'A SAINT FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS'?

by JOSEPHINE LAFFIN

On 17 October 2010 Mary MacKillop became the first Australian citizen to be officially canonized by the Roman Catholic Church. This event generated a similar outpouring of patriotic enthusiasm to that which greeted Mary's beatification in 1995. The title of this paper is borrowed from a newspaper article of 1985 by the poet, publisher and self-described 'implacable agnostic', Max Harris, a fervent supporter of Mary's canonization.[1] Saints are the only relatives that you can choose, commented Bishop Ambrose of Milan in the fourth century,[2] and taking this ancient aphorism rather more literally than St Ambrose intended, Dame Edna Everage has claimed descent from a branch of the MacKillop family tree.[3] As Dame Edna's creator, comedian and satirist Barry Humphries, is a shrewd observer of Australian culture, Mary MacKillop's triumph as a saint for all Australians seems assured – but what does this reveal about the meaning of sainthood in contemporary Australian society? This paper will trace some important stages in devotion to saints in Australian history before returning to Mary Helen MacKillop, her status as a national icon, and the threads of change and continuity which can be discerned in her cult.[4]

[1] *Advertiser*, 6 April 1985, 39. Similar articles by Harris can be found in *Weekend Australian*, 6–7 April 1985, 6; *Advertiser*, 11 November 1991, 19; *Advertiser*, 20 January 1995, 11.

[2] Ambrose, *De viduis* 11.54; see also Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London, 1982), 228–9.

[3] *Advertiser*, 5 February 1999, 3.

[4] I am very grateful to Dr Marie Foale and Dr David Hilliard for their helpful comments on a draft of this paper. For fuller consideration of the themes of this paper, see Josephine Laffin, ed., *What does it mean to be a Saint? Reflections on Mary MacKillop, Saints and Holiness in the Catholic Tradition* (Adelaide, 2010). There is also a growing body of predominantly hagiographical literature on Mary MacKillop. The Jesuit Paul Gardiner, postulator of Mary's cause at the Vatican from 1985 to 2008, is responsible for *Mary MacKillop: An Extraordinary Australian; The Authorised Biography*, rev. edn (Sydney, 2007). Osmund Thorpe's *Mary MacKillop*, 3rd rev. edn (Sydney, 1994) is also highly sympathetic but scholarly. Journalist Lesley O'Brien's *Mary MacKillop Unveiled: Australia's First Saint* (Melbourne, 1994) was written with the cooperation of the Mary MacKillop Secretariat of the Sisters of St Joseph, the religious order

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The notion that there could be 'a saint for all Australians' would have been absurd in the nineteenth century. Even after the six independent British colonies came together to form the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901, Protestantism and secularism were too strong. There was, however, a saint for most Roman Catholics (twenty-three per cent of the population of Australia in 1901). As the majority had some Irish ancestry, and most priests and bishops had been imported from Ireland, St Patrick's Day was one of the highlights of the Catholic year.[5] It was commemorated on 17 March with processions, sporting competitions, Irish dancing, Irish music and speeches by visiting Irish politicians: a nostalgic celebration of Gaelic culture spiced with a dose of politics.[6] The political overtones were contentious, especially in Melbourne after the suppression of the Easter Rising in Ireland in 1916. British Empire loyalists were outraged in 1918 when Sinn Féin banners were carried in the procession and Archbishop Daniel Mannix, a supporter of Irish republicanism, did not doff his biretta during the national anthem.[7] Rather than a manifestation of devotion to St Patrick, Melbourne's celebrations underlined the unity and identity of the relatively small, predominantly working-class, Catholic community and they exacerbated sectarian tensions. Yet the militant Irishry evident in Melbourne between 1917 and 1922

co-founded by Mary. From a sociological rather than a historical perspective, Sheila McCreanor's 2001 doctoral thesis for the University of South Australia, 'Sainthood in Australia: Mary MacKillop and the Print Media' is a rare exploration of the growing cult of Mary MacKillop. It was published by the Sisters of St Joseph under the same title (Sydney, 2001). McCreanor, a Sister of St Joseph herself, has also edited collections of Mary's letters: *Mary MacKillop and Flora: Correspondence between Mary MacKillop and her Mother, Flora McDonald MacKillop* (Sydney, 2004); *Mary MacKillop in Challenging Times 1883–1899* (Sydney, 2006).

