

**'another outpost in God's  
kingdom'**

**The Parish of the Holy Innocents,  
Croydon, 1924 - 1974**

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PRINTED BY WESTMEAD PRINTING  
FOR HOLY INNOCENTS CATHOLIC CHURCH  
CROYDON  
1974

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## Foreword

Speaking of the local Church, the Pope and the Bishops at the Second Vatican Council declare in the third Chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: "This Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called churches in the New Testament. For in their locality these are the new People called by God, in the Holy Spirit and in much fullness (cf. 1 Thess. 1:5). In them the faithful are gathered together by the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, and the mystery of the Lord's Supper is celebrated, that by the flesh and blood of the Lord's body the whole brotherhood may be joined together."

These words are applicable to the Parish of Croydon. It has been a concrete community for fifty years now, where the word of Christ has been preached and His saving death proclaimed in the Mass; where, therefore, Christ Himself has been present in His words, in His sacrifice and sacraments, in the Community of the Parish gathered together in His name.

Gregory Haines has carefully written the story of these fifty years. As in all history of a people of God, the divine and the human intermingle. At times the divine element seems diminished by the human; at times the human element seems exalted by the divine. Is not that fact the basic message of the First Letter from Croydon's first Pastor, Father Michael Tansey?

This booklet, by the grace of God, could be a call to renewal for every parishioner and for the Croydon Parish community, under the guidance and leadership of Father Peter Farrelly. No doubt its author hopes it will fulfil that role.

† EDWARD KELLY, M.S.C.,  
Auxiliary Bishop,  
Parish Priest of Concord.

## The first letter from Croydon's first priest

My Dear People,

In these lasting lines I hasten first to thank God for all He has given me—a loving people, wise counsellors and a host of loyal helpers. I came among you a stranger, with not so much as whereon to lay my head; but in the instant of my coming I found warm hearts and outflung hands of welcome; it was as though I had come out of the night to the lights and the warmth and the greetings of home. For this alone I shall lie in your debt forever.

Our task is to lay broad and deep the foundations of another outpost in God's kingdom. Our first efforts shall be humble, but many of you will live to tell your children's children of our lowly beginnings, and they, viewing the splendour of their day, shall stand amazed at your stories. In achieving this I will not ask you to follow where I am not prepared to lead. Charity and Justice shall be our guiding stars; to spend ourselves and to be spent, our ideal. We have found in you already a staunch fidelity to our infant parish; we know your generosity and your self-sacrifice; and we thank God in our hearts for it.

It is proper for me to warn you in time that human frailty will bring clouds across our path; envy, jealousy, misunderstandings, apparent slights, mistaken motives, will raise their ugly heads as the years go on. I warn you of these things that you may know them when they come. For my part your sorrows shall be my sorrows and your joys my joys. And so in patience and in confidence and in a great thankfulness of heart I lay the welfare of our parish in the hands of the Holy Innocents, that they may beseech the Christ for whom they died, to bear with us in our weakness, and lead us according to His Divine will towards the way of triumphant success.

Affectionately your servant,

MICHAEL P. TANSEY,  
Parish Priest, Croydon.

April, 1924.

## A note on the Holy Innocents, patrons of the parish.

The story of the massacre of the innocents is to be found in the second chapter of Matthew's gospel. According to St. Matthew, three wise men came from the east shortly after Jesus was born to do him homage. They had divined that he was to be the king of the Jews. They came to Herod in Jerusalem to ask where they might find this new-born king. This perturbed Herod. He discovered it had been foretold a leader who would shepherd Israel would come out of Bethlehem and he sent the Magi thither, bidding them, when they had found the new-born king, to return and tell him that he too might go and pay homage.

After the Magi had found and worshipped the Christ-child they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod and they returned to their own country without seeing him. At about the same time, Joseph was told by an angel to take the child and his mother to Egypt so as to escape the wrath of Herod.

When Herod, who feared this new king might threaten his own power, learned he had been tricked, he ordered that all male children of two years old or younger in Bethlehem and its surrounds be put to death. Probably twenty-five children were slaughtered as a result. Matthew saw in this the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy concerning Rachel weeping for her children. (See Jeremiah, 31:15.)

It seems as if the Church recognised the sanctity of these little children before the fifth century. The first pope to bear their name, Pope St. Innocent I, was elected in 401. St. Augustine (354-430), one of the greatest of the Church's doctors, wrote thus of them:

It cannot be questioned that Christ, who came to set men free, rewarded those who were slain for Him; since, while hanging on the cross, He prayed for those who were putting Him to death.

In this century, the French historian, H. Daniel-Rops, has written of the "little victims who purchased the safety of the Messiah with their lives". In a sense these little victims can be regarded as having a prior claim to that of St. Stephen as being the first martyrs of the Christian era. Their feast is celebrated on December 28.

Before the renovations ordered by the late Father Deely, there was a portrait of the massacre on the back wall of the church. It was a 14 ft. by 9 ft. copy of Rubens' "The Massacre of the Innocents", which had been painted by a young artist, Mary Troy, and hung in 1927. After the renovations, this painting of the parish's patrons found its way, in a dilapidated condition, to St. Patrick's Seminary, Manly. It has been restored, apparently by the original artist, and now hangs opposite the entrance to the college library.

# Introduction and Acknowledgements

'Another outpost in God's kingdom' was the description its first pastor applied to the parish of the Holy Innocents, Croydon, in 1924. The use of the word 'outpost' is interesting. Was the new position to be one of offence or defence; were those who manned it to go out and subdue a surrounding world which was religiously, socially and culturally antagonistic, or were they to withdraw to this new position when the buffeting from without became too severe? This will be one of the questions raised in this work. It is a small story, as the parish itself is small. Yet it is also an important story, the story of the working of a Catholic parish in suburban Sydney.

As far as possible an attempt will be made to come to grips with the Christian life of the parish, its nature and the factors which have hindered as well as those which have aided. The splendour of achievement and the clouds of dissent. It will ask what have been the over-riding considerations in the parish and will argue that its life has come about as a result of the interplay between a series of forces: the ideal of the Christian way of life, various conceptions of how to achieve that ideal and the external factors of money, and social and technological change.

This work would have been impossible to contemplate had it not been for the ready and generous help of many people. John Heath and Mary and Imelda Brewster helped in the gathering of the material. Father Peter Farrelly made the parish records available and Sister Joan supplied the records of the parish school. Sister Joan also provided Kevin Scott's figures on the social structure of the parish in 1973-4. Sister Michael and the Sisters of the Presentation Congregation have preserved the writer from error and Lenore Dunn has patiently typed a much corrected script. Sister Bernardine of the Good Samaritans provided information relating to Rosebank. Monsignor C. J. Duffy and Father John Thornhill, S.M., were kind enough to offer valuable criticisms on the original draft. The Golden Jubilee committee of the parish are to be thanked for their support and co-operation. The Bishop of Maitland, Dr. John Toohey, once Croydon's first curate, set down his recollections of the early parish and its first pastor. Special acknowledgement is due to those parishioners who kept and made available records which otherwise may have perished—Gert. Farrington, Marie Myers, Mrs. Murphy and Miss K. Connellan. To all these people special thanks are due.

To any who helped but have been overlooked, apologies as well as thanks. The only plea to be made for any unpardonable omission is that the work has been carried out at much speed and with too little time. Needless to say, the responsibility for any faults or omissions which may occur rests with the writer, not those who have helped him.

The development of the parish of Croydon forms part of two general histories, that of the Catholic Church in Australia and that of Australia itself. It is therefore necessary to give a brief account of both these histories as they are relevant. This first part will deal with the history of the Church in Australia, the second with Croydon and Australia.

The first Europeans to come permanently to the continent which Quiros, the explorer from Spain, named *Austrialia del Espiritu Santo*, the south land of the Holy Spirit, were all from the British Isles. The seven hundred criminals and their two hundred gaolers who arrived in January, 1788, in eleven ships were predominantly male, young and healthy. Most of them were Protestants. The Catholics came mainly from Ireland and were nearly all convicts.

