

An Analysis of the Australasian Catholic Congresses of 1900, 1904 and 1909 in Relation to Public Policy from the Perspective of Gender

Sophie McGrath

Australian Catholic University

This article provides an analysis of the Australasian Catholic Congresses of 1900, 1904 and 1909 in relation to public policy from the perspective of gender. This involves a recognition of the long history of the Church's engagement with public policy and a consideration of the genesis of the Congresses as the fruit of Cardinal Moran's broad vision and high aspirations for federated Australia in general and for the Australian Catholic Church in particular. Also primary to the agendas of the Congresses was the strong conviction of the rightness of the Catholic tradition that religion is integral to the life of the human person and therefore central to education. Within this context the participation of men and women in the Congresses is discussed against the background of gender norms within the Church and the wider community.

The history of the Christian Church from its beginning involved, not infrequently, engagement with public policy. After all the persecution of the early Christians, leaving aside the various political agendas of the emperors of the time, arose from their refusal to comply with the public policy of offering incense to the Roman gods. It is not surprising then that the Australasian Catholic Congresses of 1900, 1904 and 1909 included a critique of contemporary public policies as they affected the life of the Australian Community in general and the Australian Catholic Community in particular.

Although some scholars over the years have dipped into the proceedings of the Australasian Catholic Congresses (e.g. Daniels & Murnane, 1980; O'Farrell, 1985), apart from Ian Waters (2000), no one has given serious attention to them as a whole and Water's published work, to this stage, consists mainly of a brief general overview of the 1900 Congress. My intention is to analyse these congresses in relation to public policy from the perspective of gender.

Oakley (1972) first made the useful conceptual distinction between 'sex' and 'gender' with sex being understood to refer to biological sex difference and gender to the socially constructed differences between men and women (Yeatman, 1986:158). These distinctions made in the field of sociology have proved useful to historians with Joan Wallach Scott being the first to use them in her 1989 seminal work *Gender and the Politics of History* (Offen et al, 1991: xxxiv). Certainly by 1999 Scott (1999: 199 et seq) was deploring the corruption of the term 'gender'

from her original use of it but in this paper I am using it as Oakley had defined it in 1972. The term 'public policy' is taken to refer simply to a policy which is promulgated by the legitimate government of a country.

The first Australasian Catholic Congress, which was held in Sydney in 1900, was the undisputed brain-child of Cardinal Moran. He modelled it on those which had been held in many countries in Europe during the latter part of the nineteenth century, most notably in Germany, Spain, France, Italy and Belgium (O'Brien, 1900: 338). The Congress of 1900 celebrated both the triumph of the federation of the colonies into the Australian Commonwealth and the triumphant survival of the Catholic Church in Australia. Moran considered Australia to be most blessed and a land of tremendous promise. He asserted that, while taking what was best in the tradition of Western Civilisation, Australia would not perpetuate its destructive elements – those religious, political and ideological conflicts which bedevilled Europe.

Indeed across the three Congresses there is an evident concerted effort to broaden the horizons of Australian Catholics. Most of the published papers were given by well educated clerics and laymen, with the former dominating. These elite leaders in the community were not narrowly Irish, though always there were some papers focussed on Irish history and culture. That the broadening and deepening of the knowledge of Catholics, especially at the faith level, was considered imperative by the clergy is indicated in those papers dealing specifically with pastoral ministry in country and frontier areas as well as in the cities and towns. Materialism, secularism and indifferentism, with one religion being judged as good as another, were posing problems to the conscientious pastor (e.g. Gallagher in Congress, 1900: 334; Hayes in Congress, 1904:317; Dowling in Congress, 1909:112). Moran, with his strong sense of the universal nature of the Church, was intensely interested in its missionary activities, which featured prominently at all three Congresses.

The expressed focus of the 1900 Congress was 'Religion and Science'. Moran was intent on demonstrating that there was no essential conflict between the two (Congress, 1900: 3). As at most contemporary conferences the set theme was addressed directly by a few papers, obliquely by some and not at all by many.

At the opening of the 1900 Congress in his inaugural discourse Moran set the tone for the Congress in his presentation of a summary history of the Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century. In this he went to great lengths to underline the fact that the Catholic Church was not opposed to true progress and freedom. He stressed that this freedom included freedom of conscience, religious equality, freedom of the press, of meeting, of association, universal suffrage and equality before the law (Congress, 1900: 5-29).