5 For St Patrick's Day in Australia, see Patrick Mike Cronin and Daryl Adair, *The Wearing of the Green: A History of St Patrick's Day* (London, 2002), 88–93, 113–32, 141–6, 204–10; Patrick O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, rev. edn (Cork, 2001), 41–6, 181–4, 246. For general histories of Australian Catholicism in this period, see Patrick O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community*, 3rd rev. edn (Sydney, 1992); Edmund Campion, *Australian Catholics* (Melbourne, 1987).

6 An editorial in the South Australian weekly Catholic paper, the *Southern Cross*, on 14 March 1890 pointed out that there were two dimensions to St Patrick's Day, one religious and the other national, but in fact it was the latter which predominated in the reports of the festivities the following week. Much attention was paid to the speeches and fundraising activities of two delegates of the Irish Parliamentary Party: *Southern Cross*, 21 March 1890, 7, 9.

7 Cronin and Adair, *Wearing of the Green*, 116–17.

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was uncommon in Australia, and as ties with Ireland loosened St Patrick gradually faded from prominence.[8]

In the 1920s Australian Catholics embraced a new saint from France. There are many possible explanations for the worldwide appeal of Thérèse of Lisieux, the 'Little Flower', not least that she was young, attractive, had lived so recently and had encouraged a model of holiness which was accessible to lay Catholics, one based on small deeds of love rather than great acts of heroism.[9] Above all, perhaps, in Australia the supernaturalism of Catholic piety merged with the national tendency toward pragmatism. Thérèse had promised before her death in 1897 that she would shower blessings like roses from heaven, and by the time of her canonization in 1925 she had gained a reputation as a saint who got results. In 1924 Father Cornelius Crowley set out to build a church and school in Colonel Light Gardens, a new suburb in Adelaide, South Australia. Undeterred by lack of money and parishioners, Crowley appealed for funds (under the guise of 'gifts to St Teresa') in 'the Little Flower's Corner', a weekly column in the diocesan newspaper.[10] The money duly flowed in and an estimated four to five thousand people converged on Colonel Light Gardens in 1925 for the dedication of a shrine to the new saint and the opening of the church-cum-school building named in her honour.[11] An even larger crowd attended the blessing of a separate school building the following year. For the latter event, the enterprising Crowley hired an aeroplane to drop rose petals from the sky. Unfortunately, a strong gust of wind blew most of the petals away, but the resulting disappointment 'was happily relieved by the Archbishop's remark that, though the rose leaves had not come down as expected, the money was going up'.[12]

Clearly the institutional church benefited from Thérèse's cult, but it would be a mistake to accuse Crowley and Archbishop Robert Spence of manipulating it in a cynical manner. They both

[8] O'Farrell, *Irish in Australia*, 184.

[9] On the development of the cult of St Thérèse of Lisieux, see, in this volume, Sophia L. Deboick, 'Céline Martin's Images of Thérèse of Lisieux and the Creation of a Modern Saint', 376–89.

[10] The column began on 8 May 1925 and featured snippets from Thérèse's writings, accounts of miracles attributed to her intercession, and lists of the contributions to the Colonel Light Gardens appeal.

[11] *Southern Cross*, 18 September 1925, 18.

[12] *Southern Cross*, 21 May 1926, 13.

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seem to have developed a genuine devotion to the young saint. Indeed, it is almost impossible to discern in Australia which came first, popular devotion or official promotion of her cult, as both were so closely intertwined.[13] Thérèse indisputably 'struck a chord' with Australian Roman Catholics, but only with Catholics. David Hillard points out that Thérèse's cult:

> demonstrated the huge gap that separated Catholic devotional piety from the English Protestant piety that formed part of the mental world of the great majority of South Australians, with its stress on reading the Bible, hymn singing and preaching. For Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists and Anglicans, the idea of praying to a deceased French nun for material aid was incomprehensible and certainly contrary to their understanding of Scripture. It confirmed their belief that Roman Catholicism fostered religious practices that were essentially idolatrous.[14]

As Father Crowley commented in the 'Little Flower's Corner', albeit in a more triumphalist tone, 'What an inscrutable mystery must not Catholicism appear to those outside the fold!'[15]

By the 1950s it was the turn of Catholics of Anglo-Celtic descent to feel discomfort when they beheld some of the devotional practices of their co-religionists from Europe. Many of the migrants who settled in Australia after the Second World War arrived with 'saints in the suitcase'.[16] The scale of the transformation of the Catholic community can be seen in the archdiocese of Adelaide, where the number of Catholics doubled in a decade. By 1960 a third of the total Catholic population were newcomers

[13] For the cult of Thérèse in Australia, see Katharine Massam, *Sacred Threads: Catholic Spirituality in Australia, 1922–1962* (Sydney, 1996), 127–51.