The majority of the convicts who came to Australia were habitual criminals, not the unfortunate victims of draconian laws. This applied to the women as much as the men, though the Irish women convicts, the future mothers of many of Australia's Catholic sons and daughters, were probably less hardened than were their counterparts from England and Scotland. Even so, given the way so many young women, bond or free, were pressed into a life of vice on arrival, as Caroline Chisholm discovered in the 1840s, this difference probably mattered little.

Those Catholics who came as free settlers were more interested in acquiring the security and comforts which Ireland had been unable to provide than they were in the establishment of Christ's kingdom. Only a handful were instructed enough to actively support the Church's mission. The majority, if their pastors are to be believed, fitted in too easily with the greed, the drunkenness and the debauchery which surrounded them. There was little in his attitudes, his conduct or his charity to distinguish the average Catholic. Australia's first lay Catholics, whatever their origins, were hardly prepared for the founding of the Church in the land of the Holy Spirit.

The clergy the Spirit sent to work in His southern land were of three main types: the zealous missionary who worried first about the preaching of the Gospel and last about correspondence with the government, the irresponsible who were escaping to Australia, and the administrator. Men from this last group began to predominate in positions of power after 1860. Their response to the massive work facing them—a semi-pagan laity and the building of churches and schools, presbyteries and convents—was the one used in Ireland. They firmly took command and attempted to bring about order and the practice of religion through the rigid application of disciplinary measures. As a result, the laity were to become conformist in their religion—paying the Church's bills and doing as they were told—while in their secular lives they continued as the rest of men. The laity had no access to the intellectual traditions of their religion and all they had to link the

teachings of Christ with their day to day decisions and activities were devotions, Sunday instructions, and memories of a bitter Irish history. Catholicism did not take root in Australia. It remained artificially Irish until at least the 1920s.

All of this was reflected in the impoverished religious life of the average Catholic family. Even after the establishment of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in the 1880s there was little lay apostolate, or understanding of what it should be. There were few vocations—those that were there were not encouraged—and few conversions to Catholicism. In many ways the curriculum of the Catholic school represented an attempt to provide artificially what should have been provided naturally in the family. Looking at the same situation from another point of view, it would be fair to say the A.L.P. has had more influence on the attitudes of Catholics towards social questions than have the great social encyclicals which almost every pope since Leo XIII has written. In so many ways, the laity were left uninformed, nor were they interested to study their religion in any deep way. In each successive decade after 1870, Catholics have become more certain as to what the clergy demanded of them but less certain as to why they should respond to those demands.

Since its establishment, the Church in Australia has been tempted by a demon which has tended to distract it from its mission. This devil tempted men to look exclusively to temporal means for the achievement of spiritual ends. In the clergy the effects of this can be seen in the way the pursuit of money for necessary purposes has so often exhausted those involved. The priest was put in the position of being tempted simply to be a fund-raiser for noble causes. The laity were influenced by this same demon to see the giving of money as absolving them from any further responsibility, a temptation which coincided with their mediocrity. The effects of this demon became most noticeable after the education struggle of the 1880s and since then has been closely connected with the continuing education struggle. Catholics as a group were, and have tended to remain, more interested in obtaining financial justice for their schools than in understanding the nature and developing the practice of Catholic education.

In a variety of ways, Catholicism has been seen, and been made to seem, antagonistic to life in Australia. In part this was because it rightly refused to accept the notion that all religions are essentially the same. In part it was because successive governments—despite some crude attempts to the contrary in the 1830s—have adopted the view that Australian society should be a uniform one, differences being at best tolerated, never respected. Catholics have undoubtedly suffered materially from the resulting injustices. They have suffered more, though, from the effects this lack of respect has had on their religious life. Instead of being eager to win Australia for Christ, they have remained within a walled citadel where their own beliefs and attitudes

were unchallenged. The fate awaiting those who ventured beyond the gates has been the risk of ostracism and a tremendous loneliness—or else a ready adoption of the fashionable but facile ideas of the encircling world. But this applies to the few. In the main, Australia's Catholics have been stoic but inarticulate witnesses to moral truths—for example that contraception, abortion, divorce, fornication and homosexuality are intrinsically evil. The same with the sacraments, the eucharist and so forth. Catholics have tended to regard the great truths of their religion as matters of private attitude rather than as of universal application, as binding on all men and for their good. Not only have they tended not to attempt to present these truths to their fellow citizens, they have failed to defend them, even while they have tried to live them.

Originally Australia was as one vast parish. Later, in 1835, when John Bede Polding was appointed as Australia's first bishop, it became a large diocese. Until the 1860s, the whole of New South Wales remained Polding's diocese. Priests were few and had to travel immense distances to minister to their scattered flocks. The first parishes were established in the settled regions as the cathedral parish of St. Mary's, St. Patrick's on Church Hill, St. Benedict's at Broadway, St. Francis' in the Haymarket and the Sacred Heart at Darlinghurst. In the suburbs, among other places, parishes were established in Balmain, Waterloo, Botany and Petersham before 1860. The parishes which surround Croydon—Concord, Ashfield, Enfield and Five Dock were established between 1870 and 1919. In 1924 the parish of the Holy Innocents was created out of these surrounding parishes, but it inherited no buildings or equipment of its own.

## II

Croydon occupies the ridge and the flats on the western side of Iron Cove Creek, at the eastern edge of what was once called Liberty Plains. By 1876 when the railway station, opened the previous year, changed its name from Five Dock to Croydon, the boundaries of what had become a suburb of Sydney were no longer natural geographical features. To the east was Ashfield, to the west, Burwood. The northern and southern boundaries were approximated by Parramatta and Liverpool roads.

The land is well-watered and was timbered; the soil varies from good loam to sandy loam to clay; the district lies along the original land route connecting Sydney-town with Parramatta: one or all of these factors was to influence land use in Croydon for more than a century after 1790. By the early nineteenth century a series of inns, blacksmiths' forges and resting paddocks served the men and the beasts in their journeys to or from Sydney. Timber was sought for building and charcoal. At the same time, three large farms had been established on the land granted to Messrs. Alt, Faithful and Rowley, and parts of these farms covered most of the present suburb. From about the 1830s, the three large holdings were sold up and divided into smaller blocks which became orchards, dairy farms and market gardens. After 1860 the clay basins were used for the manufacture of bricks.

The Sydney to Parramatta railway line, opened in 1855, marked the beginnings of an era in which technical developments, rather than the natural features of the district, began to have an influence on the way the land was used. Until 1875 the nearest stations were at Ashfield or Burwood. This gave the district the convenience of easy transport to the city and the delight of a rural setting, features which enticed wealthy merchants and professional men to move in. They came and built mansions only a short coach drive from the railway which delivered them to and from the city. These men were a new type of settler in the district. They were residents who did not attempt to derive a living from the land. And in the wake of the Anthony Horderns, the Lloyd Joneses and the Webbs came a variety of tradespeople to supply their wants. The mansions called a village into being.

The brickworks brought further changes. They were financed by men such as Anthony Hordern III of Shrubra Hall, now part of the Presbyterian Ladies' College. By the time of World War I there were three pits in operation. Each employed from thirty to fifty men and homes had to be built for them and their families. Thus were born the tenements, still to be found in Wellington Street and Croydon Road. The village was changing into a dormitory suburb. Between 1874 and 1900 the population of the Municipality of Burwood increased six-fold. A water supply was connected in 1886-87, the Western Suburbs' Cottage Hospital opened in 1893, and in Edwin

Street a shopping centre developed to cater for the increasing population. The incorporation of the municipalities of Ashfield (1871) and Burwood (1874) meant the beginnings of such services as kerbing, guttering, street lighting, garbage collection and parks. Even so, the northern part of Webb Street was an unsealed, un-guttered lane when the parish church was founded. Blair Park was not created until late in the 1920s.

The brickworks with their smoke, dust and explosions, closer settlement and the associated loss of its rural character and charm made Croydon increasingly less attractive to the very wealthy. In the period before and immediately after World War I it still managed to attract upper middle class people, usually to Malvern Hill—the area furthest away from the brickworks. And they still built fine homes, but on a smaller scale than the first mansions. The tenements have proved more durable than the original mansions, most of which have become flats or now house institutions or have been pulled down to make way for home units. The outstanding development of this period, a trend which was to continue until after World War II, was the detached brick cottage for members of the lower middle class.

