

Julian Tenison Woods as a Religious Founder: Some contextual considerations

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Abstract: *Julian Tenison Woods is well known as the co-founder, with St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, of the Australian Sisters of St Joseph. This paper deals with circumstances and influences in his life which have relevance for his inauguration of, and shaping, this new religious institute to meet educational needs in the earlier pioneering years in South Australia, this followed by his later foundation of a community of primarily contemplative Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Brisbane. His concern for religious education also led to his founding in Adelaide a short-lived group of teaching Brothers. A fuller treatment of his actual experiences as a religious founder is not attempted here, but is covered in a number of publications.*

Key Words: Tenison Woods, Mary MacKillop, Sisters of St Joseph, Sisters of Perpetual Adoration

Julian Tenison Woods (1832-89) was surely one of the more remarkable members of the earlier generation of those born overseas who came to Australian colonies as young adults and soon acclimatised themselves to an environment very different from their former associations. Within this foundational cohort, on the threshold of a radically new and shaping era for an ancient land, Julian Woods traversed it extensively and, unlike many others, felt practical sympathy for its indigenous peoples so rapidly dispossessed and, in so many cases, socially debilitated. From Tasmania to northern Queensland, also widely inland in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, briefly in the Northern Territory,¹ he travelled on coastal steamers, on horseback or in horse-drawn vehicles, carrying out an appreciated pastoral ministry and undertaking and recording his scientific observations.² He spent years in isolated or itinerant living conditions, associating with and forming strong friendships among other venturers in the Australian bush, such as the gifted poet, Adam Lindsay Gordon.³ It was in the ten years, 1856-66, as pastor in the small supply town of Penola with its vast parish area in South Australia's south-east that his best known achievement, the foundation in his final year

¹ Until 1911, it was officially the Northern Territory of South Australia.

² His biographer Margaret Press records 204 scientific writings of Woods, mainly articles and reports of commissioned research, but also longer works, published between 1857 and 1887. See Margaret Press, *Julian Tenison Woods: 'Father Founder'* (Sydney: St Pauls Publications, [1994] 2004) 261-74. He was a member of various scientific societies, listed in this Appendix, and served also as Vice-President of the New South Wales Linnean Society. His widespread scientific observations, in south-eastern Asia as well as Australia, have received recent renewed interest.

³ Born 1833(-'70) in the Azores into a Scottish military family and educated in England.

there of the Sisters of St Joseph in collaboration with St Mary MacKillop, took place; the immediately pressing need for some type of teaching venture and some means to achieve it had been long pondered. Like so many other innovators in Australia's pioneering years, he was aware of pressing environmental needs and drew creatively on past associations and experiences to address them. Julian Woods was also the founder of a short-lived community of teaching Brothers in Adelaide and of a small, though enduring, congregation of primarily contemplative Sisters in Brisbane.

EARLY YEARS

Born in London on 15 November 1832, Julian Edmund Tenison Woods, as he was baptized, was the child of Irish parents, James Dominic Woods from a Catholic mercantile family in Cork and Henrietta Tenison, daughter of a Church of Ireland minister in Donoughmore, who also acted as Deputy-Governor of Wicklow.⁴ While denied political voice at every level in Ireland, together with entry to the professions and commissions in the armed forces, from the mid-eighteenth century, an affluent Catholic business class often with Continental connections had been developing in the southern port cities, where the chief import and export trade, subject to little restriction at the time, was in their hands.⁵ By James' time, prior to Catholic Emancipation (1829), Catholics became eligible to take up law, where he qualified as a barrister but did not pursue this career, becoming instead a parliamentary reporter for the London *Times*; later he was a correspondent as well for the Scottish *Standard* and secretary-reporter for meetings of the East India Company.⁶ He married Henrietta Tenison in 1819 in the Catholic chapel, St-George-in-the-Fields, Southwark. They had ten sons, of whom three died in early childhood, and one daughter, meanwhile establishing a middle-class life-style, with some changes in location, in commodious, servant-employing homes. Money, however, seemed always to be tight, Julian later claiming that his father always "lived up to his means." He was hospitable, welcoming the company of interesting people, English and Irish, and taking in, for a period, his brother's five motherless children.

Julian has left a quite detailed picture of his early years as the middle surviving son in this affectionate, close-knit family. He spasmodically attended various schools, two lay-run, for Catholic children. Tutors were occasionally engaged, such as during a lengthy stay

⁴ The Irish name "Woods" has been interpreted as an anglicised form of O'Cuill; they are described as a family of some literary note. See Edward MacLysaght, *More Irish Families* (Galway: O'Gorman, 1960) 201, 282. There was an Irish Fr Woods in Tasmania when Julian Woods was in Australia. The Tenison family tree included an archbishop of Canterbury and an Anglican bishop of Ossory, also the Anglican Dr Martin Lucius O'Brien of Thomond, Henrietta's maternal grandfather. See Press, *Julian Tenison Woods* 6; George O'Neill, *Life of the Reverend Julian Edmund Tenison Woods* (Sydney: Pellegrini & Co., 1929) 2.

⁵ Irish religious founders Nano Nagle (1775), Edmund Rice (1802), Mary Aikenhead (1815), Frances Ball (introduced Mary Ward's institute to Dublin as an independent foundation, 1821) and Catherine McAuley (1831) all had relatives of social standing and financial means. Mary Aikenhead (a convert, though her mother came from a Cork Catholic merchant family) and Catherine McAuley had non-Catholic family connections.

