

**Julian Casey, et al, *Sub Tuum Praesidium: Marist Brothers in Australia 1872-2022*, Marist Brothers Australia, Mascot, NSW, 2022, xiv + 563 pages; ISBN 9780646853253**

Institutional histories tend to be celebratory in tone – see what we have achieved against the odds during our existence. *Sub Tuum Praesidium: Marist Brothers in Australia 1872-2022* has a different feel about it, coming at a time when the reputation of the Marist Brothers in Australia remains at a low ebb following the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

From the book's beginning, with a message from the Superior General, to the bibliography at its end, the dark cloud of the sexual abuse crisis casts its shadow over the text. The authors' acknowledgment of the institute's failures regarding the abuse of boys under its care is neither perfunctory nor exculpatory. In addition to a chapter specifically on the Royal Commission, the authors refer to the abuse scandal often throughout the text, with both contrition and shame.

Consequently, *Sub Tuum Praesidium* (Latin for 'Under your protection') is a history of the institute's existence in Australia very different from its predecessor, Brother Alban Doyle's *The Story of the Marist Brothers in Australia*, published in 1972 for the institute's centenary. As Brother Peter Carroll (Australian provincial) writes in the foreword to *Sub Tuum Praesidium*, 'I'm informed there was a

touch of triumphalism in the 1972 centenary celebrations ... It's become difficult to celebrate the achievements of the past, with such a tragic public record.' Nevertheless, he also observes, 'It would be unjust to write off the good and noble efforts of so many brothers who never offended.'

In telling the story of the Marist Brothers in Australia, *Sub Tuum Praesidium* is in five parts, each with several chapters. At the end is a glossary of terms, a list of sources, notes, and a detailed index.

In Part 1, Brother John Luttrell, a recognised expert in Australian Catholic history, describes the progress of the brothers in Australia from their shaky start in 1872, when four brothers landed in Sydney, through three decades of expansion when the institute grew to 175 brothers in 23 communities across three states by 1903, the year Australia became a separate province of the worldwide Marist order.

In Part 2, Brother Luttrell traces the history of the Province of Australia until 1947 when it comprised 344 brothers in 45 communities across all states except Tasmania. So large had the institute become that in 1948 the Province of Australia was split in two: the Northern administered from Sydney and the Southern administered from Melbourne.

Part 3, by Brother Neville Solomon, and Part 4, by Brother Julian Casey, cover each of the new provinces during their 64 years of separate existence. In that period, the provinces developed their own identities due largely to the

different personalities and priorities of their leaders. However, in response to the steady decline in the institute's fortunes, which had started at about the time it was celebrating its Australian centenary, they reunited in 2012, to be once more known as the Province of Australia.

With increasing secularisation and declining religious adherence, fewer young men with ambition to teach were willing to dedicate themselves to the religious life with its vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Concurrently, the reintroduction of state funding of denominational schools meant the Catholic Church was no longer dependent on the teaching orders to supply unwaged teachers to staff its schools.

Also, the Second Vatican Council led to significant changes in Catholic culture and the church's engagement with the world. Many brothers chose to leave religious life. Between 1970 and 2021 the number of professed Marist brothers in Australia declined from more than 600 to 173.

One might have thought that these factors spelt the end of history for the Marist Brothers in Australia. Yet as Brother Peter Rodney explains in Part 5, the institute adapted to the new circumstances, transforming from one exclusively comprising professed brothers teaching in schools to one with a wider focus that includes lay people, both men and women. This transformation expressed itself through the establishment of several entities:

Marist180, a welfare organisation; Marist Youth Ministry, for spiritual formation; Australian Marist Solidarity, a development agency; and Marist Schools Australia, an educational project consistent with Marist tradition and the mission of its founder, St Marcellin Champagnat. These entities operate under the council of the Marist Association of St Marcellin Champagnat, which comprises 875 members, 88 per cent lay and 57 per cent women.

Although history has not ended for the Marist Brothers in Australia, new challenges await. In December 2022 the Australian and Pacific provinces will merge to form the Star of the Sea Province. Whether this is a response to continuing decline, perhaps terminal, is yet to be seen. If not, *Sub Tuum Praesidium* may not be the last word and, like its predecessor, may be superseded by a new history celebrating the bicentenary of the Marist Brothers in Australia.

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**Jeff McGill, *Rachel: Brumby hunter, medicine woman, bushrangers' ally and troublemaker for good ... the remarkable pioneering life of Rachel Kennedy*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2022, 324 pp, ISBN 9781760879983.**

This is a thoroughly researched and readable book that provides a glimpse of life in western New South Wales during the late 19th and early 20th centuries