In the twenty odd years before the parish was founded, many economic changes took place in Australian life. Between 1901 and 1924, real wages rose by about 17%. In Ashfield between 1914 and 1921, land prices rose by about 50% and between 1914 and 1923, prices rose by 55% and wages by 75%. The wage-earner temporarily lost ground in his battle with rising prices in the years when the economy felt the effects of the Great War, between 1915 and 1920, but in overall terms he was in a better position in 1924 than he had been in any previous year. In 1912 a labourer employed by the Burwood Council received seven shillings a day and a senior clerk three pounds a week. In 1922 the basic wage in New South Wales was three pounds and eighteen shillings per week. The happier position which the average worker found himself in in 1924 was largely due to the automatic quarterly adjustments to the basic wage, in line with increases in the cost of living, introduced in 1921. The cost of living figures were based upon the needs of a man, his wife and three children under fourteen years of age.

Growing affluence portended changes. The average wage-earner was becoming able to buy a whole range of items, from motor cars to electric kettles, items which hitherto had been considered luxuries. At the end of 1924 Hecla was manufacturing a range of eighteen electrical appliances and had sold over 100,000 electric radiators in Australia. The wage-earner was becoming a consumer, not simply a fabricator, of goods. This affected his wife in particular. She was able to buy supposedly labour-saving appliances and ready-made foods, especially baby foods and milk-substitutes, goods and services which were unavailable to, or too expensive for, her mother. By the 1920s, many suburban homes had electric power, gas, sewerage and some

radio and the telephone. Between 1923-24 and 1927-28, the number of registered motor vehicles for each 1000 people in Australia rose from 41.7 to 89.9. Silent movies and later talkies were becoming the opium of the people. Croydon's first moving picture theatre opened in 1916 in Edwin Street, next to the German-speaking Catholic Church, the former Congregational Church. In 1921 the cinema moved to larger premises, now demolished, in Meta Street, opposite Hennessy Street.

The First World War marked and caused many social changes. It marked the decline of the more ordered, stuffy and predictable Victorian and Edwardian styles of life. The Communist revolution in Russia took place during the war. Thereafter economic grievances which gave rise to strikes were reinforced by the thought of Marx, Lenin and their successors. This did not thereby signify the adhesion of the strikers to, or even their understanding of, what was a very useful ideology—a fact and a distinction which later was to confuse many Catholics. The War also marked the beginnings of and gave impetus to a technological revolution which was to have a profound impact upon the life of the average man. It was somehow appropriate that the age of the masses should begin with a massive war. Indirectly or directly the war marked the beginnings of mass production, mass communication and mass social services, and the enhancement of mass amusements and mass education. During or after the war came the assembly line; the cinema, gramophone, radio and later, television; the motor car and the aeroplane; social services for invalided soldiers, and a growing interest in looking at sport, whether horse-racing or cricket or football.

The general economic changes implied in the growing affluence and the ever-growing range of consumer goods stimulated a restructuring of the economic life of Australia to finance these activities. Credit became a normal way of life, whether in the form of overdrafts or hire-purchase. The fundamental change was the transition for the average family, from a debit to a credit economy, from saving for it to paying it off. As a result, young couples were able to marry at an earlier age and did not have to live with their parents until they could afford their own homes. The links which bound the larger family were effectively threatened, if not broken.

Without denying the benefits which have resulted from these developments, it is necessary, in the present context, to dwell for a moment upon the real and potential threats they posed for the life of the family and the local community and thus to parish life. In general, they encouraged passive rather than creative use of the increased leisure time they provided. Spectating began to replace sport. The radio and the gramophone replaced the piano and the living room as the centres of family activity; conversation tended to be replaced altogether. Although young people were spending more time at school, they tended to read less, and to read less of quality, than had their forebears. The newspaper editorial of the 1870s was

more sophisticated and demanding and longer than was its counterpart in the 1920s and 1930s and even today. The mass market meant flimsy novels and even more flimsy magazines. Dickens and Thackeray, who wrote for the masses of the nineteenth century, were superseded by Carter Browns and Larry Kents. The works of Shakespeare and Macaulay, family favourites in the 1870s, were consigned to a dusty oblivion and replaced by *Smith's Weekly* and Norton's *Truth* as the intellectual manna of the masses.

As these changes eroded family life, so the motor car and the telephone eroded community life. People became less socially dependent upon their neighbours. Instead of having to come to grips with the people next-door whose views, interests and activities might have provided a challenge, the motor car and the telephone meant that one was able to ignore or just be polite to them while keeping in constant touch with people who were several miles away but who had similar ideas, similar minds and similar outlooks.

It is important to dwell upon the consequences these changes implied for parish life. Just as a suburb is not a self-subsistent or fundamental unit of a city—it relies upon the city itself for sewerage, gas, electricity, transport and so on, so the parish is not a fundamental unit of the Church. Indeed, as a unit, it is very much based upon the rural village rather than on the suburb of the modern city. Even so, the parish is an important unit, despite the fact that it may, in suburban areas, be in need of a re-evaluation. To develop into a community of worship and prayer which sustains and expresses the Christian life, the parish requires both appropriate institutional structures and some form of natural community on which to build.

Croydon, with its three distinct social layers by 1924—the wealthy in their mansions and splendid houses, the middle classes in their cottages or above their shops, and the working men in their tenements—was probably never a community. With such a disparate social structure it must be doubted that truly communal organisations ever developed. The pub and the picture house were probably the best substitutes, and poor ones at that. And whatever there was of communal association was being eroded by the technical developments which have already been discussed. As well, Croydon, like all other places in Australia, was peopled by various religious denominations. It thus offered few natural, communal associations from which a Catholic parish could be forged. In such a situation, the only way in which a parish can be developed is for it to begin, rather than culminate, at the centre, the parish priest. And in this situation, the weight of responsibility for maintaining a parish rests with its institutional, rather than its communal forms. The common celebration of the liturgy, the common discipline and so on ought on the one hand be the peak of parish achievement, on the other the servant of the vital communal life of the parish. It is to be doubted if, that communal life being absent,

its institutional counterpart will fully suffice for the development of a vital parish.

Alongside the foregoing considerations, it has also to be realised that the nature of the Church's development in Australia, its concentration on institutional or disciplinary forms of control, also hindered the formation of true communities of Catholics. These trends operated from the 1860s at least until the Second Vatican Council. They may have seemed necessary and expedient when first introduced but the longer they continued the more anachronistic they became. They stifled the communal life of the Church and the longer they depended upon exclusively institutional forms, the more they became a source of disillusionment with or disinterest in the Church itself, not simply its rules. As the Fathers of the Vatican Council pointed out, the local parish ought to be a discernible sign of man's union with God and of the unity of mankind—that is, the parish ought to provide tangible evidence of the supernatural bonds implied in the communal parish association, not just of institutional or disciplinary organisation. Yet, as the preceding review of the history of the Church in Australia has indicated, and as the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council implied in their pronouncements, before the Council, the life of the Church had been stifled because attention had centred too exclusively on the essential but secondary aspects which related to its institutional life. The Church seemed almost to have forgotten its teaching role, which applied to and was for the benefit of the whole of mankind, and to have been absorbed with itself as an institution, albeit for the sake of the gospel. The result was that the freedom and uninhibited initiative of those who were God's sons was retarded, especially as this applied to the laity. This factor, and the one previously discussed, meant, for Croydon as for other parishes, that the weight of forging a parish would rest too precisely upon the priest and his human attributes—his charm and affability—rather than on all the people involved and on the natural, pre-existing community.

The Church's emphasis on its institutional forms—obedience which became conformity, the service of the slave rather than that of the free-born Son of God—meant that it was intensely difficult to found a true parish in the 1920s. Father Tansey's faults have to be judged in the light of this obstacle which he almost surmounted. The technical changes, the absence of a community in Croydon and the institutional approach of the Church—all of these have to be kept in mind when considering the parish named after the Holy Innocents.