⁶ References here are taken chiefly from Press, *Julian Tenison Woods* and Woods' *Memoirs*, recorded to dictation by Anne Bulger, member of the lay community of devoted women who cared for Julian in his final invalid years. See Margaret Press, *Sunrise to Sunrise: The History of St Margaret's Hospital Darlinghurst 1894-1994* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1994), 14. Beginning her task in 1887, she states that the dictated memoirs, with occasional fragments of conversation, were progressively checked. (Printed copy, 91 A4 pp., for which I thank Janice Tranter rsj). Also read, similar, but not identical, *Memoirs* recorded by Sr John Dowling, temporarily in this same community.

on Jersey which Mrs Woods, accompanied by her daughter and younger sons, agreed to undertake for the sake of her failing health. Julian thoroughly enjoyed this time, carrying out natural science explorations—to develop into his later distinguished scientific career – and fascinated by medieval castles and Roman ruins.⁷ He clearly indicates, however, that his chief educator was his well-read father, with his classical education and a well-stocked library. Among these various educational experiences, Julian was well tutored in literature, Latin and Greek, and had a good familiarity with French. He later attended courses in art and chemistry. Though never denying his Catholicism, James Woods, while ensuring Catholic baptism for his sons—and accepting Anglican baptism for his daughter—did not enforce a Catholic upbringing.⁸ The tone of the household was deeply Christian, with family prayer and attendance by the children at Anglican services and for Julian, at least, occasionally Catholic. What he did recollect very strongly was the near impossibility at that time for a Catholic in London to hold a respected professional position while openly observing his religion. Following his wife's death and later retirement from his employments, James Woods returned to active practice of his faith until his death in 1851.

Meanwhile Julian, from early childhood, developed a deep religious awareness and a growing attraction, from desultory encounters and occasional reading, to Catholic ritual and symbolism. As a child, he had an indelible experience of a heavenly mother whom he sensed as the Virgin Mary, extending to him care and protection.⁹ Apprenticed in his mid-teens in *The Times* office, he came to a definite conversion, as he regarded it, to the Catholic faith, joined in this by his sister, who was nursing him through an illness. They made their First Communion together, Christmas 1848. With his older brothers already embarked on their careers—mainly journalistic and literary—Julian, with his deeply religious attraction, came to reside with Canon Oakeley, a Woods marriage connection and an influential convert through the Oxford movement. Oakeley, who had become pastor at St George's,¹⁰ not only tutored Julian further in his classical studies but guided his spiritual reading and formation. Specifically, he interested Julian in a tertiary Franciscan group of young men which he was forming for their own spiritual development and who assisted him in classes for disadvantaged youth in the parish. With approval of their Franciscan community mode of life, which Julian now shared, by the Vicar Apostolic, Bishop Wiseman—to become in 1850 Cardinal Archbishop of the restored Catholic hierarchy in England—he entered fully into the religious programme and the active involvement of his fellow tertiaries.

By the early nineteenth century, a permeating revival in Franciscan spirituality was spreading in Western Europe, especially in France and now reaching England, pervading not only Catholicism but new religious currents in High Anglicanism. Canon Manning,

⁷ Mrs Woods died there, aged 46.

⁸ This arrangement was not unusual before the 1908 *Ne Temere* decree, requiring that children of inter-faith marriages be brought up Catholic. The sons were baptised at St George's, though not all are recorded.

⁹ He had a life-long deeply felt Marian devotion, evidenced in his exhortations as a missionary and spiritual director, this also revealed strongly in his letters. See *Letters from Father Founder Julian Woods to Sr. M. Joseph (Ambrose) and Sisters at Lochinvar 1883-1887*, edited and arranged by Jan Tranter rsj and Marie Hughes rsj (Lochinvar NSW: Sisters of St Joseph, 2012). Mary MacKillop had also a similar indelible experience in her girlhood in Melbourne. See Osmund Thorpe, *Mary MacKillop: The Life of Mother Mary of the Cross, Foundress of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart* (London: Burns & Oates, 1957) 9, 26. The original spelling 'MacKillop' is now used.

¹⁰ Oakeley and another notable convert, Frederick Faber, preached at the opening of the new Pugin-designed St George's.

distinguished Oxford Movement convert and later succeeding Wiseman as Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, was himself a Franciscan tertiary and influenced a community of convert Anglican Sisters towards becoming a regular Franciscan Third Order congregation.¹¹ Claude Langlois, noted sociologist and historian of religious life in 19th century France, labels this spreading influence “neo-franciscanism”, not only noting congregations officially obtaining canonical affiliation under a Franciscan title, but evident in others in the use of terms such as ‘Poor’ and ‘Little’ in congregational titles and designations adopted.¹² Surrounded thus, from early childhood, by powerful influences, social and historical as well as religious, and impelled by his own inner spiritual search, Julian now decided to join the Passionist congregation, newly arrived in England, which had already attracted not only young men from old aristocratic Catholic families but influenced prominent converts, such as John Henry Newman, received into the Church by their leader, Fr Dominic Barberi, now beatified.