So successful was the 1900 Congress that it was agreed that regular congresses should become a feature of Catholic life in Australasia. Consequently congresses were subsequently held in 1904 in Melbourne and 1909 in Sydney.

Congress papers

At each of the Congresses numerous papers of varying quality were presented, mainly from Australia but with a significant number from overseas on the invitation of Moran or one of the bishops. Generally the Congress papers were classified into seven sections: Apologetics; Social Questions; Charitable Institutions; Education; History and Missions; Science and Art; Statistics. There were some significant categories added at times e.g. the 1904 Congress had sections on Medical Questions and the Christian Woman.

In all of the papers in these sections there was clearly an effort to deal with the issues of the day and, while upholding tradition, to indicate that the Church was not opposed to true progress. In his paper on 'Liberalism in Religion' the Rev Dr McDonald from Maynooth College, Ireland stated:

Within the domain of politics there are many peculiar to the Liberal party which, whether they are true or false in themselves, are, at least, not in any way opposed to the teaching of the Catholic Church, and which, therefore, the faithful are perfectly free to hold. I consider it the duty of one who addresses a body of Catholics of all shades of opinion to eschew such questions as might cause division and with regard to which every Catholic has, in the sense aforesaid, a right to form his own judgment (Congress, 1900: 66).

He went on to explain:

The second remark I wish to make is to the effect that I do not wish to be understood as holding that in the domain of faith and morals there is no room for Liberalism, understanding the term to signify progress, development, increase in knowledge, and advancement of culture and civilisation. Those who have read Cardinal Newman's Essay on the "Development of Christian Doctrine" or Cardinal Franzelin's "Treatise on Tradition" will understand in what sense the deposit of faith is capable of being developed and expanded (Congress, 1900: 66).

McDonald did, nevertheless, make it clear that the official teaching authority of the Church is vested in the Pope and the bishops. Yet he expressed sympathy for Catholic journalists attempting to critique the Church (Congress, 1900: 82-3). He appreciated the advantages of the separation of State and Church (85) as did Cardinal Moran, who, surveying post-French Revolution times, declared "the Church has been freed from the trammels and fetters by which for centuries she was held captive under State control in a sort of honourable bondage, and which could not fail to impede in a thousand ways the free and beneficent exercise of her divine mission" (Congress, 1900: 9).

From the traditional Catholic perspective religion is integral to education and this is underlined again and again in the various Congress papers. Indeed Moran was utterly convinced of the importance of religion to human happiness and the advancement of civilisation (McGrath, 1989: 37).

This was forcefully reinforced in the 1900 Congress paper "Catholicism and Modern Constitutionalism" prepared by John Reiner from New Jersey in the United States. He was a lay man and from comments in his paper a convert to the Catholic faith. He commenced his paper declaring categorically that his aim was "to show that at all times, and in all ages, religion or irreligion was a potent factor in the formation of civil government and in shaping its underlying principles." Reiner went on to quote the Roman writer Lactantius (Div. Inst. 1V, 2) who held that "religion binds creature to God, which has as its consequence the high destiny of man." As a result, all of a man's various "activities and relationships in life" including his relationship with the civil government "pre-eminently find no sufficiency in themselves, but strive for the supernatural" (Congress, 1900: 147).

According to Al Gabay's study of the mystical life of Alfred Deakin, at least one of the founding fathers of Federation would have not argued with this (Gabay, 1992: 48,49). Nor, as will be seen, would either the men or the women who prepared papers for the Australasian Catholic Congresses.

Women's Presence at the Congresses

Now fortunately we do not have to resort to a hermeneutics of suspicion to determine that women were part of the Congresses and indeed a vital part. It is not surprising that women, both lay and religious, were responsible for the catering and hospitality as well as the occasional entertainment provided at the Congresses. We know this from the various votes of thanks and photographs. But were the women just in the background? Were they really interested to actually come to the various sessions of the Congress or did they think that the papers would be over their heads and that discussion of policies concerning the Church and the State was 'men's business'?

It is recorded that 700 people attended the 1900 Congress but the Proceedings contain no further detail or photos. In the case of the 1904 Congress, however, the names and addresses of the approximately 1000 enrolled are printed in alphabetical order in the back of the Proceedings.