[14] David Hilliard, '"Little Flower Land": Devotion to St Thérèse in Adelaide in the 1920s', paper presented to the seminar 'Encountering Thérèse', Catholic Theological College, Adelaide, 2 February 2002, 12.

[15] *Southern Cross*, 22 May 1925, 8.

[16] Stefano Girola, 'Saints in the Suitcase: Italian Popular Catholicism in Australia', *Australasian Catholic Record* 80 (2003), 164–74. See also Adrian Pittarello, *'Soup Without Salt': The Australian Catholic Church and the Italian Migrant* (Sydney, 1980); Antonio Paganoni and Desmond O'Connor, *Se la processione va bene … : religiosità populare Italiana nel Sud Australia* (Rome, 1999); Anthony Pagononi, *Valiant Struggles and Benign Neglect. Italians, Church and Religious Societies in Diaspora: The Australian Experience from 1950 to 2000* (New York, 2003).

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who had arrived in the previous twelve years.[17] The new parish which became home to one of the largest Italian congregations in Adelaide was diplomatically named after St Francis of Assisi – everyone knew St Francis – but the church soon filled with statues of more obscure saints like St Rock and St Hilarion. The importance of patron saints in Italian Catholicism can scarcely be overestimated. Rituals associated with the patron saint of a migrant's town or village of origin provided a reassuring sense of continuity amidst the stress of adjusting to life in a new country, as well as an important way of maintaining social networks.[18] This means, however, that the cults fostered neither a sense of Italian national identity nor the successful integration of Italian Catholics into the mainstream Australian Church. Northern Italians were inclined to shrug their shoulders at the feast days of southern Italians which were usually more exuberant than their own, with long outdoor processions, extravagant forms of penance, gunfire and the pinning of jewellery and money onto statues. Anglo-Celtic Catholics were often just embarrassed and bemused. The growth in the popularity of the concept of multiculturalism helped to ease tensions in the 1970s, but the acceptance of exotic feast days by the wider Catholic community probably owed more to pragmatism than anything else. The *feste* proved to be a great way of raising money for the parish church and school.

The first generation of migrant children who went to St Francis of Assisi parish school in Adelaide were taught, like so many other Australian Catholic children in the mid-twentieth century, by Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart. These women belonged to the religious congregation founded in 1866 by the Adelaide diocesan priest, Julian Tenison Woods (1832–89), and the devout young daughter of Scottish migrants, Mary MacKillop (1842–1909). From humble origins in the small rural town of Penola in South Australia, where Woods was parish priest and

[17] Archbishop Beovich calculated in his report to Rome in 1960 that the number of Catholics in his diocese had risen from 66,500 to 120,000, and that 40,000 were recent migrants, a figure which accords with census data collected the following year; the report is in the Adelaide Catholic Archdiocesan Archives: Josephine Laffin, *Matthew Beovich: A Biography* (Adelaide, 2008), 205–13.

[18] See, e.g., the account of devotion to St Hilarion in Daniela Cosmini-Rose and Desmond O'Connor, *Caulonia in the Heart: The Settlement in Australia of Migrants from a Southern Italian Town* (Adelaide, 2008), 68–102.

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Mary taught poor children in a disused stable, the congregation rapidly expanded.[19] It became the most successful manifestation in Australia of the wave of new institutes devoted to education, charitable work and mission which swept through nineteenth-century Roman Catholicism. Teaching poor children remained a primary focus, along with the development of orphanages, refuges for the destitute and other forms of social welfare. In the first five years more than a hundred women joined Mary's enterprise, and by the time she died, the tally was over seven hundred. Her sisters were responsible in 1909 for 117 schools and 12 charitable institutions throughout Australia and New Zealand.[20] Numbers continued to rise until the mid-1960s.

Establishing a successful religious order has been one of the best routes to canonization since the papacy assumed control of the process. One of the reasons for this is that an order or congregation can lobby the Vatican on behalf of its founder over a long period of time.[21] It is not difficult to see why Sisters of St Joseph should strive so eagerly for Mary MacKillop's canonization, and with it the affirmation of their own life's work. What, however, is her appeal for other Australians?