RELIGIOUS LIFE EXPERIENCES

The Passionists—the Congregation of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ—were founded by Paul Danei (1694-1775), canonised as St Paul of the Cross in 1867. A native of Italy, he had a powerful spiritual experience imbuing him with the conviction that God was calling him to an evangelising mission in a radical following of the Gospel counsels. In 1720, he undertook a forty-day retreat in the church sacristy in Castellazzo and was invested by his Capuchin director in a black tunic, this symbol and year regarded as marking the foundation of the new religious institute. Writing his rule and now joined by his brother John Baptist, they were invited by the Bishop of Gaeta to assist with catechesis in his diocese. Exercising this type of ministry, Paul and his brother went to Rome where, after study with the Franciscans, the Dominican Pope Benedict XIII ordained them and gave his approbation for founding the planned congregation. It had two primary goals: basic pastoral ministry among local populations in their need for spiritual renewal and a deeply contemplative communal spirituality, with a strong ascetic emphasis—a reflection of the mission and lifestyle in a new era of the disalced medieval preaching friars.¹³ This became primarily a ministry of conducting parish missions, linked to availability for spiritual direction. Missions of this type were to become a powerful regenerating force in widespread ‘grassroots’ religious renewal in the nineteenth century and a ministry Julian Woods was to be engaged in with great effectiveness in a later stage of his career in Australia.¹⁴

A parish mission in Southwark given in 1850 by the Passionists, led by Fr Ignatius Spencer—a convert aristocrat, ordained in Rome and the first English Passionist—and followed by further contact with him, now became deciding factors for Julian. After a shortened preparation in view of his Franciscan community experience, he was admitted as a Passionist novice in February 1851. He remembered this time in novitiate training as

¹¹ See Pauline Shaw, *Elizabeth Hayes: Pioneer Franciscan Journalist* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2009) 12-13.

¹² Claude Langlois, *Le Catholicisme au Féminin: les congrégations françaises à supérieure générale au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1984) 192-5. He lists a number of such Franciscan congregations founded between 1820 and 1880.

¹³ The word “disalced”, in practice, sandal-wearing, was incorporated in their formal canonical title.

¹⁴ St Paul of the Cross hoped for the conversion of England; this influenced their English mission which was facilitated through their meeting influential English converts in Rome.

thoroughly congenial to him, despite bouts of ill health which had beset him from childhood. He also recollected that the ascetic regime of the Passionists was proving too much for him at this time, a fact noticed by his superiors. He was sent for a change of air to Ashton Hall where the superior was Ignatius Spencer and where he read extensively, particularly relishing the writings of St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross.¹⁵ His health was considered sufficiently improved for religious profession, his vows being pronounced in February 1852. This was followed by theological and scriptural studies, but persisting poor health led his superiors to advise dispensation from his vows and the recommendation to seek a less austere religious institute.

Back in London and advised by Fr Oakeley, Julian went to reside with Fr Faber's Oratorian community at Sydenham, where he was deeply impressed by Faber, who at the time was working on his popular spiritual work, *All for Jesus*, and whose personality and experience, as Julian indicates in his *Memoirs*, strongly attracted him. His health also began to improve, while medical advice urged a sojourn in southern France. Through Faber, he was introduced to the French Marists, recently arrived in London. He was permitted to join their community, his arrival as a postulant being recorded as April 1853.¹⁶ Not long after, he left for the Marist novitiate in Lyons, stopping however in Paris on the way and revelling in the historic associations and beauties of the French landscapes through which he travelled. During preparatory study, Julian was able, with interesting companionship, to take long rambles through Auvergne, noting especially its geological features and whetting his never dormant attraction to the natural sciences. In July 1853, he was admitted as a Marist novice, when his studies became more formal, embracing theology, church history and the French spiritual classics. Some months later, the novices were transferred to Montbel, near Toulon, which opened up further vistas, historic and scientific, as the students were allowed to ramble on free afternoons.¹⁷

Once again, a persisting illness led to his being advised to leave the novitiate, with a post as an English teacher being offered to him at the boarding college at La Seyne-sur-Mer, where many boys, sons of naval officers, studied science and mathematics with a view to taking the naval cadetship examinations. Julian, with light teaching obligations, now greatly improved his scientific knowledge, augmented by much practical geological and botanical observation in the surrounding area. Deep spiritual influences also continued; the college rector was Fr Peter Julian Eymard, then a Marist but soon after, in 1856, to found his primarily contemplative Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament;¹⁸ he became Julian's spiritual director, as well as showing him much personal kindness and arranging an extensive tour for him in which he met the already revered Cure of Ars. Julian was to acknowledge in his *Memoirs* the deep and shaping influence his experience in France had on his later life. His stay, however, did not last long. Returning from his tour, he found the college closed due to a virulent outbreak of cholera and his only alternative return to London.

¹⁵ Spencer's cause for canonisation has been introduced in Rome.

¹⁶ Press, *Julian Tenison Woods* 41.

¹⁷ Julian had also an acknowledged musical talent; at the dedication of this new college, named St Joseph's, he played the organ. Devotion to St Joseph, which Julian shared, was given impetus in Teresa of Avila's writings.

¹⁸ Now St Peter Julian Eymard.