From an analysis of the first 533 registered (A – F in the listing) it is known that of those who attended the 1904 Congress 44% were men, 37% women (16% married, 21% single), 17% clerics, 2% nuns or women religious, 0.75% religious brothers. Altogether of those in attendance 81% were laity of which 54% were men and 46% were women.

From these figures it is clear that women formed a significant number of the 1904 Congress participants. Although there were no numbers concerning registered members recorded in the Proceedings at the 1909 Congress, from the numerous photos of the various events it is clear that the Congress was well attended and women were well represented.

Division Along Gender Lines

It is evident from the comments of the clerical organisers of the Congresses and from the papers given at the three Congresses that there was considerable concern among the clergy and educated laity to promote lay men in the Church. This involved fostering their education, including their theological education, precisely so that they would, not only be better Christians and more able to explain their faith intelligently, but better able to contribute to public debate about public policies. That this nurturing was sorely needed is indicated by the fact that there were only four Catholics elected to the 1897-8 Federation Convention (Bannon, 2001: 15).

Integral to this promotion of the laity was an ongoing concern to develop Societies and Clubs for young Catholic men to provide them with opportunities of continuing education and the acquiring of skills of debating and oratory so as to equip them for the public arena. In order to promote the interest of young lay men in the 1900 Congress, and of the Congress participants in Young Men's Societies, the Federal Council of the Catholic Young Men's Societies of Melbourne organised an essay competition for young men on the topic: "What means should be adopted to safeguard and promote the spiritual interests of Catholic youth from the close of school training till the attainment of mature middle life?" Three prizes were offered and the essays of those who gained first and second place were published in the Proceedings of the Congress. The Diocese of Rockhampton followed Melbourne's lead and conducted a similar competition (Congress, 1900: 399, 407, 413).

At the 1900 Congress Rev E.J. Kelly of St Brigid's Parish, North Fitzroy presented a paper on "Theological studies for laymen". He saw theological education as a pressing need for the increasing numbers of Catholic educated middle class men and for the talented self-made man, who often made his mark in the political field. Kelly held that it was essential that such men be able to give a reason for their faith at an adult level of scholarship. He ended his paper: "Oh, indeed now, if ever, the Church wants a strong race of laymen" (Congress, 1900: 181).

Bishop Gallagher of Goulburn strongly supported the nurturing of the spiritual and intellectual development of young Catholic men through Clubs, literary and debating societies and the development of good parish libraries. As Gallagher explained:

Mere devotion without knowledge, practice of piety without dogma well understood, mere religious sentiment without fixed principles firmly planted in the head and heart, will hardly withstand the fierce rays that beat upon religious life in Australia. (Congress, 1900: 339)

Gallagher encouraged a vigorous muscular Christianity. He advised the young Catholic men of the time:

To be a genuine Catholic, in the rough- and- tumble of Australian Life, demands a robust faith and a vigorous piety ... We require not less but more firmness of character, more courage of conviction, more of strong muscular moral backbone. Our grand old Mother Church has no fear of strong men. She needs them ... (Congress, 1900: 341).

A lay man, R.E. O'Connor QC, from Sydney presented a similar paper on "The scope and purpose of young men's societies' (Congress, 1900: 351). There was no similar concern expressed for the establishment of young women's societies.

The Public Voice of Women

The participation of the women in the public forum of the Congress of 1900 where public policy was confronted, especially in the area of public education, reflected the contemporary gendered nature of society where men were expected to be concerned with the theoretical and the broader issues, and women with the practical and domestic (Wearing: 1996: 4-6). It also reflected the hierarchical structure of the Church.

All the papers in the Apologetics and Education Sections, which provided the theological and philosophical underpinning of the Catholic schools, were given by men and, with one exception, clerical men. In the section on Our Schools, however, the women dominated with six of the eleven papers being written by women religious.

Indeed the women religious presented more papers than lay women at all three Congresses. This domination of the women religious was not surprising in light of the fact that in 1900 in Australia they numbered 3, 150 compared with 1, 042 priests and 377 brothers. They were responsible for 96 girls' boarding schools, 138 superior day schools, 669 primary schools and 64 charitable institutions, including major hospitals, in most of the capital cities (Catholic Directory, 1900: 162-3). These numbers increased steadily in the following years and were a source of much pride at the succeeding Congresses. The Catholic women as members of religious institutions, and as enthusiastic supporters of these institutions, were contributing significantly to the mission of the Church and were constantly reminded by Moran of their importance. At the 1909 Congress he declared: 'What shall I say of our grand army of Sisterhoods, on whom in a most special way has developed in our times the apostolate of charity and Christian enlightenment. Our Australian communities have proved themselves worthy of the exalted title which popular piety has awarded them, whilst saluting them as ministering angels of Mercy and Charity' (Congress, 1909: 691).