An epic tale of eventual triumph over great difficulties will always attract some interest. In addition to the innumerable challenges associated with ministering in urban slums and remote rural communities, Mary endured ill-health, family tragedy and an estrangement from Woods. In 1871 misunderstandings and jealousies led to her excommunication for disobedience by Bishop Sheil of Adelaide.[22] That the decision was revoked by Sheil shortly before his death in 1872 and subsequently deemed to be invalid did not lessen Mary's pain at the time. Even after 1874, when

[19] For the foundation of the Sisters of St Joseph, see, in addition to the biographies of Mary MacKillop, Marie Therese Foale, *The Josephite Story: The Sisters of St Joseph: Their Foundation and Early History, 1866–1893* (Sydney, 1989); Margaret Press, *Julian Tenison Woods: 'Father Founder'*, 2nd edn (Melbourne, 1994).

[20] The figures for the year of Mary's death come from *Southern Cross*, 10 September 1909, 594. See also Foale, *Josephite Story*, 34, 43.

[21] A point made by Peter Burke, 'How to Become a Counter-Reformation Saint', in David Luebke, ed., *The Counter-Reformation* (Oxford, 1999), 129–42, at 138, 140–1 (first publ. in Kaspar von Greyerz, ed., *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1800* (London, 1984), 45–55).

[22] For Sheil and MacKillop, see Foale, *Josephite Story*, 78–123; Margaret Press, *From Our Broken Toil: South Australian Catholics 1836–1906* (Adelaide, 1986), 182–7.

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she secured Roman approval for her institute, Mary encountered strong opposition from bishops who wanted the Sisters of St Joseph to provide a cheap labour force in their dioceses subject to their control rather than under the central authority of a superior general, as mandated in the rule drawn up in Rome. Bishop Reynolds of Adelaide supported Mary for a time, but forced her to leave his diocese in 1883. Ill-founded rumours that she was an alcoholic contributed to his change of attitude.

Throughout her various trials, Mary demonstrated integrity, courage, compassion, pragmatism and egalitarianism, qualities which Max Harris believed made her a more appropriate symbol of Australian national identity than traditional contenders like Ned Kelly, a nineteenth-century bushranger, and Phar Lap, a race horse during the Great Depression.[23] Although Harris died a week before Mary was beatified in Sydney on 19 January 1995, his conviction that she was an iconic Australian was readily taken up by politicians in speeches in the federal parliament in Canberra on 2 February 1995. In response to Prime Minister Paul Keating's motion acknowledging the beatification and the contribution of Mary MacKillop to Australian society, government backbencher Mary Easson proclaimed: 'As we move towards our next centenary of federation, perhaps we should look to seeing Mary MacKillop as a paradigm of an Australian. Her ingenuity, determination, intelligence and plain stubborn courage are Australian values that are accessible to all Australians, whether Catholic or not.'[24] In his own speech, the Prime Minister interpreted the beatification as the bestowal of 'a great honour on a great Australian'. He was pleased that it involved recognition of the often overlooked role of pioneer women in Australian history: 'In honouring Mary MacKillop His Holiness has honoured all Australian women and, I believe, he is honouring us all.' Perhaps conscious of his own Irish Catholic ancestry, Keating, like Easson, stressed Mary's broad appeal. As two of her greatest benefactors were the Jewish businessman Emanuel Solomon and the Protestant philanthropist and socialite Joanna Barr Smith, he was able to declare that 'in a sectarian age she was avowedly non-sectarian'. Keating was also impressed by Mary's

[23] *Weekend Australian*, 6–7 April 1985, 6.

[24] *House of Representatives Hansard*, 2 February 1995, 365 [online edition] <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/>, accessed 12 June 2009.

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determination to establish an institute with central government rather than one subject to the control of diocesan bishops: 'Years before the federation of the nation, her view was national. She thought as an Australian, in Australian terms.'[25] In a rare display of bipartisanship, the Leader of the Opposition, John Howard, seconded the Prime Minister's motion. After expressing his 'total agreement' with Keating's speech, Howard observed that 'it is to me as a non-Catholic and as a member of the Protestant section of the Australian community very humbling and important that the head of the Catholic Church has seen fit to honour this very distinguished Australian'.[26]