One wonders if these two religious institutes—the Passionists with their ascetic regime and the Marists with their major missionary involvement in the Pacific—questioned whether this ardent and apparently fragile young man, as he then appeared, was really temperamentally suited to their ministerial demands; or was a guiding Providence leading him elsewhere?

JULIAN TENISON WOODS AND SISTERHOODS

So far we have not adverted to what were to prove his most influential observations in France. In Auvergne, while following his natural history interests, he saw something which was a revelation to him: a rural active Sisterhood. These were “daughters of farmers and humble people”, as his Memoirs record. Not highly educated, “they lived a life of great edification and supplied most of the wants a religious community could fulfil”. He noted that they lived “in great poverty and simplicity and there was no fine-ladyism about them”, going on to relate that he had thought of a nun as “one on whom a great deal of money had to be spent, and who must be raised above the labouring classes, both in means and education”; he felt “instinctively that a nun to be one with the poor, and a servant of the poor, should belong to the humbler classes.”¹⁹ Julian himself had little acquaintance with nuns, except for the Benedictine community at Hammersmith in whose chapel the boys worshipped during his incidental stay at a lay-run boarding school for Catholic boys. These nuns came from English gentry families and lived an enclosed lifestyle, while educating upper-class girls as boarders.²⁰ During 1850, he spent six weeks in Ireland, joining his father who, now a widower, had returned to visit his family in Cork, and during which time Julian records going on extensive rambles. He seems, however, not to have encountered the fairly recently founded Sisterhoods devoted to relief of poverty in its many forms, particularly in this immediate aftermath of the Great Famine, the effects of which Julian noticed and was to express his admiration, not only of their publicly professed Catholic faith, but of the cheerfulness and resilience of the people amid the evidence of so much desolation.

Julian Woods came to France at a time of significant evolution in female religious life, an evolution in which the French Revolution of sixty years before played a pivotal role. Until then, in France, as in other countries ruled by Catholic sovereigns, canon law was upheld in civil courts, in what was deemed the common law of Europe.²¹ In the general, and soon to become violent, reaction against the entrenched privilege of a centuries-old aristocratic ordering of society—in which the Church was seen as allied with the *status quo*—the legal endorsement of solemn vows in civil law was abolished.²² Soon religious

¹⁹ See M.R. MacGinley, *A Dynamic of Hope: Institutes of Women Religious in Australia* (Sydney: Crossing Press, [1996] 2002) 150. The quoted extracts are from Julian’s Memoirs, as recorded by John Dowling.

²⁰ This community, one of a number on the Continent for English women, had been given harbourage in England when forced into exile by the French Revolution. See *A History of the Benedictine Nuns of Dunkirk*, edited by the Community (London: The Catholic Book Club, 1957).

²¹ See Manlio Bellomo, *The Common Legal Past of Europe, 1000-1800. Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Canon Law 4*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane. (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995).

²² The point chiefly at issue here was the vow of poverty by which ownership of property was legally rejected, effecting “civic death” in the words of a jurist of the time. Simple, or private, vows did not prevent personal ownership, though its independent use was surrendered. This historic understanding continued under later canonical approbation.

communities themselves were ruthlessly disbanded and their property confiscated. In the slow restoration under Napoleon, the first to gain public recognition again were St Vincent de Paul's Daughters of Charity (founded 1633), this because of their visible commitment to the relief of need, whether poverty, illness or social dislocation. These Sisters, like the Sisters of St Joseph of Puy (founded ca. 1650) who caught Julian's attention, were not canonically religious;²³ their vows, if vows were pronounced, were described as simple, or private, not solemn (or public), and had no binding power in civil law.

Many such communities of women emerged in the Middle Ages, variously titled, such as Beguines, Beatas and the tertiary communities of approved religious orders; they came to be known in France by the seventeenth century, under a general descriptive name, as *filles séculières*, religiously committed, celibate women, usually living in small communities and involved in various forms of locally needed charity.²⁴ Following the Revolution, not only did these communities gain public recognition, but a tide of new ones was founded in the course of the nineteenth century. They form the subject matter of Langlois' major study, *Le Catholicisme au féminin*, where he traces their rising profile with the development of individual communities linked under one administration, that of a major superior, elected by the membership and assisted by her council of advisers.²⁵ Because these communities relied on the approbation of local bishops for their validation as corporate religious bodies, problems could arise when they were invited to cross diocesan boundaries. A usual arrangement was for the bishop where the mother house was situated to be recognised as their ecclesiastical superior, who approved new foundations and could grant dispensation from the simple vows undertaken. Because disputes arose, in 1816 Roman approbation was granted to Sisters of Charity in Ghent, this followed rapidly by others, thus effectively creating a new category of canonically defined religious, those with simple vows.²⁶ They were to constitute from this time on the most widespread and readily recognised form of religious life for women in the Church. Their centralised structure and commitment to a wide range of active works—elementary and higher education, social and health care, missionary work—insured internal strength and public visibility. Soon, the more prominent were operating transnationally. This evolution and these understandings were to influence the development of a new Sisterhood in faraway Australia, initiated by Julian Tenison Woods.

