"Innocence and Penitence Hand Clasped In Hand":
Australian Catholic Refuges For Penitent Women, 1848-1914

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ABSTRACT

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Catholic religious sisters in each of what became the Australian states opened a refuge for penitent women - those who bore the stigma of disgrace through failing to meet society’s standards of female sexual behaviour.

Their transgressions may have taken the form of working as a prostitute, becoming pregnant outside of marriage, being known to have engaged in pre-marital or extra-marital sexual activity, or of demonstrating a likelihood of engaging in one of these activities.

This thesis contends that for several decades the object of the refuges was to serve the immediate material and spiritual needs of the women, but that through the influence of secular domestic ideology and evangelical Protestantism, the reformers changed their aim to inculcating the penitents with the values of feminine propriety and social usefulness.

It aims to show compassion for the penitent women and empathy with the reformers who tried to alleviate their suffering. However, it will be critical of the social structure that created inequality of wealth between classes and inequality of opportunity between the sexes, and of the moral code that set narrow limits for acceptable female activity and strict censure of any deviation.
DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Kellie Louise Toole and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Kellie Toole: ____________________________ Date: ____________________
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<td>Archdiocesan Catholic Archives of Adelaide, SA.</td>
<td>ACAA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Archives of the Religious Sisters of Mercy, Adelaide, SA.</td>
<td>ARSM</td>
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<td>Archives of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, NSW.</td>
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INTRODUCTION

The *Annals of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan* records that on a Sydney street in 1848 Father Farrelly, O.S.B., met a woman who was tired of a life of sin and shame and begged him to help her find a place where she could rest her body and rescue her soul. Farrelly placed her under the care of Mrs. Blake, a kindly Catholic woman, who soon took in six more women who were escaping lives of sin. On hearing of the work, Archbishop Polding “saw the urgent necessity of a Home where these poor creatures might permanently remain and contribute in some way towards their up-keep.” He engaged the Irish Sisters of Charity to assist Mrs. Blake to establish a more permanent community and thus founded the first Australian refuge for penitent women.¹ Farrelly and Polding confronted in 1848 the problem that the Catholic clergy in all the Australian capital cities faced during the late nineteenth century. The Benedictine clergymen also adopted the same solution as the Catholic communities in each of the other states. The problem was the existence of women whose sexual behaviour did not accord with secular or religious standards of feminine propriety. Sexual experience was only acceptable in chaste wives or widows. Any woman who had worked as a prostitute, fallen pregnant outside marriage, become a victim of rape or

¹Archives of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, New South Wales, hereafter referred to as ASGS, *Annals of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St. Benedict, 1857-1938* (typeset, 1968), p. 5. The *Annals* is a single, bound volume compiled by Sister Mary de Sales Smith in the 1930s and typeset in 1968. It is a compilation of letters, convent records and newspaper clippings with the commentary of Smith linking the primary sources. I verified the 1968 version of nineteenth-century sources with originals where possible and always found them accurate. I have accepted the comments of Smith for details of the founding of the House of the Good Shepherd that I could not find in primary material. Smith’s version draws on oral history and is romanticised but still reliable.
seduction, or consented to pre-marital or extra-marital sexual relations was deviant and outcast, and considered a „fallen woman”.

All of those women and girls who demonstrated signs of sexual precocity, if not activity, attracted the attention of Catholic reformers. However, women from two categories accounted for most of the residents of the refuges throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century. The first group consisted of women who earned their living through prostitution. The refuges admitted prostitutes at any stage of their career and many of the women entered the refuges when they were no longer able to support themselves as prostitutes rather than when they experienced a desire for moral reform. The second group was comprised of less debased women. These were „girls in danger of falling into sin”. They might have been as young as twelve or thirteen without any sexual experience but have been in the habit of associating with boys or men against the wishes of their parents. Their families or the courts or police placed them with the sisters to protect their virtue and prepare them to lead a more sedate life. Also in this category were women who had progressed from this stage and had engaged in sexual activity, which might have resulted in pregnancy, but not been degraded by the traffic in sex.

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2In this thesis the term „reformer” describes the members of the Catholic community who worked for the refuges in any official capacity. This includes the sisters who were responsible for the daily operation of the homes and the clergy who supported them and made policy decisions. These two groups determined the official philosophies of the refuges. The Catholic press handled publicity and much of the fund-raising and the newspapers in each state presented the views and actions of the clergy and the sisters to the public. There are no examples throughout the sixty-six year period where the views of the press differed from those of the clergy or the sisters so I use articles and editorials from Catholic newspapers as examples of the views of the „reformers”.

3Some women in the refuges did not fit into one of these categories. Some were unemployed
refuges varied in their acceptance of women who had become mothers without becoming wives. Some welcomed unmarried mothers and provided special facilities for the delivery and care of their babies while others accepted women who had already given birth but made other arrangements for their babies.  

The solution the reformers proposed to cope with the existence of fallen women was to create refuges where women could receive physical and spiritual comfort and moral, religious and domestic training from religious sisters. The refuges allowed women to make the important transition from „fallen woman” to „penitent woman”. The Catholic communities in each of the Australian states established one such refuge between 1848 and 1902.