That political leaders should adopt a nationalistic perspective is not surprising. What is a little more curious is that they were following the example of the Pope. After arriving in Sydney on 18 January 1995, Pope John Paul II explicitly declared that 'the honour which the Church will give to Mother Mary MacKillop by declaring her among the Blessed is in a sense an honour given to Australia and its people'.[27] In saying this, the Pope went beyond the trend in the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council to promote saints primarily as role models. With an 'unshakeable conviction in the "exemplary" value of the lives of holy men and women',[28] John Paul strongly encouraged that approach, but he was also concerned about evangelism and inculturation and realized that saints could be useful allies. Hence on 18 January 1995 he did not only express the hope that Australians would be inspired by Mary MacKillop's 'genuine openness to others, hospitality to strangers, generosity to the needy, justice to those unfairly treated, perseverance in the face of adversity, kindness and support to the suffering'. He also identified these as national characteristics: 'Mary MacKillop embodied all that is best in your nation and in its people.'[29] The following day, in his homily at the beatification ceremony at Randwick Racecourse, the Pope told the crowd of

[25] Ibid. 357.

[26] Ibid. 358.

[27] 'Address of His Holiness John Paul II, Kingsford-Smith Airport of Sydney (Australia), Wednesday, 18 January 1995', <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1995/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19950118_arrivo-australia_en.html>, accessed 12 June 2009.

[28] Michael Walsh, *John Paul II* (London, 1994), 254, 292; see also the 1983 Apostolic Constitution *Divinus Perfectionis Magister*.

[29] 'Address of His Holiness', 18 January 1995.

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170,000 that 'the Beatification of Mother Mary MacKillop is a kind of "consecration" of the people of God in Australia. Through her witness the truth of God's love and the values of his kingdom have been made visible in this continent – values which are at the very basis of Australian society.'[30]

'A Nation Consecrated' proclaimed the headline on the front page of the national daily newspaper, the *Australian*, on 20 January 1995. Mary MacKillop's beatification was clearly a publicity triumph for the Roman Catholic Church, which had recently overtaken the Anglican Church as the largest religious body in Australia, with twenty-seven per cent of the population claiming adherence. Since 1995, however, Mary's status as a national icon has proved to be a mixed blessing. It has fostered a sense of entitlement, that a great nation like Australia deserves to have at least one saint, and this has led to impatience with the Vatican and its slow processes. Australians can also feel a vicarious sense of pride in Mary's achievements in the nineteenth century without necessarily wishing to emulate them in the twenty-first.

Moreover, on closer inspection not all aspects of Mary MacKillop's life and piety resonate well with contemporary Australian culture. She refused to criticize her opponents in the hierarchy, and to ease tension with the bishops she obediently relinquished her role as Superior General to a less capable woman for thirteen long years. While such humility and loyalty to the institutional Church cannot have harmed her chances of canonization, they now have limited appeal. The former chief postulator of her cause at the Vatican and author of her official biography, Paul Gardiner, has been accused of defining Mary 'as an idealized woman and saint'.[31] He may well have exaggerated her passive acceptance of suffering and downplayed the extent to which she challenged patriarchal power structures. Nevertheless, this complaint should not be pushed too far. Mary combined a very active ministry

[30] 'Homily of the Holy Father John Paul II, Randwick Racecourse, Sydney, Thursday 19 January 1995', <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19950119_beatificaz-sidney_en.html>, accessed 12 June 2009.

[31] See, e.g., Kathleen McPhillips, 'Post-modern Sainthood: "Hearing the Voice of the Saint" and the Uses of Feminist Hagiography', *Seachanges* 3 (2003) [online journal], <http://www.wsrt.net.au/seachanges/volume3/html/mcphillips.html>, accessed 15 June 2009.

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with what could be called a passive spirituality, one which placed great emphasis on trust in divine providence. Humility, poverty, obedience and chastity were virtues which meant much to her, even if they are not very fashionable today. She associated them with her beloved St Joseph. Male hagiographers have not simply imposed an outdated stereotype of feminine goodness onto her. The name which she chose for herself, 'Sister Mary of the Cross', implies that from the very beginning of her religious life she accepted suffering and self-sacrifice as part of Christian discipleship. Mary MacKillop is thus an ambiguous role model for feminists.

There is also the issue of miracles. Before Mary was beatified, the Catholic Church required evidence that a miracle had taken place as a result of her intercession, and the verification in 2009 of a second physical cure paved the way for her canonization. Both cases involved unexpected recovery from cancer, and represent healings which cannot be explained by scientific means. The thaumaturgical aspect of sainthood, which featured so prominently in medieval piety, retains a significant appeal. On any day of the week, a steady stream of people enter the Mary MacKillop Memorial Chapel in North Sydney and pray before Mary's tomb. On one occasion when I was there a large family group unsuccessfully tried to coax a severely disabled child to relinquish a bunch of flowers and place it on the tomb. It was obvious that they were not there merely to pay their respects to a national icon.