It is relevant to note here, because of their widespread presence in Australia, the different context of the Sisterhoods founded in Ireland from the evolution in France referred to above. Religious houses were prohibited in the penal legislation in place in Ireland, which saw some mitigation prior to Catholic Emancipation. While there were small communities of the monastic orders, keeping a very low profile and dressed as lay women surviving until a better day dawned, the first appearance of a simple-vow group was Nano Nagle's gathering her local helpers in 1775 to form a humble teaching body for the free schools she had established for poor children, this on a model she had seen in

²³ In a time of transition in the Middle Ages, following legislation of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), religious life, as a legally recognised category, was defined by papal approbation and the public pronouncement of the three vows of religion.

²⁴ The term "fille" (literally "daughter") here signifies a pious, unmarried woman given to good works.

²⁵ Langlois, *Le Catholicisme au Féminin*, lists some 400 such congregations founded in France between 1800 and 1880, a number of which were to spread to other countries.

²⁶ The two categories of solemn- and simple-vowed religious appear in the 1917 official Code of Canon Law.

Paris. She had already successfully “tested the waters” in 1771, through introducing a solemn-vow Ursuline community from Paris who, because of their enclosure, were restricted in their movements. They were, however, to be particularly influential. After Nano’s death, her spreading group, now titled Presentation Sisters, obtained approbation from Rome in 1805, on the Ursuline pattern, with solemn vows and a less rigid enclosure.²⁷

Both the Brigidine and Mercy Sisters followed this same pattern with autonomous houses, though able to obtain papal approbation, at a later date, with simple vows and without canonical enclosure. Like the Presentations, they came to Australia with the pattern of autonomous houses, which only in time were grouped in centralised congregations. The Charity and Loreto Sisters were centralised from the beginning; their constitutions were shaped by their two foundresses having trained in York in Mary Ward’s community there with its historic Jesuit influence.²⁸

ARRIVAL IN AUSTRALIA

By mid-1854, Julian had returned to London, to live with family members who were still together. He pursued a course of lectures in science and renewed his friendship with Canon Oakeley. Following a Mass at St George’s Church, he was introduced to a visiting bishop from Van Diemen’s Land, Bishop Robert Willson, then in England seeking resources for his diocese and also amelioration of convict treatment. Perceiving promise in Julian and having sought Oakeley’s opinion, he invited him to his diocese, with the prospect of the ordination to the priesthood he still sought. Julian’s agreement to this offer was not unconsidered. His father’s brother had been a prison superintendent in Hobart and had left family there, while Julian’s older brothers, Edward and James, had already emigrated to Australia, Edward now a journalist with the *Melbourne Argus* and James secretary of the Central Roads Board in Adelaide. Julian was to accompany the bishop’s party as a funded prison chaplain, the group leaving by mid-October on a voyage of over three months, during which, like many intending missionaries, Julian continued his studies.

Arriving as a twenty-two year old in a colony where convict transportation had finally ceased in 1853 and which was to adopt a new name, Tasmania, during 1855, Julian found his chaplaincy duties involved reading morning and evening prayers in the various prisons in Hobart and further afield, offering what spiritual help he could and attending convict burials. Bishop Willson also saw him as a promising teacher in the boys’ college he was anxious to develop and where the pupils so far were of junior age. After a brief trial, Julian decided this was not for him and accepted, before the end of 1855, Edward’s invitation to come to Melbourne. By the year’s close, he had gone on to Adelaide where his brother James and his wife were now well settled and where he soon found employment as a reporter for the *Adelaide Times*, though his aim remained a religious involvement of

²⁷ The Council of Trent reiterated strict enclosure for solemn-vowed women. The Presentation vows were declared simple in 1910, in accordance with the original founding idea.

²⁸ Simple-vow institutes adopted in their constitutions varying levels of enclosure according to traditions influencing them or they wished to adopt; some approached the canonical, or papal, enclosure required of the solemnly vowed. In a parallel movement with Roman approbation of simple-vow institutes, solemn vows were no longer accorded to those involved in active works (The Irish Presentations appear to have been the last thus approved, this approbation sought for corporate security in a troubled country and granted reluctantly.)

some kind. As an active reporter covering local happenings, he became familiar with the various aspects of colonial life in Adelaide, before reaching a definite decision to follow his desire for ordination.

South Australia was, first of all, essentially a colony of immigrants scarcely twenty years from its foundation and where the leading colonists were from dissenter and evangelical backgrounds in England, resulting in a different social and political climate from the original colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, where the dominant religious influence was Anglican. There was also a minority sector of Irish Catholics, their percentage noticeably smaller than in the eastern Australian colonies,²⁹ where Victoria had already separated from New South Wales. These came chiefly through government or publicly sponsored migration schemes and were distributed in both rural and urban areas.³⁰ Most were in poorly paid occupations, though some were already established in businesses and clerical employment, as well as on rural holdings. There were Catholics among the pocket of German settlers north of Adelaide and Catholic Scottish pastoralists from across the border in Victoria in the colony's south-east. The popular Governor, Sir Dominic Daly, was a committed Irish Catholic, as also the esteemed medical doctor, J.M. Gunson.³¹

The Catholic clergy were also an immigrant group, diversified in former experience. Initially Irish-born, they were joined in 1848 by a community of Austrian Jesuits who established a college at Sevenhill, north of Adelaide, and were to make a leading contribution to the diocese. Five of the Irishmen studied at Propaganda College in Rome;³² two had been at the Subiaco Benedictine monastery in Italy, then joined the Spanish Benedictines in Western Australia before leaving for Adelaide and being ordained there, after completing studies at Sevenhill;³³ others had attended various colleges in Ireland taking both clerical and lay students, such as those at Wexford and Waterford; one was educated at a Cistercian college (undoubtedly Mt Melleray) before completing studies at the relatively new All Hallows in Dublin (founded 1842); another had considerable Continental experience before arriving as a deacon. Two Dutchmen came, recruited for the diocese.³⁴ The first bishop (1844-58), Francis Murphy, educated at Maynooth, was an early volunteer in New South Wales before becoming pioneer pastor in Melbourne; his two

²⁹ Until Federation in 1901, Tasmania, with its also relatively small Catholic population, was seen as a different island entity from Australia.