None of the women religious or religious brothers who provided a paper was named but simply given a corporate identity e.g. Dominican Sisters, Strathfield or Patrician Brothers, Ryde. This no doubt was the result of a certain spirituality of religious life, which did not promote the individual over the group. The Jesuit, who presented a paper, was also a religious but was named, presumably because

he was a cleric. No lay woman presented a paper at the Congress of 1900, although, from the Catholic newspapers of the time it is known that a significant number had become increasingly involved in the discussion of public policies such as the extension of the franchise to women which was publicly supported by Cardinal Moran (Oldfield, 1992: 182).

The Dominican Sisters from Strathfield provided a paper on "Christian doctrine and history of the Church considered as the basis of Catholic enlightenment and culture." It is clear that a central concern of the Sisters was to prepare the young girl for her subsequent life when her religion would be the subject of attack. There is then, not surprisingly, a certain defensiveness in this paper. It is stated that authentic history shows that "the Church is not the oppressor of mankind but in fact it is the defender of the truest liberties of the human race" (Congress, 1900: 423).

The Loreto Community provided a paper on "Character training in Christian and Catholic education". They declared:

A solemn moment, a great moment in her history has come for Australia. In all the freshness of youthful vigour she steps forth and takes her place in the rank of nations, and every heart breathes for her the wish she may be: "as great as the greatest, as good as the best." A goodly heritage is hers. Empires long passed away have bequeathed her glorious traditions. Nations of the far West have sent their children, the "bold, determined Teuton, the keen-witted, original Celt", to build the fabric of her greatness (Congress, 1900: 423).

These patriotic Sisters were concerned with the education of the child and adolescent to true virtue, not just the external keeping of the law. The writer observed:

Each age of the world has dangers peculiar to itself, which call for the exercise of certain qualities. In our days when so many in the pursuit of pleasure 'out-pagan the pagans', and forgetting or ignoring the great future, live bond-salves of caprice, it is necessary to impress on the young a sense of the dignity of their end as immortal beings, and the need of self-restraint in order to attain that end (Congress, 1900: 429).

The Loreto Sisters were critical of the public educational policy of public examinations for schools and they declared that, apart from parents stupidly spoiling their children, they saw the other great difficulty to effective education of children to be "the bugbear of Competitive Examinations". They explained:

The poor teachers have no time to train character or develop individuality; the one great aim is to secure good results and high percentages, at any cost. ... Wise educators, notably Fitch and Parker, have raised their voices in condemnation of this system, which sacrifices to the Moloch of examination, the teacher's high aims and the children's best interests. Leading school journals have inveighed against it, and with effect. In Germany a wise method of marking a child's paper absolutely, and not relatively to his comrades, is

now in place, class-placing being unknown. In England, too, examinations have been superseded by informed 'Inspector's Visits' (Congress, 1900: 436).

The Good Samaritan Sisters presented a paper on "The Australasian Catholic Readers". A dominant theme in this paper is patriotism and the Sisters worked hard to emphasise the loyalty of Catholics to Australia and to dispel the myth that their allegiance to an international Church with the head in Rome was at variance with this. They pointed out: "Now on the eve of Federation, it is a pleasing fact and worthy of note to remark the patriotic spirit of the 'Readers' in contributing to foster Federal aspirations."

They elaborated:

The readers teach self-reliance, independence of spirit, and inculcate high ideals. They teach that the highest, greatest conquest, is the conquest of self; they teach us to annihilate all feelings of revenge, hatred; they urge, forbearance, brotherly love. But while teaching Charity and its kindred virtues, they teach no enervating doctrine. We are not asked to sacrifice our manhood, or make cutting blocks of ourselves for those so inclined to treat us. ... They teach justice – but justice tempered with mercy... They teach the dignity of honest labour, and give a meaning to the worker's work (Congress, 1900: 456).