In 1925, Father Tansey noted that although the people of the parish met at Mass they seldom formed friendships. He regretted this and put it down to "a trait of our national rather than of our religious character". In his view it was up to the priest to overcome the shyness which he saw as being responsible. But he noted that it was difficult for the priest to do anything positive about it, given the duties which

befell him before and after Mass. The "true faith", he said, "should fill us with a spiritual kindness towards our fellows, for they are kith of our kith and kin of our kin". Hospitality and friendship were, in his view, essential consequences of the Catholic religion. With remarkable insight he said that these elevated human virtues should overcome any residual natural shyness. Father Tansey was probably wrong when he ascribed the blame for the absence of friendship and hospitality in his people to their Irish ancestry. But he was outstandingly right when he described what ought to have been.

### III

The earliest Catholic establishment in the vicinity of Croydon appears to have been at Concord. There, in 1845, a church accommodating two hundred people was built and opened. Prior to this, Mass had been celebrated in homes in the district. This church was replaced in 1875 by a larger one and in 1928 an even larger church was built—signs of closer settlement and increasing population density. Other churches and parishes followed Concord: St. Thomas', Lewisham, in 1851; St. Vincent's, Ashfield, in 1894; St. Joseph's, Enfield—including the old church of St. Anne's, South Strathfield—in 1916; St. Martha's, Strathfield, in the same year; All Hallows', Five Dock, in 1919.

The first Catholic institution in what is now the parish of Croydon was the Good Samaritan Convent at Rosebank, St. Mary of the Angels. The Institute of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St. Benedict, the first Australian religious order, was founded by Archbishop Polding in 1857. In 1867 when the community stood at forty, Rosebank was chosen as the site for a novitiate. Later this incorporated a boarding college for girls and later still became a day school.

The land on which the Croydon church stands was originally part of Thomas Rowley's farm. On Rowley's death his son-in-law, John Lucas, inherited one-third of the original grant, including the present church land. Later, the block at the corner of Queen and Webb Streets was bought by J. H. Palmer and there in 1893 Palmer built a family home which he named "Esperanza", the Spanish word for hope. In 1923 the Church acquired "Esperanza" and its grounds, then consisting of the eastern section of the land presently held. The blocks in Queen Street and Cheltenham Road were bought later.

The Croydon parish comprises sections taken from the surrounding parishes of Ashfield, Five Dock, Concord and Enfield. From February, 1924, until the following November when the church was opened, Sunday Mass was said in the Palais Hall, Edwin Street, the old picture theatre. It cost three pounds to hire the hall during all this time. Before the opening of the church, marriages and baptisms were performed in the chapel of the original presbytery, the former "Esperanza" and the present convent.

Croydon's first priest was Michael Tansey. He was born in Sydney on March 4, 1889, and went to school at St. Benedict's, Broadway, and the cathedral high school. After studying at St. Patrick's College, Manly, he was ordained by Archbishop Kelly in St. Mary's Cathedral on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1913. Before coming to Croydon he was stationed at Katoomba, Newtown, Concord and the cathedral. He died at the age of 50 in Lewisham Hospital after a brief illness on April 14, 1939. In his fifteen years at Croydon he had spent over twenty thousand pounds and the debt he left his successor, Father Vaughan, amounted to some four thousand pounds—a remarkable testimony to his efficiency and perhaps an explanation

of the short life of a man who was never very healthy but always energetic.

Father Tansey was a warm, persuasive and kind man, a man who readily served his people. During the 1919 influenza epidemic, when he was stationed at St. Mary's Cathedral, he visited the homes of the afflicted parishioners and helped with the housework and so on. Father Tansey had a gift for writing short stories and he contributed articles to the Victorian Catholic magazine, *Austral Light*, the *Freeman's Journal*, a Catholic newspaper in Sydney, and *Manly*, a magazine of the Manly union of priests. He had a special warmth to which the children in the parish school invariably responded. Perhaps his greatest love was music. An organ was included amongst the first items of furniture purchased for the new Church and later, under Sister Cecilia, the Presentation Sisters and Father Tansey, the school choir was to receive many accolades.

Father Tansey worried too much. Financial problems cost him much anxiety and caused loss of sleep. Despite his adroitness in these matters—he seems to have been a gifted organiser and his parish was never seriously in debt—they caused him constant and, it would seem, unnecessary worry.

The parish rose on Tansey's energy and ability. He visited all the people of the parish in the early months, on foot it would seem. Later he acquired a Douglas motor bike. He began a parish news-sheet, the *Record*, which gave the parishioners a sense of belonging to and pride in the new parish. "The Benjamin of the flock", he called the parish in June, 1924, "pulsing with energy"—with Tansey's energy. He established the St. Vincent de Paul Society, an altar society, the Children of Mary and the Sacred Heart Sodality within the first year. In its first year the St. Vincent de Paul Society received fifty-seven pounds, thirty of them from the poor boxes. Of the forty pounds it spent in that year, thirty-four were spent within the parish. Six families and twenty-five people received aid and the sixteen members made ninety-nine visits to the homes of distressed people in the parish. At the end of the first year, in the new church, Father Tansey arranged for the Sacred Heart Fathers to give a parish mission at which fourteen hundred people received Holy Communion.

Father Tansey organised monthly collections which began in February, 1924. By May there were eleven men collecting money from 223 homes and the collections rose steadily from eleven pounds in February to twenty-five in May. In May 500 people attended a euchre party and dance in the Palais Hall to aid the parish and fifty pounds was realised. During its first year, Croydon raised over three hundred and seventy pounds at a bazaar, nearly three hundred from the monthly collections and over two hundred and eighty pounds from social fund-raising activities. Second collections amounted to sixty-seven pounds. When the foundation stone of the church was laid, a

record one thousand pounds was contributed.

In its first year, the parish of Croydon had raised some two thousand four hundred pounds, spent just over nine thousand and had a debt of six thousand five hundred pounds. The main items of expenditure were the property, three thousand five hundred pounds, the church, some four thousand pounds as well as altar fittings, church furniture, desks and the organ. Within a year, land, a presbytery and a church-school had been acquired. The people had been welded together through their pastor's energy and persuasiveness.

When inviting people to come to the laying of the foundation stone, to take place on July 13, Father Tansey wrote:

You will have at last in Croydon a church of your own, where your children will be baptized, your maids pledged in marriage, and where you will bid your last farewell to your dead. It will be the lodestone of your lives. From it the Sacramental Christ will look down upon your homes . . . to it you will come—aged and young—to pour out the troubles of your soul. I look forward . . . to . . . watching my spiritual children wax strong in age and grace.

These are days of sacrifice. We cannot achieve all we long for, without a huge expenditure. We look to everybody to measure his donation on the foundation stone not in guineas, but in tens of guineas. . . .

I have yet to see God forget generosity. We are striving to have the Sacramental Christ amongst us: He will not let us falter.

In January, 1925, Tansey's heart was full of confidence. By November he was again worried. In March he was spending himself on a novel way of raising money, a way which poses the question of the sacredness of a church building. Should a church be sacred, be set apart for the worship of God or can it be fittingly used for other purposes, even fund raising? Already the principle of the church as a place set apart had been broken as a matter of archdiocesan policy: during the day it doubled as a school. Fund raising was, though, another matter and it is sad to note that the man who could achieve so much for his people and have such fine ideals, could turn his church into a gigantic wireless studio, two shillings admission for those who wanted "to listen in to the wireless wonders" and hear a broadcast of the St. Patrick's night concert from the Sydney Town Hall. In 1930 the church was used each Monday evening for euchre parties. In September, 1934, when the cottages in Queen Street had been acquired and converted for use as classrooms and a hall, it was announced that in future pianos could not be used in the church as moving them about might damage the rubber stripping which had recently been laid in the aisles.

There was an almost mania about money. From August, 1925,

until November, Father Tansey promoted a bazaar which in November he wrote of as the "only hope of staving off a financial failure". The preliminary activities had not been as popular as had been expected and the work had fallen into the hands of thirty or forty people. In the event, the bazaar raised over fifteen hundred pounds. The bazaar in 1928 raised nearly two thousand pounds—the equivalent of about thirty thousand of today's dollars, perhaps more. A typical bazaar included three or four months of preliminary activities—dances, concerts, theatre parties, balls (several), house parties, sports days, car drives, raffles (40 in 1925) and a 'Queen competition': a sort of Miss Holy Innocents, the prize going to the young lady whose supporters raised the most money. There were baby competitions, cricket matches, drama nights—every conceivable form of activity. With so many events and so much success, it is amazing that Father Tansey worried so much. Yet success did depend upon his goading. In February, 1930, the words

And must I be giving again and again?