³⁰ See Peter Moore, "Half-burnt turf: Selling emigration from Ireland to South Australia, 1836-1845", in Philip Bull, Chris McConville and Noel McLachlan (eds), *Irish-Australian Studies: Papers delivered at the Sixth Irish-Australian Conference July 1990* (Melbourne: La Trobe University, 1991) 103-119. This earlier period of Irish migration to South Australia contained a considerable non-Catholic component, as Moore notes. Legislation in the 1850s with a view to land settlement enabled Catholic clergy to promote further Irish immigration. (*The Southern Cross* and *South Australian Catholic Herald*, 20 July 1868).

³¹ Both mentioned in the above paper. Gunson had a sister in the first Presentation community in Melbourne (1873).

³² Including Julian's later supporter as Vicar-General, John Smyth, and the influential, sterner Archdeacon Russell.

³³ One, Christopher Reynolds, became fourth Bishop of Adelaide; the other, Frederick Byrne, a Vicar-General there.

³⁴ *The Southern Cross*, as it was generally known, contains numerous references to particular clergy in connection with events and also obituaries, e.g., that of the highly educated Jesuit, Fr Hinteroecker, with whom Julian Woods shared scientific interests and exploration. See also brief biographies in *From Abel to Zundolovich*, Vols. I and II, compiled by T.J. Linnane, Melbourne Catholic Historical Commission, 1979 (I), 1995(II).

successors, Patrick Geoghegan (1859-64) and Lawrence Sheil (1866-72) were Franciscans. By mid-1856, Julian Woods was accepted as a candidate for the priesthood by Bishop Murphy and undertook studies with the Jesuits at Sevenhill before his ordination on 4 January 1857.

PASTOR AND FOUNDER

Several months later, he was posted to the vast rural parish of Penola, where he carried out a constant round of visitation of its scattered settlers and their employees, followed a regular personal spiritual programme (involving one full day per week), and continued his geological and botanical observations and writing.³⁵ In particular, he noted not only the plight of the Aborigines and sought some amelioration for them but also the educational and religious deprivation of the isolated bush children. A solution to this concern continued to occupy him until his recall of the rural Sisterhood he had seen in France;³⁶ a first thought appears to have been to somehow invite these Sisters to the diocese, this idea taking some shape when he met a highly competent young governess, Mary MacKillop, employed by her uncle, Alexander Cameron, one of the Scottish settlers around Penola.³⁷ She too was seeking an avenue for a life-long apostolic religious commitment. Born in Melbourne in 1842 to recently arrived Highland Scots parents, Mary's educational formation was strongly influenced by a well-educated father, who had spent over six years at the Scots College in Rome, and a religiously devoted and informed mother.

Mary, with her knowledge of Penola and already some teaching experience, was ready to collaborate in a novel religious experiment, feeling unmistakably that this was the avenue she had long sought. Early in 1866, she and her two sisters, in a preliminary trial—expedited by the coming marriages of the two young women teaching local Catholic children—began classes, whose enrolments soon increased under Mary's able direction. On 19 March, St Joseph's feast, Mary adopted a simple black dress and was to regard this date as marking the foundation of the Australian Sisters of St Joseph. Neither sister committed to joining,³⁸ but others did, enabling a second school to be staffed in Mount Gambier, also part of the parish. A further development of plans was unexpectedly opened by the decision of the newly consecrated bishop, Lawrence Sheil, to call Julian Woods to Adelaide as his secretary and Director-General of Education, surely the first such appointment in Australia.³⁹ Early in 1867, Julian moved to Adelaide to take up his new duties, this involving a survey of the educational scene in the diocese, with its nineteen parish-supported Catholic schools, augmented by several private ones conducted for Catholic pupils. He determined to bring Mary and a companion Sister to Adelaide, where

³⁵ Earnings from these enabled him to buy and order books on visits to Melbourne. During these years, he was accepted as a Fellow of several scientific and learned societies; he began using his third name to avoid confusion with two other natural scientists surnamed Woods.

³⁶ He was, he says in his Memoirs, "continually thinking of such a foundation, yet it seemed ... so utterly impracticable that I scarcely dared to hope for it".

³⁷ Mary was to write to her mother, "I have such an earnest longing for the Order of St Joseph ... none other is so fitted for the wants of this colony ... unless Sisters come from France it will be long before there will be enough of us to do the work that is to be done." George O'Neill, *Life of Mother Mary of the Cross* (Sydney: Pellegrini & Co., 1931) 33.

³⁸ One, Lexie, later joined the Good Shepherd Sisters in Melbourne.