The House of the Good Shepherd, Sydney, New South Wales, was established in 1848. The sisters transferred the bulk of their work to Saint Magdalen’s Retreat, Tempe, New South Wales in 1887. The Irish Sisters of Charity worked with fallen women on the streets of Sydney during the 1840s. They planned to place the women directly into domestic service with carefully chosen families but this method did not prove successful and they decided an institution would be preferable. Archbishop Polding engaged girls without family in the city, some had physical or intellectual handicaps, some were alcoholics, others were deserted wives and others needed refuge from abusive husbands. The sisters sheltered these women because nobody else did but the refuges did not exist for them. The reformers did not include them in the official aims and records of the homes so I have not included them in this study.

4The Australian Catholic reformers maintained a distinction between the women in these groups. The case was different in Britain where reformers attached the label of „prostitute” to promiscuous women who may not have considered themselves prostitutes.

5ASGS, letter from Mr. P.M. Stallard, House of the Good Shepherd - Reverend J.B. Laughton, Secretary, Sydney Female Refuge Society, 25 January 1849.
the Sisters of Charity to establish a permanent community to relieve Mrs. Blake from sole care of the penitent women. Mother Mary Ignatius Gibbons acquired the „Carter’s Barracks” in Pitt Street that had been a convict shelter and a military depot. In 1853 she also acquired the adjacent grounds and buildings of the Debtors Prison. Archbishop Polding appointed Mother Mary Ignatius, her sister Sister Mary Scholastica Gibbons and Sister Mary Teresa Walsh to run the institution. The home was first called the House of Refuge and then the House of the Good Shepherd but was frequently referred to as the Pitt Street Refuge. One night in 1853 Mother Mary Ignatius and Sister Mary Teresa both died suddenly as a result of influenza or consumption, and Sister Mary Scholastica, Mrs. Blake and two other lay women were left to run the refuge. The convent of the Sisters of Charity could not afford to release any more sisters to work in the home so Archbishop Polding successfully applied to Rome for permission to found the first order of Australian sisters. In 1857 he instituted the Sisters of the Good Shepherd but later changed the name to the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of Saint Benedict to avoid confusion with the French Sisters of the Good Shepherd.6

The area around the Pitt Street refuge became more industrialised and in the 1880s the sisters sought a quieter place away from the city to continue their work. They purchased the Tempe Estate that had been used by Caroline Chisholm in the 1860s as an Educational Establishment for Young Ladies, and established Saint Magdalen’s Retreat. A group of twenty-five

penitents arrived from Pitt Street on 16 October 1887. The House of the Good Shepherd was used as a receiving home until 1901 and then closed.7 The sisters established the Good Samaritan Refuge, Saint Magdalen’s, known as “Mount Magdala”, in Buckingham Street in the city in 1903 so that women would still have a home that was readily accessible. In most cases, the sisters transferred the penitents to Tempe shortly after their admission to Mount Magdala.

The **Magdalen Asylum, Abbotsford, Victoria**, was established in 1863. During the late 1850s Bishop Goold became “anxious about the „strayed sheep”” of Melbourne.8 He was concerned about the number of women living on the streets and the suicide rate among young women. In 1859 he wrote to Mother Euphrasia Pelletier, the Superioress of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in France, requesting that she send sisters to Victoria. Those sisters had been working with penitent women in France since Mother Euphrasia founded the order for the purpose in 1833. The demands of their work in other parts of the world prevented Mother Euphrasia from sending sisters in response to Goold’s first request but she was able to assist him in 1862. Four Irish sisters arrived in June 1863 and settled on a large property in Abbotsford. They received their first postulant and first penitent in August and established not only a magdalene asylum but also a reformatory for girls

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referred from the courts or the police and a preservation class for girls in
danger of falling into sin. It became the largest magdalene asylum in the
Southern Hemisphere and generally held more than three times the number
of penitent women sheltered in the other large Australian Catholic refuges.\(^9\)
The Sisters of the Good Shepherd opened a branch refuge in South
Melbourne called the Rosary Place Magdalen Asylum. It was a sizeable
operation but the heart of the work of the sisters was at Abbotsford.

The **Catholic Female Refuge, Adelaide, South Australia**, was established in
1868. Mary MacKillop and Julian Tenison Woods established the Sisters of
Saint Joseph in 1867 and the sisters immediately began weekly visits to the
women in the Adelaide Gaol. They realised that many women would reform
their lives if they had an alternative to life on the streets so resolved to
establish a refuge for them. The local Catholic clergy and community
appointed a committee of management in October 1867 and placed the
sisters in charge of the general running of the refuge. They rented Finnis
Cottage in Franklin Street in Adelaide to serve as temporary accommodation.
In March 1868 the refuge opened with two women recently released from
gaol. In the following month two Josephites took over the residential
management of the refuge, replacing two Catholic matrons who had been
living there and working under the supervision of the sisters. By May the
sisters were in complete charge of the refuge and had twenty-four penitent
women in their care. The Franklin Street premises became too small and in