Oh, no, said the Angel and his glance pierced me through.

Just give till the Master stops giving to you.

first appeared at the top of the published list of subscribers to the monthly collections. In the 1930s the ten o'clock Sunday Mass was said not for the people of the parish but for those who subscribed to reduce the parish debt.

Throughout Father Tansey's period, money was raised and spent with a vigour. When the Presentation Sisters came to the parish from Lismore in January, 1927, Father Tansey sold his presbytery to them for use as a convent. Apart from housing the sisters who were teaching in the school, it was also to be used as a house of studies for Presentation Sisters attending the University of Sydney. A cottage in Queen Street was purchased and while it was being renovated for use as the new presbytery, Father Tansey lived at Five Dock with Father, now Monsignor, Peoples. On the official opening day of the new presbytery and convent over twelve hundred pounds was raised. At about the same time, additional furniture was bought for the Church—side altars, a crucifix, maple panelling for the sanctuary. By the end of 1927, the parish had spent over thirteen thousand pounds and was in debt for less than half that amount. Income declined during the years of the depression, 1929-1933, yet in 1934 Tansey spent over four thousand pounds on three cottages in Queen Street to complete the present two-and-a-half acre holding. In 1938 the stone wall and gates around the property were erected to celebrate the silver jubilee of Father Tansey's priesthood. During his ministry, Father Tansey founded the Holy Name Society, the Boy Scouts and the Holy Catholic Guild, apart from the societies already mentioned. From 1927 onwards he had help from an assistant priest, the first being a Father John Toohey, now Bishop of Maitland. By the time of his death, just prior to the outbreak

of World War II, the parish was financially sound and well founded.

His successor was Father Thomas Vaughan, an older man than Tansey. Father Vaughan lasted only two years, dying in June, 1941. During his term, no additions were made to the parish property. He continued to promote the Holy Name Society and the Holy Catholic Guild, as Father Tansey had. Shortly after the outbreak of the war, in December, 1939, he advised the people on the evils of Communism, warning them against "Reds, Parlour Pink bishops, professors, politicians and other gullibles in our midst striving for 'Cultural Relations' with the Soviet". He also quoted from Hilaire Belloc's *Survivals and New Arrivals* to warn of the evils of nationalism and hence Nazism. Vaughan was in poor health when he came from Katoomba, where he had been parish priest. While at Croydon he had been unable to make visitations: that essential element which Tansey had been able to give, unceasing energy, constant encouragement and an ability to persuade and enthuse the people, was absent.

The next priest, Father William Stevens, arrived in 1941. He too was older than Tansey would have been, had he still been alive. He also did not enjoy good health, particularly during the final part of the nine years he spent at Croydon before he died. Stevens was a dour, unyielding man and one who was slightly aloof. He was also a generous man, a man who was willing to try to serve. During his time the new school was built and opened by Cardinal Gilroy. The founding stone was laid in June, 1948, the school blessed and opened in July, 1950. It stands where one of the cottages purchased in the 1930s had stood.

After Father Stevens, Father Page was administrator until Monsignor Giles came. The monsignor was ordained in Rome in 1929 and served as secretary to the apostolic delegate before going to parish work. This "fiery" director of the Fatima Crusade died in 1956. During his time in Croydon additions to the convent were completed. Giles was devout but over-zealous. He introduced Fatima devotions and the practice of taking the statue of Our Lady to various homes in the parish for the nightly recitation of the rosary by all the Catholics in the immediate district. By the sheer force of his own will he made this a 'popular' devotion. After his death it fell into disuse. Giles was one of those priests who found it easier to talk of God's wrath than of his love, of the fires of hell than the horror of sin; he tried to move men through fear rather than love. He was a man of outstanding fortitude and little subtlety.

His successor, Father Deely, an Irishman, was also a sick man who was not destined to stay long in Croydon. He died in 1962. Even so, in those years the new presbytery was built and the church renovated—a ceiling put in below the naked beams, new altars, confessionals, doorways and the choir loft being the main changes. During Father Deely's time, much money was raised and much spent.

Father Deely's successor was also Irish, also ill. Father Kerwick was in Croydon until the appointment of the present pastor, Father Farrelly. He was a simple, kind and generous man, a man old enough to be slightly resentful of the changes which resulted from the Second Vatican Council. During his stewardship, the school went through the throes of the Wyndham changes in education and, in 1963, lost its secondary classes as a result of a massive reorganisation of Catholic schools in the archdiocese. Also during his stewardship there occurred many changes in the parishioners. New Australians began to settle in the parish, taking the place of the Australian-born parishioners of Irish stock. This had been happening since the post-war immigration scheme began, but the impact of this change came in the mid-1960s. By the end of the decade, some three-quarters of the pupils in the parish school would be from migrant families. These points will be raised again in a further section.

From its inception, the parish life of Holy Innocents has depended upon the priests of the parish. And in the main, those priests have been concerned with parish debts, with making ends meet. There has thus been, in the life of each priest, a tension between fostering a true community and begging. The various pastors—no attempt has been made to assess the contribution of their assistants, but this omission is not to be seen as a dismissal of their efforts as having been of no account—were usually so pressed by financial worries as to concentrate on two things, their essential mission, ministering, and raising money. The fostering of a community has mostly gone by default.

Father Tansey undoubtedly made an effort, and to a degree succeeded. The means he used to raise money were means which also brought the people together at the wide variety of activities. As the motor car, the cinema and so on, the technological development discussed above, increasingly claimed a larger share in the life of the average parishioner, so these means became less successful and were replaced by more impersonal methods of raising money. It has also to be remembered, and this largely accounts for the decline which has taken place in the parish—no longer is it a Benjamin pulsing with energy—that until Father Farrelly's appointment, Croydon has seen a succession of elderly and ill priests. However, much determination they may have had, these men did not have the energy necessary to foster a community, nor were many of them in the parish long enough to help form one.

## IV

A parish is not a communion of saints, but a collection of people. The notion of the bond of Christian charity uniting those who worship together in the spirit of the living gospel is an objective to be worked towards rather than the base on which a parish is built. And the striving for this objective is a constant and continuing process. A parish results from a natural community on the one hand and the fact of sharing one baptism, one faith and one creed on the other. It should in some way manifest the one Christ drawing all men to himself.

In this sense, a parish is built from human hearts in the process of purification, human minds seeking the truth under the inscrutable actions of divine grace. The local church is the centre of the parish because it is in the church that sacramental grace is usually encountered. In the church the parishioners should be encouraged and instructed in the ways of the saving truth of the living gospel which will ever be maintained in its purity by the Catholic Church.

The parish has a further grace to give. Just as the universal Church is a kind of a sacrament, a visible sign of invisible grace, so is one's neighbour. In one's contacts with one's neighbours in the parish, the graces which have been received in the church grow from grace to grace, or they wither. One way, then, of looking at the life of a parish is to investigate, as far as is possible (for here there are only signs and no physical facts), whether it has strived, as a whole, to build a temple of the spirit.

To begin to do this, one has to investigate the level of awareness of this life towards which the parish should be striving. The Second Vatican Council reminded Catholics of this responsibility, of the need they have to be aware of their Christian duties, to be responsible children of God. It demanded external Christian actions from Catholics as signs of this internal awareness. This was significant for, since the Reformation, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, that is since about the sixteenth century, there had been a tendency to deprecate the role of the Christian in the world, the layman, and to deplore what the world itself was doing, rather than to come to grips with it. Democracy, for example, was suspect at least until the time of Pope Leo XIII. Churchmen aimed more at providing rules which, it was thought, would protect Catholics from error, than at spreading and encouraging the truth wherever it might be found. As a result, and this was so in Australia, seminaries tended to concentrate on history, literature and above all law rather than on philosophical and theological analysis. The doctrinal and dogmatic education of the priest tended to centre on the training of his memory rather than the formation of his mind. Priests were thus ill-equipped to evaluate in any sophisticated way the trends which were taking place in Australia and hence ill-equipped to foster a truly lay Christian spirit. In 1911, for instance, Archbishop Kelly condemned mixed surf-bathing outright.

