others.

In deciding who is really a hero, Australians utilise a framework of their background knowledge: this can be obtained from formal study, arise from involvement in a Church or be conveyed through the popular media and literature. The dynamic relationship between knowledge already consolidated and the new knowledge obtained by a process of filtering, comparing and consolidating new ideas is part of the complex transmission of cultural values. Against the backdrop of the qualities revered in Australian heroes and those necessary for formal sainthood in the Catholic Church, Mary MacKillop has been recognised as a saint by a broad cross section of the Australian community. Other individuals who have led heroic lives and given hope can be called secular saints.

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