All of these papers on Catholic schools presented by Catholic women religious were general in nature and not concerned specifically with the education of girls. One prepared by the Sisters of Mercy, Parramatta, however, did focus specifically on girls, the writer held that "of all the needs that press upon our notice at the close of this much vaunted nineteenth century none is more important than the education of girls." She declared: "Girls, who are to be wives of the present and mothers of future generations are the chief agencies for carrying on the works of mercy by which the Church of Christ fulfils her actions" (Congress, 1900: 479).

This paper considered woman to be man's 'help-mate' and expressed this in somewhat rapturous, romantic terms but it is made clear that the writer wanted the very best education for girls, though she held that it is "not clever girls the world needs but unselfish devoted women who realise that their mission is sacrifice in the shade." Despite this view, which could be interpreted as a somewhat 'woman as the doormat' attitude, she argued for a public policy of government examination of Catholic schools, the establishment of Catholic Teachers' Colleges and for the higher education of girls, which she declared in her rhapsodic style she would "have as high as the heavens and broad as the world" (Congress, 1900: 494).

It is significant that at the 1904 Congress there was no separate section on 'Our Schools' and the only representative of women religious in the 'Education' section was a Loreto Sister who contributed a paper on "History as a factor in the education of the Catholic child". It would seem that some women at least were now being recognised as true professionals in the field of education and not just as practitioners. The 1909 Congress, also, had no separate 'Our Schools' section and

in the section on 'Education' there were five papers by women, three from women religious and, significantly, two from lay women. Two women religious also contributed papers on Art in the section on 'Literature, Science and Art' (Congress, 1909: 586, 594). Although women religious were still dominant lay women were gaining more prominence.

Indeed at the 1909 Congress Miss Teresa Magner's paper on "The training of the Australian girl" expressed a resentment on behalf of girls of the practice of what later would be called 'sexism' in the education of Australian children which favoured the boy. After stressing the importance of the education of girls she declared: "This holds good in Australia perhaps more than in any other country, because the Australian woman not only trains the men and women of the future, but also has a direct influence on the public life of the present" (Congress, 1909: 201).

Teresa Magner elaborated:

Women's organisations have forced the Government to do many things that might otherwise be left undone, whether it be providing better accommodation for the nurses in its hospitals or establishing a Children's Court. In many districts, too, she holds the balance at the elections. It is out-of-date to discuss the question of woman in politics; the fact remains that she is there, and should be prepared for the position she must take. The majority of women are not fitted to fill this position, and it remains for the Church to examine and remedy the defects of her education (Congress, 1909: 201).

Magner lamented that most women teachers say they prefer to teach boys than girls. She defended girls against the criticisms made of them by many teachers and explained, among other things, that they did not have the after school freedom of boys because so much of their time was given to doing household chores and caring for other members of the family. Apart from pointing out such things as the lack of school amenities for girls compared with boys, she complained: "Nearly every parish has some kind of boys' club but clubs for girls are unknown" (Congress, 1909: 206).

Gender and Social Welfare

It was right and proper that women, both religious and lay, were involved in the 'Our Schools' and later 'Education' sections of the Congresses, but they are glaringly absent from the social welfare sections of the Congresses.

Social work of course was not yet recognised by public policy as an academic discipline – it was just perceived largely as an aspect of women's work – philanthropic ministering in the case of the upper classes, 'helping out' in the lower classes. The Church depended upon the women to work at the coal face in the social welfare area of its ministry but in 1900 it was only the men who presented papers in the 'Social Questions' section of the 1900 and 1904 Congresses. In accordance with gender perceptions in the wider community, men

were 'the thinkers' and official public face of the Church; the women were the hidden 'doers', though the men sang their praises in public (e.g. Congress, 1900: 368; Congress, 1904: 301; Congress 1909: 691).

It is noted, however, that in the Proceedings of the 1904 Congress in a supplementary section called "Congress Notes" there was published a report by a Mrs Power of Melbourne in which she critiqued the Victorian Government public policy concerning boarded-out children (Congress, 1904: 626). It appears to be a well informed and fair critique of government policy in this area. Mrs Power had also contributed short papers on the religious education of blind children and on hospital visitation. There is a ring of authority and confidence in Mrs Power's papers. It is suggested that she represents the tip of the iceberg, as it were, of the increasing number of middle-class lay women involved in Catholic social work.