He saw it as an utter destruction of modesty. (It could be argued that the present-day concentration on history, sociology, anthropology and psychology in the seminaries, a continuing aversion from philosophy and theology, and a shying away from law—a backlash against previous over-emphasis—will and has resulted in similar lack of sophistication and similar confusion.)

Beyond the seminary, the emphasis in the church was on practical achievements, physical structures, rather than on soul-searching, the beginning of the Christian life. And, as has been indicated, the energies and efforts which were directed towards money-raising left little by way of reserve for soul-searching, a far more arduous activity. Both within the seminary and without, a clear and positive vision of the Church, her mystery and her mission was absent. Hence there was absent a clear and positive notion of the role and responsibility of the laity. Before the Second Vatican Council it was normal but scarcely orthodox for the laity to accept anything the clergy said. Since the Council it has become fashionable in some quarters for men to presume to beat the Church's breast, to debit the Holy Church, Christ's spotless bride, his Mystical Body, with the sins of those who claim to belong to her. In each case this was a failure to see that the holy Church is also a church of sinners, that its mission is that of Christ: to call sinners to the life of grace, the light of truth.

As a result of these faulty views of the Church, and the mistaken practices adopted by officials of the Church, too many laymen have been left unaware of the nature of parish life. They have had to rely on a ready generosity and a Catholic instinct rather than on the deliberations of a Catholic mind to reconcile reason, action and faith. Indeed, they have happily left it to the clergy to do the thinking in matters pertaining to religion and have followed the clergy's advice.

A next step in evaluating the life of a parish consists in examining the nature of the teaching given and the practices encouraged. Here, where it is possible to focus attention more sharply on Croydon, even though the evidence available was not as much as would have been preferred, it will be seen that rather than attempting to build an awareness of the role of the Catholic in the world, the emphasis has been all the other way. In general, though many commendable attempts were made, it has to be said on the basis of the available evidence that the teaching in the parish was aimed at maintaining a level of Catholic life a little better than mediocre. This conclusion does not in any way pretend to reflect upon individuals. It is based solely on the very fallible signs of what was done.

The teaching given in the parish aimed either at a basic form of instruction or at the encouragement of pious practices. Apart from November and May devotions, there seems to have been little conscious attempt at imparting a doctrinal basis to, or understanding of, devotions. The articles in the *Record* on St. Bernadette of Lourdes, for example, were simply instructional and devotional. The article on Catholics and

the Bible was aimed at defending against Protestantism: it argued that the scriptures had been given to man by the Church and that their authenticity rested upon its authority. Teaching on the Mass was at a very basic level and perhaps implied widespread ignorance.

The apostolic role given to the Catholic girl was minimal. She should dress attractively and fashionably but decently. In her social activities she should enjoy herself but refrain from drinking, smoking and swearing. Dancing was permissible if for the sake of recreation but not if for the sake of passion. The teaching was not large-minded, was repetitive and basic. Warnings were issued against dangerous literature and the parishioners were advised of the Southern Cross Library in the city which had some 8000 good Catholic tomes and cost eight shillings a quarter for membership. The writings of Hilaire Belloc, one of the most vigorous defenders of the faith before the Second World War, were recommended. The notion of the apostolate of the laity which was presented consisted in first being a good Catholic—through membership of sodalities and so forth, second, distributing Catholic books and being ready to offer advice to wayward Catholics or those enquiring about the Church. Next the laity were to co-operate with, and second, the lead of the local priest, and to sanctify their homes by the daily recital of the rosary. During Lent, it meant reading some spiritual works or the gospel accounts of our Lord's passion. This was all sound but it amounted to a "be good and wait" policy. It was not extroverted—a reflection of the insecurity which Catholics felt in the Australia of the 1930s and of the possibly impoverished religious lives of even good people. There was no call to read the Church's teachings, to study the encyclicals or to pray and meditate continuously on the Sacred Scriptures. At one stage, Father Tansey asked his parishioners to obtain missals so they could follow the Mass.

The parish seems to have produced few vocations. Before 1933, one boy, Kevin Larkin, joined the priesthood and four, William Killeen, Miss Rohr, Miss Dunne and Ella Matthew, the religious life. Ella Matthew was the first girl from the parish to join the Lismore Presentation Sisters. Despite the severe annual warnings against mixed marriage, of 498 marriages between 1924 and 1962, 172, or 34% were mixed marriages. In 80% of these, the Catholic was the woman. On the other hand, of 583 baptisms between 1924 and 1935, 77 were conditional baptisms signifying conversions from a Protestant denomination. Thirty-eight of the converts were men.

When the convent opened, Father Tansey expected it would become the cultural centre of the parish. Its role in relation to the school will be considered below. Here it is necessary to say that the only obvious influence of the convent was in the musical life of the parish. After the Presentation Sisters arrived in 1927, there were advertisements in the *Record* for pianos and the school choir won many awards including one at an Irish music festival. It is impossible to even suggest the indirect influence the sisters may have had through

their example and through their influence upon the school children. What can be commented upon is that with their then strict rule—being almost enclosed—it was very difficult for the sisters to join directly in the parish life by helping to stimulate a love for the things of the mind, for truth, for religion.

Until at least the 1930s it seems as if the example looked to in the matter of Catholic culture was the example of Ireland; to the beautiful greetings used there which were full of unashamed religion because, as Father Tansey pointed out, Ireland had not been influenced by the Reformation.

A second, very different way to investigate the life of the parish is to make some observations on the people themselves. In this case, the purpose is not to see if the people were capable of receiving the gospel or of believing the mysteries of religion—God gives that ability to each man according to his talents, and to man each enough. Rather the purpose in this different type of investigation is to describe the parish, to point out some of the factors which were relevant to parish life.

The parish marriage registers give some indication of the occupations taken up by the people in the parish. The table on this, Table I, which appears opposite, needs some comment, though. First it must be remembered that in most instances the bride chooses the place of her wedding. The figures for men being married, then, in many cases apply to people beyond the parish. The figures relating to parents apply to fathers and to the fathers of both parties.

The occupational groupings used also require some comment. Male manual workers, unskilled occupations, were mainly labourers or process workers but also included storemen and like occupations. Members of the armed forces, which chiefly occurred during the Second World War, were included in this group. Included in the male tradesman classification were apprentices and hairdressers—the majority, though, were in the building trades. Male white collar workers included shop assistants, clerks, policemen, businessmen and those who give their occupations as managers. The numbers in this group grew over the years. The male professional group comprised school teachers, accountants, pharmacists, medical practitioners, lawyers and dentists. School teachers and accountants made up the bulk of it.

Those women grouped as giving home duties as their occupation were probably elder daughters who stayed at home to help in the running of the home. Quite often they married men from the manual group. After 1935 few instances of this group were met and scarcely any after World War II. A sign, perhaps, of the breaking down of family life. Female manual workers were mainly process workers and machinists. Female trades were mainly dress-making, millinery and hair-dressing. The white collar female group included typists, clerks, secretaries and shop assistants. After about 1935 the number of girls who

chase callings in this group increased markedly. About the only two occupations included in the female professional group were nursing and school teaching.

**Table I**

Occupations as Shown in 346 entries in the State Marriage Register for the Parish of the Holy Innocents, 1924-1959.

Occupational Group	Men	Women	Parents
Home Duties	—	23%	—
Manual	38%	15%	36%
Trade	23%	7%	24%
Land	1%	—	8%
White Collar	30%	48%	28%
Professional	8%	7%	4%

Included in the professional group of the parents of those married were two ministers of religion, one Anglican, one Presbyterian. Those included in the group, Land, were farmers, graziers and orchardists.

The figures reflect the suburb. Croydon was a working-class, lower middle-class malgam, with a handful of wealthy merchants and professional men. Well less than half of the men married and less still of the women would seem to have gone to school beyond third year. A very small number obtained university degrees. The debating society begun after the depression does not seem to have been active. And there was an almost awed veneration for a Doctor Heffernan, "brilliant young medico", who came to live at Malvern Hill, just before the depression. Most parishioners, it would seem, were not rich.