³⁹ This transfer necessitated the shelving of another plan of Julian: to establish, in view of their plight, a type of clinic-hospital for local Aborigines, about which he had consulted John Smyth as Vicar-General.

they arrived in June and where the teacher at a local Catholic school, Josephine McMullen, a former Mercy novice in Ireland, was willing to welcome them; she did more, joining them soon after their arrival. It is not possible in this short survey, principally of environing factors, to trace the future development of this truly pioneering Australian venture—already well known with Mary’s recent canonisation.

The Josephites were the first women religious in South Australia, though Bishop Sheil, who left for Europe soon after Julian’s coming to Adelaide, obtained a community of Dominican nuns from Dublin who arrived the following year to undertake the further education of Catholic girls. What type of rule did Julian devise for his Sisters? He does not seem to have known in detail much regarding the St Joseph of Puy Sisters whom he had seen in action, in their little companies of three, in the countryside around Lyon, where they had been re-organised by Mother St John Fontbonne following their dispersal during the French Revolution.⁴⁰ Among developments in the French Church, he observed not only the re-foundations of older institutes, but the emergence of numerous new ones. He felt an “extraordinary pleasure”, he records, “in reading the lives of all those who had been founders of religious orders, particularly the life of St Ignatius, St Philip Neri, St Teresa and others canonised by the Church,⁴¹ but probably before all others I enjoyed reading many times over the life of the founder of the Little Sisters of the Poor”, founded in 1839 in Brittany by Jeanne Jugan, daughter of a poor fishing family, for care of the aged poor. However, the founder referred to was the Abbé Le Pailleur who took virtual charge of the fledgling institute, substituting another as leader in place of Jeanne and, in every particular, directing its rapid spread.⁴² In 1851, and reprinted later, appeared an account of this new foundation and its growth, attributing this to Le Pailleur and, as later research revealed (after Julian’s death), shaped by his own interpretation. The now widespread emphasis on humility and poverty appears in its constitutions, while the Sisters were to use public begging in support of their works.⁴³ In keeping with these humbler foundations, there were no lay Sisters and dowries were not sought.⁴⁴ On 17 December 1868, Bishop Sheil gave his approbation to the rules drawn up by Julian on these precedents he had studied and incorporating a radical emphasis on poverty and “littleness”.

South Australia’s educational scene differed from the other colonies. From 1852, public funding was available only for completely secular teaching, with daily readings from the King James Bible. Elsewhere, funding was available for denominational

⁴⁰ The Australian Josephite habit, however, closely resembled that of the French Sisters. See illustration in Brad Geagley, *A Compassionate Presence: The Story of the Sisters of St Joseph of Orange* (Congregational publication, 1987) 44. No doubt Julian’s sketching skill assisted here. These Sisters spread widely in the USA in locally centralised congregations, similar to the Mercy Sisters in Australia.

⁴¹ Julian Woods’ wide reading and spiritual emphases are well revealed in the monthly diocesan paper, *The Southern Cross and South Australian Catholic Herald*, to which he was a chief contributor. It was succeeded from 1870 by *The Catholic Herald* (later *The Chaplet and Southern Cross*), for which he was solely responsible. I thank Dr Anne Player rsj for making her run of these papers available to me.

⁴² See Paul Milcent, *Jeanne Jugan: Humble, so as to love more*, transl. Alan Neame (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1980).

⁴³ Woods sent a copy of his rule to Le Pailleur for his appraisal, which was enthusiastically given. (*The Irish Harp*, 30 March 1872). James Woods was associated with this weekly paper, which strongly defended the Josephites in their later Adelaide troubles—his wife was a niece of the Irish writer Gerald Griffin, a visitor to the Woods household. Julian was to give the occasional oration at the 1875 Daniel O’Connell commemoration in Hobart, a colleague of O’Connell also a visitor.

⁴⁴ Nano Nagle’s original Sisterhood had no lay Sisters, though they were introduced by the mid-19th century.

education, where the great majority of Catholic parish schools were lay-staffed until the subsidies were withdrawn, following which teaching religious were sought.⁴⁵ Julian Woods was a capable and innovative Director of Education. As Josephite numbers increased, he began, with their availability, replacing lay teachers he considered, upon examination, to be inefficient, and at the same time founding new schools—his swift actions seen by some as high-handed, especially as a serious level of diocesan debt began to be incurred. There was also questioning about the Sisterhood, seen as decidedly novel and seeming to have sprung up without antecedents. The training, both educational and religious, of the mainly immigrant membership was queried, though many, in fact, had been teachers and governesses.⁴⁶ Begging in the parishes was resented by parish priests with few moneyed parishioners, as were rapid transfers among the Sisters. As Margaret Press comments, Julian, instead of learning from criticism, dismissed it as part of the trials besetting all spiritual undertakings.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, Julian collaborated with a former teacher from the Jesuit Sevenhill College in establishing a day school for further education for boys in Adelaide,⁴⁸ and moved to the foundation of a community of Brothers of the Sacred Heart, attracting some ten members who, before long, were staffing four schools. We have little documentation regarding them, though they seem to have had a rule similar to the Josephites.⁴⁹ They did not survive Julian's own departure from Adelaide.