On the other hand, amidst the favourable accounts of the beatification ceremony in 1995, one newspaper editorial noted the 'considerable uneasiness' felt by non-Catholics when the subject of miracles was raised.[32] That was probably an understatement. On Easter Monday 2009 a young Irishman's surprising emergence from a seven-month coma generated a flurry of newspaper reports in Australia (where he had been injured), Ireland and other parts of the world as his family expressed gratitude to Mary MacKillop for her intercession. Ninety-six comments were added to the Australian Broadcasting Commission's internet page devoted to the story on 13 April. Most denounced the notion that a miracle could have taken place ('I think it somewhat ungracious in the least for the family not to focus their praise and thanks on the medical profession'). Some were sarcastic ('It is a pity St Mary didn't intervene

[32] *Advertiser*, 20 January 1995, 10.

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to prevent him being bashed into a coma in the first place'), and a few vented their prejudice against the Catholic Church ('[it is] an almost blasphemous offence to raise Mary MacKillop to the level of a deity and pray to her'; 'Mary MacKillop is another part of Catholic nutty folklore').[33]

Such disbelief and misunderstandings have not stopped other traditional aspects of the cult of saints from flourishing in twenty-first century Australia. Pilgrimages are made to places associated with Mary, including the shrines (diplomatically known as 'Mary MacKillop Centres') which the Sisters of St Joseph have established in each state. Holy cards and other pious souvenirs are available for sale. In Penola local Catholic men have made wooden crosses from the floorboards of the schoolroom built for Mary in 1867. Other more highly prized relics include the fragments of her original cedar coffin which fell away from the lead lining when Mary's body was moved to its current tomb in 1993. Liturgical services are held annually on her feast day, 8 August, and the hundredth anniversary of her death on 8 August 2009 was commemorated with a variety of special events.

Many are the statues, paintings and stained glass windows which now carry Mary's image. Artists have responded enthusiastically to the challenge of representing a nineteenth-century nun and twenty-first century saint. Brisbane's diocesan shrine is located in the oldest church building in Queensland. St Stephen's Chapel was built in the late 1840s, probably according to a design by the Gothic Revivalist architect Augustus Welby Pugin. The neo-Gothic apse is now dominated by John Elliot's timber sculpture of Mary. A leaflet available in the chapel explains that the rough bark is intended to evoke the Australian bush and the wooden hut in which Mary opened her first school, as well as her 'tough pioneering spirit' and resolute faith in God. While acknowledging that Mary lived most of her life in towns and cities, painter Robert Juniper also chose a bush theme, setting the founder of the Sisters of St Joseph against the iconic backdrop of the Australian outback, his work 'a modern gothic icon' with gum trees against gold leaf.[34]

[33] 'Bashing victim's recovery "the work of Mary MacKillop" ', ABC News, 13 April 2009, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/04/13/2541282.htm>, accessed 12 June 2009.

[34] Andrew Wilson, ed., *Mary MacKillop: A Tribute* (Sydney, 1995), 52.

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St Stephen's Chapel and Juniper's icon bring together important strands in Mary's cult, most notably the somewhat uneasy coexistence of her status as a national icon with traditional aspects of Catholic piety inherited from the Middle Ages. If Mary Helen MacKillop really is a saint for all Australians (or at least for a great many of us), it can only be because sainthood has multiple meanings today. Beatification and canonization can be seen as little more than rather strange honours bestowed posthumously on a person of outstanding virtue and achievement. However, older understandings of the saint as a powerful intercessor and miracle worker still have meaning for some and appear as absurd or idolatrous to others. So while at one level Mary MacKillop's popularity demonstrates how well integrated Catholics have become in Australian society, it also contributes to ongoing tensions.

As Australia's first officially proclaimed Catholic saint, Mary MacKillop occupies a unique place in Australian history, but she was only one of 1,341 men and women beatified by Pope John Paul II. A further 482 were canonized during his pontificate.[35] Given this large pool of saints and blessed, exploring the role of sanctity in the modern world should be an interesting and fruitful exercise for historians in years to come. What can be concluded here is that the case of Mary MacKillop provides a remarkable example, along with earlier forms of devotion to saints in Australia, of both the resilience and the adaptability of the cult of saints through Christian history.

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[35] See, in this volume, Michael Walsh, 'Pope John Paul II and his Canonizations', 415–37.

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