Even so, if they lacked money, they gave; if their intellects were not finely honed they still had an instinct for the faith. As much can be seen in the activities of the St. Vincent de Paul Society during the depression of the 1930s. The Society aimed at the sanctification of its members. This was to be achieved through corporate, corporal works of mercy. The intention was that each member should act when ministering to one of Christ's impoverished members as if ministering to Christ. The temptation was, as Mother Teresa of Calcutta has pointed out, simply to be a social worker. The device of honorary membership—one who had to pay regularly but who did not engage in active works—necessary for those who wished to help but were unable, and handy for raising extra money—did admit this possibility. Guarding against it probably rested with the priest. But whatever this danger it is clear that during the depression the Society raised and spent more money than it had in previous years. This despite the fall in the average weekly collections — from eleven pounds to eight pounds

between 1929 and 1930 — and the overall decline in the income of the parish. In 1929 the parish had raised nearly one thousand and fifty pounds, the depression beginning to take effect in that year. By 1931 the annual income of the parish had dropped to eight hundred and seventy pounds. Yet the Society's income during the same time was consistently above the 1926 figure, as the following table shows.

**Table II**

Income and Expenditure of the St. Vincent de Paul Society,  
Holy Innocents, Croydon, 1924-1933.

Year	Income in pounds	Income derived from church poor boxes in pounds	Expenditure pounds
1924	57	30	49
1926	95	70	89
1930	265	188	243
1931	224	178	218
1932	188	154	186
1933	190	161	162

When reading these figures it should be kept in mind that by the end of 1930, 20% of the work-force were unemployed, that there was a 10% cut in wages in 1931, that 24% of the wage-earners of the country earned less than one pound a week during 1932-3 and that out of a population of 6,630,000, including 3,155,621 nominal wage-earners, 500,000 were unemployed in June 1933. It was a time when the derelicts in the Sydney Domain were dispossessed of their piece of grass, when the children of the unemployed were underfed and went without clothing, when men queued during the night to be the first to read the "positions vacant" columns in the morning papers. It was also the time when the self-help organisations, the Hibernians and the Catholic Guild formed branches in the parish, along with the Boy Scouts.

It was not altogether surprising, therefore, to note in the baptismal register of the parish the number of babies born during the depression who were baptised in the 1935-1937 period. The parents, it would seem, might not have been able to offer a stipend and therefore thought that until they could they should not ask the priest to bring their child into the Church. On the other hand, there was little discernible change in the number of marriages or the average ages of those being married during this period, as the following table shows.

**Table III**

Average ages of those married in the Parish of the Holy Innocents, 1925-1950.

Year	No. of Marriages	Av. Age M.	Av. Age F.
1925	6	34.5	36.2
1927	14	27.4	26.7
1929	12	26.1	23.2
1930	17	30.2	26.6
1931	12	27.5	24.3
1932	8	—	—
1933	10	—	—
1935	9	28.1	28.7
1936	5	32.8	31.6
1938	18	30	26.7
1939	13	28	25.8
1941	9	26.9	25.5
1943	15	32	31.3
1945	12	30.3	26.2
1950	8	28.8	26.6

If anything, the change occurred in the years after the depression.

After the Second World War, the population of the parish began to grow. From the mid-sixties, the overall population and the number of children climbed steeply. On the other hand, the jump in the income of the parish occurred before this time.

**Table IV**

Population and Income of the Parish of the Holy Innocents, 1941-1972.

Year	Population	Children	Income (Dollars)
1941	1,350	231	6,932
1953	1,758	336	5,998
1959	1,695	435	17,152
1962	1,773	290	12,124
1965	1,814	626	—
1967	2,261	529	—
1970	2,788	533	—
1972	—	—	10,185

In 1973, of 233 families sending their children to the parish school, 83 were Italian, 52 Australian or English and 39 Lebanese. Only three were Irish and the majority of the remainder were from various European countries, only four being from Asia or Oceania. More than half of the parents were labourers or process workers.

There is no real way of relating this descriptive analysis to the earlier parts of this section, save by referring to the second section of this work. Now that it is peopled by various linguistic groups, the parish of Croydon is even less of a community than were the various groups who began it in 1924. And the linguistic difficulties involved in the preaching of the gospel are obvious. The solutions are not so obvious.

A school was begun in the parish in 1925. Two Sisters of Charity came each day from Concord to teach. Initially there was only an infants' department, but the school had been commenced in the expectation that it would become "a centre of education even for advanced pupils". Father Tansey was delighted by this prospect. "With the children about us," he wrote, "learning their own religion in their own schools, we will feel that at last we have established the Parish on a firm foundation." He saw the school as helping to draw the people of the parish even closer together, as leading to the establishment of a local tradition. His ambition was one day to bless the marriages of children he had baptised and who had attended the parish school.

At the end of the school's first year he praised the work of the two pioneering sisters, Sisters Dorothy and Ludovic. The conduct of the children had improved, he noted. They were "singing sweetly", and the sisters were well beloved by the parish. They had, he said, helped in the raising of hundreds of pounds.

The school was formed in the middle of a boom period for Catholic schools in New South Wales. Between 1918 and 1938 they grew from 438 to 551. In 1934, 80,000 children were enrolled in Catholic schools, an average of some 160 pupils in each school. Since 1911 those private schools which had wanted to present their pupils as candidates for state bursaries had had to be registered and open to the state's inspectors. From 1916 it became compulsory for all private schools to be registered. This, and the return to state parliament of Doctor Fallon, a member of the Democratic Party, a Catholic party, gave rise to renewed agitation for state aid. In 1924, Fallon headed a deputation to the then Minister for Education, Mr. A. Bruntell, to press the claims of Catholics. Bruntell was unmoved. He alleged that the state's was the most acceptable and equitable system of education. He supported this contention by instancing the number of Catholic pupils (35,000) and teachers in state schools.

This was but one more hazy round in that extended, confused and confusing education debate which began in 1836, or even earlier. Since about 1866, the majority has claimed that the state's was the best system of extending the benefits of formal education to all children irrespective of their class or creed. Supporters of the Catholic system have objected that they have been forced to pay twice for education, once for their non-Catholic neighbours' children and once for their own. Neither side has ever bothered much about education itself, or the respective proper roles of parent, state, school and church in the education of children. Catholics, their claims having been consistently denied from 1880 until recently, have had, and have had nurtured in them, the feeling of being an aggrieved minority. Even so, because of their obedience to their bishops and for the sake of the principle—

their own children educated in their own religion in their own schools—they have been willing to suffer financial hardship and, in many instances, inferior schools and teaching. For a parish like Croydon, the implication of this for the poorer children was unfortunate. Without a bursary, few were able to stay at school beyond the minimum legal age for leaving. These children suffered in comparison with children at state schools where there were no fees to be met.

In 1927, the Presentation Sisters replaced the Sisters of Charity. The first of their number to come were Mother Carthage and Sisters Cecilia and Columba. This resulted from a decision taken by Father Tansey. Apparently the second year under the Sisters of Charity had not fulfilled the promises of the first. An inspection revealed that the sister in charge was an inefficient teacher, that children had left the school, that the parishioners were disturbed and that the singing had deteriorated.

On their arrival, the Presentation Sisters advertised that they would take pupils for the piano, for all stringed instruments, for singing, theory of music, business principles, typing, shorthand, book-keeping, elocution and dancing. It was a girls' school. In 1927 the school had 142 pupils, in 1928 an orchestra, and the following year a distinctive uniform with a badge and an "Australian motto". In 1929 the school choir won the silver cup at the Irish Music Festival and in 1930 it sang by invitation at the St. Patrick's night concert in the Sydney Town Hall and later in St. Mary's Cathedral before a conference of New South Wales Music Teachers. On this latter occasion it won the praise of the *Sydney Morning Herald's* music critic.

Shortly after the Presentation Sisters arrived in the parish, an appeal was made to parents. They were praised for the sacrifices they made on behalf of their children and reminded to ensure that those efforts were made for lasting and worthwhile causes. The parents were almost admonished to buy good books for their children rather than toys: perhaps had Catholics husbanded the fruits of their self-denial more wisely their children might have had the benefit of an extra year or two at school.