Progress seemed to have been made in the 1909 Congress when for the first time a woman's paper was included in a section on "Religious and charitable organisations". A Dominican Sister from Waratah presented a paper on "Our duty to the Catholic deaf and dumb". Obviously it was recognised that specialist training was needed to undertake the education of the deaf and dumb unlike the running of orphanages for children with less defined problems (Congress, 1909: 466).

Also in the 1909 Congress a lay woman, Annie Golding, presented a paper on "The industrial and social condition of women in the Australian Commonwealth" in the section called "Social Questions". In this paper Golding based her critique of the industrial and social condition of women upon Government statistics and a wide knowledge of progress in working conditions in the Commonwealth of Australia and New Zealand. Effectively she is arguing for equal wages for men and women (Congress, 1909: 287).

Among other things Golding also argued for the establishment of a School of Domestic Science in association with Sydney University since the kitchen is central to the health of the nation. Essentially she was supporting the call by other women's groups for the study of nutrition, sanitation and the like (Howe & Swain, 1992: 165). Golding pointed out that The University Reform Bill was then before the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales. The women's call was ignored. Sydney University established a School of Veterinary Science rather than a School of Domestic Science. A School of Nutrition was not established at Sydney University until the 1960s (Congress, 1909: 291).

Golding's concern about the conditions of labour was shared by many men in the Church. At the first two Congresses much anxiety was expressed about the plight of the worker at the hands of the capitalist by the Rev John O'Mahoney, editor of *The Monitor* in Launceston. In his paper on "Some thoughts on capital and labour" he lamented the blindness of those who saw the present status quo of labour in relation to Capital as '**right**'. He complained:

All speculations on social subjects are considered idle and dangerous and every attempt to investigate the problems that present themselves, with a view of providing some remedy, is regarded as revolutionary, as being Communism, or what they are pleased to call Socialism in disguise ... (Congress, 1900: 202).

O'Mahoney urged his readers:

... we can help every progressive movement that tends to ameliorate the condition of the poor, and support public men, of whatever creed, whose sympathy for the workers is genuine, and whose efforts on their behalf will, I hope, be the means of preventing in this new land of ours those evils that are a disgrace of the civilisation of Europe (Congress, 1900: 208).

Socialism, so closely allied with the Labour – Capitalist conflict, was critiqued at each of the three Congresses. It was seen as having taken over the liberty, equality and fraternity of Christianity but having severed them from Christianity's nourishing roots and, as a result, a threat to contemporary society (Congress, 1904: 425).

As a response to the social problems of the time the Catholic Church promoted mutual aid societies and there were papers on them at all three Congresses. None of these were given by women but much satisfaction was expressed concerning the number of 'ladies groups' which had been established. Also underlined was the benefit of mutual aid societies to a family, especially the mother, in the event of the death of her husband (Congress, 1900: 307).

The Christian Woman

No doubt as a response to women having gained the vote nationally, there was included in the 1904 Congress a section on 'Christian Woman' consisting of three papers. The first of these was entitled "Position of woman in pagan society". It was designed to point out the benefits that Christianity had brought to women and inferred that really they had little to complain about. This paper was presented by the Very Rev. Michael Maher CM (Vincentian) Malvern, Victoria. That a man presented the key paper in this section was in accord with the gender policy in the wider community where scholarship was traditionally a male responsibility (Congress, 1904: 551).

The second paper was by Annie Golding, the well-known Sydney activist mentioned previously. Her paper was on "The evolution of women and their possibilities". In tracing through the history of women across the ages Golding displayed considerable knowledge of women's history including a balanced judgment of Mary Wollstonecraft's famous treatise *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and an awareness of the political activities of American woman suffrage workers (Congress, 1904: 560).

Golding was jubilant at what had been accomplished:

The women of the Commonwealth of Australia stand in the unique position of being citizens of the only nation in the whole world which has absolute adult suffrage ... Let their influence radiating from the home, the school, and public life, permeate the nation, instilling ideals of honour, justice, truth and humanity. Then indeed, will the day of the sweeter, seducer, and oppressor have forever passed away (Congress, 1904: 560).

The third paper in the 1904 section on "Christian Woman" was prepared by Miss Macreeedy and entitled 'The home training of our girls'. In this she attempts to uphold the importance of the home and domestic arts along with the involvement of woman in the wider discourse of the nation. Her ideal woman, after having informed herself, would use her vote intelligently. She saw the higher education of women as promoting both the domestic and public spheres of a woman's life (Congress, 1904: 465).