Meanwhile, matters were moving to a climax, with another absence of the bishop who had left to attend the First Vatican Council and returning over a year later, during which time Mary was absent establishing her first community in Brisbane, the first also outside the diocese. This was to lead to later difficulties with ambiguities in the Josephites' diocesan rule, stating that "The Bishop shall be in every case the Superior" and later speaking of the institute as present in a number of dioceses and of a General Chapter "held under the sanction of the Bishop where the Sister-Guardian resides,"⁵⁰ a *de facto* understanding in the earlier phase of the new simple-vow institutes in France. Another close desire of Julian, to foster a contemplative group within the Josephites, led to several would-be visionaries among the Sisters reporting supernatural experiences and phenomena, these culminating in the disappearance of the Blessed Sacrament from the tabernacle, with one of these Sisters the actual culprit. There resulted a strong demand that the bishop completely alter the structure of the Josephite institute, which Mary, clear in her canonical right, said she would then need to leave, as this was contrary to the commitment she had vowed. There followed her months-long excommunication, the Roman ordering of an episcopal inquiry, Mary's complete exoneration and Julian Woods'

⁴⁵ Legislation for solely funding secular education was passed in Victoria (1872), Queensland (1875), New South Wales (1880) and Tasmania (1885). Female teaching communities, prior to these dates, were sought mainly for higher education of girls, while they usually taught also in adjacent parish schools.

⁴⁶ Of the 127 names on the register by 1871, 81 were Irish-born, 5 English, 2 Scottish and 1 German. See Marie Therese Foale, *The Josephite Story: The Sisters of St Joseph, their foundation and early history 1866-1893* (Sydney: St Joseph's Generalate, 1989) 202-6. Critics reckoned without Mary's leadership, her training capabilities and her spirituality.

⁴⁷ Press, *Julian Tenison Woods* 107.

⁴⁸ *The Southern Cross* 20 February 1868; this school, with his association, continued to be advertised.

⁴⁹ Press, *Julian Tenison Woods* 101. Julian's widowed younger brother Terence joined them, later re-marrying.

⁵⁰ "Rules for the Institute of St Joseph", in *Resource Material from the Archives of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart* 3, 1980, 1-25.

departure from the diocese,⁵¹ to be employed, first of all, by Archbishop Polding in giving parish missions and a ten-year involvement in this ministry, engaged by various other bishops. During this time, he was able to establish in Brisbane in 1874 the contemplative community he desired, the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, who were to become a recognised presence in the heart of the city.⁵²

Meanwhile, the wider contextual issue of most significance for the Josephite Sisters in Australia and for many others, was evolving in Rome, the development of guidelines for the canonical approbation of the numerous new simple-vow institutes emerging during the 19th century. These were initially treated individually, but by the 1850s, Bizzarri, secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, which dealt with Roman approbation, had developed his *Methodus*, a consistent set of guidelines for basic requirements.⁵³ Three of these were to affect the Josephites in their obtaining approbation:

- (1) complete centralisation;
- (2) removal of the time-honoured roles of ecclesiastical superiors and clerical directors;⁵⁴
- (3) elimination of what were seen as pietistic exaggerations.⁵⁵

The first of these was opposed by the French and Belgian bishops at the Vatican Council as an encroachment on their episcopal role in a growing Roman centralisation,⁵⁶ a view voiced by French writers in the field today. It seems more a recognition of new social and political realities.

In mid-1883, Julian Woods was able to respond to an invitation from Sir Frederick Weld, Governor of the Malay Straits Settlements, whom he had come to know well during his previous governorship in Tasmania, to undertake scientific exploration in this new posting.⁵⁷ Accompanied by others interested in exploration, he was to travel quite widely in south-east Asia before arriving in Darwin in mid-1886. After several months of requested scientific exploration in the Northern Territory, he returned to Brisbane and, at the end of the year, left for Sydney. By now, his health was deteriorating, with growing loss of general mobility and his physical writing ability. He died in Sydney, 7 October 1889, in the care of the devoted women,⁵⁸ some former Josephites, who saw that his Memoirs were recorded. The Passionists, who had recently made their foundation in Sydney, came to know and visit him, clothing him again in the Passionist habit, in which he was buried from St Mary's Cathedral.

⁵¹ An evil genius behind these events was Irish Franciscan, Charles Horan, who had conceived a deep resentment of Woods' influence with the bishop, this leading him to attack the Sisters.

⁵² See Thomas P. Boland, *Quiet Women* (Deception Bay, Qld: Refulgence Publishers, 1974).

⁵³ Francis J. Callahan, *The Centralization of Government in Pontifical Institutes of Women with Simple Vows* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1948).

⁵⁴ Both Le Pailleur and Woods were to find their roles eliminated, though Langlois, *Le Catholicisme au Féminin* 170-1, felt that the former's directive control was needed early in the congregation's growth.

⁵⁵ Woods' insistence in his rule on total non-ownership of property was seen as impracticable.

⁵⁶ Callahan, *The Centralization of Government* 65-6. This view was also held by many Irish bishops, e.g., the Quinns in Australia.

⁵⁷ Of relevance here was the 1882 arrival in Australia of the Redemptorists with their ministry of parish missions; also the death in 1881 of James Quinn, an episcopal supporter.

⁵⁸ Not unlike a group of *filles séculières* in pre-Revolutionary France

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