During the depression, when it was advertised that the school was giving an intermediate grade course, enrolments initially grew. Older children who were unable to find work were staying longer at school. However, as the depression wore on, and more parents were unable to pay school fees, enrolments dropped.

In 1934 the school moved from the church to the recently acquired cottages which had been converted for use as a school. In 1950 it moved again to its present building, a site which seems originally to have been chosen for the building of a more fitting church.

Over the years the school has been subject to examination by inspectors from the Department of Education, the archdiocese and the Sisters of the Presentation. Results have been uniformly good. The

archdiocesan inspector has looked at accommodation and facilities, staffing, school and class records, the standard of religious education (comment here usually occupying several lines) and of secular education (one line of comment usually sufficing). In the Catholic system, it is only in very recent times that a programme of teacher training has been instigated, or that Catholic school teachers have been encouraged to take university degrees. Generally, religious teachers in Catholic schools in the earlier parts of this century were less well prepared, technically, for their teaching roles, though were probably more dedicated than their counterparts in State Schools were. In 1940, for the first time, sisters who had qualifications from the Catholic Teacher Training Institute came to the school.

In 1963, as has been mentioned, the school lost its secondary classes as a result of the impact of the Wyndham scheme. After the war—though Croydon did not directly feel this, enrolments in Catholic secondary schools doubled and the waste involved in the maintenance of a secondary department, necessarily small, in parochial schools became increasingly obvious. It took the challenge of the Wyndham scheme to overcome the obstacles to the solving of this problem. As a result of its demands, and to meet them, regional Catholic high schools were formed. In the event, this freed classrooms at Croydon for the increasing enrolments in the primary school.

From the mid-sixties, new methods of teaching began to be introduced. Instead of being taught by rote, the child was challenged to explore learning. The curriculum was broadened and less emphasis placed upon memory, examinations and tests. The aim was to try to teach to the level of each pupil. The advantages of these changes are obvious. A too heavily memory-centred curriculum can deaden the young student's curiosity. There are also disadvantages. In many cases parents, brought up themselves in the old way, have found it difficult to appreciate the changes and even to become involved in their children's learning process. And there has been the danger that the newer, less structured approach has tended to ignore the discipline necessary to education—perseverance, thoroughness and so forth, which are essential for study and learning.

In 1965, the school provided adequate facilities for the 280 odd primary pupils in attendance. In 1971, two years after the school had been chosen as a demonstration school for the training of future teachers, and one year after necessary repairs, the school's buildings, facilities and equipment were described as "splendid". After 1971, growing enrolments, and the need to have smaller classes, meant that the old cottages—parts of the former school—had to be pressed into inadequate service. By 1973 the need for new facilities had become urgent and in 1974 the parish which unaided had built the 1950 school received notification of a grant from the Federal Government to aid in the construction of these much-needed additions.

In 1966, when fees were increased 40% it was feared that there

might be a falling off in enrolments and that the poorer children of the parish might not be able to attend the school. In fact, children had to be turned away. Here one encounters one of the most vexed problems of the parish school and of the Catholic education system in general. In 1971 it was estimated that there were over three hundred Catholics at the Croydon Primary School, most of them from poor migrant families, and a similar number at Burwood Girls' High School, many of whom had never been to a Catholic school. Provision for the religious instruction of these children has been difficult and their knowledge of basic Christian principles described as deplorable. The problem is, on the one hand, the best use of resources, on the other, how to meet the need for, and respect the right these children have to, religious knowledge. If, as is obvious, the parish school is to continue, and to continue demanding energy and resources for the sake of the children who attend—and it is already overcrowded, then by way of justification, it seems essential to make an equal effort on behalf of those children not in the parish school. Steps have been taken in this direction—the training of voluntary catechists, special classes outside school hours to prepare state-school children for the sacraments, for instance—but a much greater effort would seem to be required if the parish is to discharge its responsibilities to those children who do not attend its school, and could not if they wanted to. This is a general problem faced by the whole archdiocese, but this does not absolve the parish from a duty to work to try to find a solution in its own area.

**Table V**

Enrolments, staff and class size, Holy Innocents parish school, 1932-1970.

Year	Enrolment	Teachers		Av. Class Size	Class Size (Secondary)		
		Rel.	Lay		1st	2nd	3rd
1932	278	6	—	46	—	—	—
1934	262	9	—	30	—	—	—
1935	262	8	—	35	—	—	—
1938	267	10	—	26.7	—	—	—
1939	221	7	—	31	20	10	12
1940	196	7	—	28	16	12	9
1943	173	6	—	29	18	10	9
1947	214	7	—	30	15	14	7
1966	280	5	1	46			
1967	333	5	1	55			
1968	340	5	3	42			
1970	325	5	4	36			

It is difficult to assess the impact of the school on the parish. It has, over the years, brought the more dedicated parents together to work for various projects associated with the school, much as the building, maintenance and running of the parish has brought handfuls of generous parishioners together in similar work. In 1952 the school was credited with having led to a better attendance at morning Mass and at Mass on the first Friday of each month. It was also credited with having influenced older pupils to join the altar society and the Children of Mary. If this influence came from the school, it seems proper to credit it to the priests and the sisters who were responsible for the school's overall conduct and tone. Responses to calls from the sisters for parents to become more involved in the apostolate of the school and hence "a deeper spiritual involvement . . . in the sacramental and liturgical life of the parish" have always been disappointing.

Apart from their role in the parish school, the religious have a role in the parish. Here it is again difficult, if not impossible, to assess the impact of the sisters. Only general comment can be made. The religious can serve a parish by prayer and example. In their lives, both as a community and as individuals, they can bear witness to the efficacy of grace by exhibiting a noticeable growth in faith, hope and charity. Their obedience reflects their faith, their poverty hope, and their chastity charity. They can be as beacons. Through their work and their dedication they can manifest this light. It remains to the parish to profit by it.

## VI

For fifty years the sacramental Christ has been in Croydon. For fifty years the gospel has been preached to those who would listen, the sacraments administered to those who sought them, and for forty-nine years a school has been available for the children of the parish. Perhaps the most significant change in that time has occurred since the Second World War. The coming to the parish of people from a variety of national cultures, with their different languages and styles of life, has highlighted a fact which every parish must face: it must ever be attempting to regenerate that friendship and understanding on which its community life is based. To fail to do so is to risk death. In Croydon it is no longer possible, as once it was, to rely upon the traditional Irish approaches to the Catholic religion. New approaches acceptable to all must be found. And to find them, a continuing process of purification, a continual attempt to appropriate the truth of the living gospel in an intensely personal way is required. This is perhaps the most immediate challenge facing Croydon, though, as this work has tried to show, there are other challenges as well.

This was never intended to be a chronicle of the first fifty years of the parish of the Holy Innocents. Rather it has attempted to reflect upon those years. It therefore has not singled out many individuals. In fact, it could be alleged that it has all but ignored the important contributions made over the years by those willing work-horses who have spent themselves in myriad ways to keep the parish functioning. If these people, always few, have not received the attention they might have, it is not because their contribution has been discounted as trivial. It is simply that in this brief essay attention has centred elsewhere.

If these reflections have indicated that the Christian life of the parish has been impeded, that should not cause shock. Indeed, it is to be hoped that by looking honestly at the achievements and failures of these first fifty years, some people may be encouraged to help make the parish pulse again with an even more purposeful life.

## A note on sources

The primary sources on which this work has been based consist of:

(a) Official Documents: the Baptismal, Confirmation and Marriage registers held in the parish.

(b) The balance sheets, parish notices and sodality registers, also held in the parish.

(c) Copies of the Croydon *Record*, the parish news bulletin, from 1924 until 1957. These are held by the parish and by parishioners. No single holding, and no amalgamation of the various holdings, is complete.

(d) The parish and clergy files in the Archdiocesan Archives at St. Mary's Cathedral, Sydney.

(e) The *Catholic Press*, 1924.

*Secondary sources* were many. The select list which follows may serve as a guide for further reading.

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