Rev. J. Brophy of Dubbo responded to the papers and commented concerning the two women's papers: "[They] ... contained much that was worthy of admiration, but some such things that, though lawful, were hardly expedient under our present conditions of life." Archbishop Kelly of Sydney, the president for this section, observed: "... that womans's place was in the home, where she reigned as the queen and the mistress, surrounded by her loving husband and little children" (Congress, 1904: 570).

From this Section of the 1904 Congress came the resolution:

That this Section of the Congress desires to record its appreciation of the value of Girls' Clubs, and of the establishing of technical schools, where domestic and economic arts might be taught.

This resolution, though apparently of a culturally gendered nature to keep women apart from mainstream activities and firmly anchored to the home, was in line with the express wishes of such activists as Teresa Magner, Miss Macreeedy and Annie Golding, who had explicitly recommended such moves, while firmly defending woman's contribution in the public sphere beyond the home.

Conclusion

From this necessarily limited analysis of the Proceedings of the Australasian Catholic Congresses of 1900, 1904 and 1909 in relation to public policy from the perspective of gender, it is seen that both men and women in the Catholic Church in the early years of the 20th century were very much engaged with public policy, especially in the areas of education and social welfare.

It is also clear that there prevailed at the Congresses the gender norm of the wider community which recognised man as the leader, the intellectual, the philosopher, the theologian, the thinker and the chief planner in relation to public policy. Woman was perceived as the practitioner, though there is evidence across

the Congresses of an increasing recognition of some women as professionals in the fields of education and social welfare.

The women supported the men concerning such fundamental principles as the centrality of religion to the life of the human person and hence to education. They also supported the men in their concern for the poor, the destitute, the orphaned and the worker. The women like the men expressed a strong spirit of patriotism and interest in the development of young Australia as a country which, hopefully, would not repeat the mistakes of Europe.

The clerics expressed concern about the welfare of the young men of the Church rather than the young women. They hoped to educate, both spiritually and intellectually, able young men to be leaders in the making of public policy in the wider community. While most of the women addressed the matter of education generally, one lay woman expressed strong resentment concerning the preferential treatment given to boys in parochial primary schools and in the parishes

The clerics, though strongly and publicly appreciative of women, especially women religious in their educational and social welfare work, obviously were not looking to the women of the Church to be leaders in the field of public policy making. Yet the clerics invited women religious and later lay women to present papers in the field of education and these women took the opportunity to critique current public educational policies. It is clear, too, that such women as Annie Golding, Teresa Magner, Mrs Power, and Miss Macreeedy were convinced of the need and the responsibility of women to be involved in the public sphere concerning policy making and were already making a contribution in that area.

A post-structuralist reading of this gender analysis of the Australasian Catholic Congresses leads me to suggest that the influence of the gender norms of the wider society upon the Church were being challenged by the living members of the Church, both men and women, being faithful to their mission in their daily lives. As has been seen, the very fact that women had been educated for their participation in the ministry of the Church provided them with the skills necessary to participate in the public forum of the congresses.

It was the pro-woman suffrage Cardinal Moran who initiated and encouraged the Congresses, which provided women with some opportunity to speak out. But Moran died in 1911 and there were no more Australasian Catholic Congresses. He was succeeded by Archbishop Kelly who simply did not have the vision and capacity to inspire such congresses and who, unlike Moran, saw woman's sphere of operation as strictly the home.

Nevertheless, for the sake of the ministry of the Church it was imperative that women, especially women religious, be educated. It is not surprising then that the bishops of the Australian Catholic Church were finally convinced of the necessity of embarking upon research projects in the 1980s and 1990s which responded to the expressed desire of a significant number of women for greater participation in the policy making discourse of the Church (Macdonald et al, 1999: 1-19).

It is Joan Wallach Scott (1989: 2-3)'s view that "history's representations of the past help construct gender for the present ... it provides a means for understanding and contributing to the process by which gender knowledge is produced." It is hoped that this limited historical analysis of the Australasian Catholic Congresses of 1900, 1904 and 1909 in relation to public policy from the perspective of gender will contribute to the widening of the horizons, especially of women, concerning the participation of committed Church women in the discourses concerning policy making both within the Church and the wider community.

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