1870 the refuge moved to Mitcham, a suburb some distance from the city. The water supply was inadequate in this position and its distance from Adelaide adversely affected the trade in the laundry they had established to support the institution. This period coincided with the attempts by the local clergy to excommunicate Mary MacKillop and to disband the Josephite order and this also damaged the work of the refuge. It relocated for a short time to William Street, Norwood, and thrived and moved again to Queen Street, Norwood, in 1872 to a position near the Jesuits’ Saint Ignatius’ Church. This property also became too small so in 1901 they moved to an eleven-acre property on Wattle Street, Fullarton, which was previously a Jam Factory. The refuge remained in this location.\textsuperscript{10} A motion was accepted by the Committee of Management in 1883 that the refuge would be called the Magdalen Asylum but it never was.\textsuperscript{11}

The \textbf{Holy Cross Retreat, Lutwyche, Queensland}, was established in 1889. Bishop O’Quinn was preoccupied with the need for an institution for penitent women from 1877 but due to a shortage of available sisters it was more than a decade before the Sisters of Mercy opened the refuge in Lutwyche in his honour.\textsuperscript{12} The sisters did not have a special vocation but

\textsuperscript{10}Southern Cross and South Australian Catholic Herald, 20 November 1867-20 April 1868; Private collection of Marie Foale, R.S.J., hereafter referred to as MF, \textit{A Short Account of the Institutions Under the Care of the Sisters of St Joseph}, c.1905, pp. 4-6. Most of the papers in the possession of Sister Marie are photocopies of records in the Archives of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, Kensington, South Australia. I was denied permission to use the archives.

\textsuperscript{11}ACAA, \textit{The Refuge, Norwood, Minute Book, October 1883 - November 1896}; 29 October 1883.

\textsuperscript{12}Mercy Centre, Archives of the Religious Sisters of Mercy, Queensland, hereafter referred to
were dedicated to “the service of the Poor, Sick, and Ignorant.” The opened a maternity home on the property at the same time as the refuge especially to house mothers and infants together.

The **Magdalen Home, Sandy Bay, Tasmania**, also called Mount Saint Canice refuge, was established in 1893. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd established the Magdalen Home at Sandy Bay as a branch of the Abbotsford asylum and they ran it on the same principles and out of the same concerns. It was the only refuge in Australia that did not attract immediate and warm support from the local community. Tasmanians were reluctant to support a charity for prostitutes and prisoners. The growth of the asylum was slow in the early stages and there were few applications for admission. However, through the continued, although qualified, support of the local Catholic press, the Catholic and non-Catholic public began to offer their support. The local courts also began using the refuge as an alternative to goal and the numbers of admissions gradually grew.

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The Magdalen Home, Leederville, Western Australia, was established in 1902. Bishop Matthew Gibney was concerned at the number of women adopting immoral lives after the discovery of gold in Western Australia increased the prosperity and population of the colony in the late 1880s. He tried without success in 1892 and again in 1897 to persuade the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Abbotsford to found a branch refuge in Western Australia as they had done in Tasmania. In 1898 he visited the Mother House of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in France and in the following year the Suprioress General in Angers authorised the Provincial Superior of Australia to establish a convent in Western Australia. After some difficulty securing a suitable site the Bishop approved an appropriate place in Leederville and two sisters arrived from Victoria in 1902. The sisters found temporary accommodation in Adelaide Terrace in September 1902 while negotiations and building took place. In the following month they received their first penitent and when they moved to Leederville in September 1904 they had twenty penitent women and four sisters.17

These seven refuges are the subjects of this thesis.18 The scope of the thesis is from 1848, the year of the establishment of the first refuge in Australia, until


I favour the term “refuge” and use it throughout to refer to the institutions.

18Catholic sisters also undertook work with penitent women, mainly unmarried mothers, in other ways. They offered care to women in special maternity wards in some hospitals and also ran receiving homes and foundling homes or hospitals in most states. The most prominent of these homes were the Josephite’s Receiving Home in Carlton, Victoria, the Foundling Home, Waitara, New South Wales, and the Infant’s Home, Ashfield, New South Wales. The sisters ran the foundling homes on the same principles as the refuges but the
1914, when the First World War brought significant social changes to Australia.

The admissions registers for the refuges indicate that women from Australia, New Zealand, England, Scotland, Ireland, North America, Poland, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Yugoslavia, Italy, Spain, India, Germany, France and South Africa sought shelter with the sisters in the period 1848 to 1914. During this time the refuges housed girls and women aged from their teens to their eighties. Most of the penitents were between twenty and forty and a significant number were in their fifties and sixties.\(^1^9\) There was a consistent and demonstrable demand for the refuges and all the homes received a steadily increasing number of penitents. The case studies of New South Wales and South Australia, for which there are the most detailed records, show the demands placed on the Australian refuges. In 1849, the year after the House of the Good Shepherd was established in Sydney, ten women were resident.\(^2^0\) On 31 December 1855, the refuge housed forty penitent women, and during the course of the year forty-five “voluntary applicants infants rather than their mothers were the prime focus. For example, the sisters intended that Waitara should house just babies and began accepting the mothers only when they realised that many of the women were in dire need of shelter. Although these homes share features with the refuges, the priorities of the foundling homes, the short-term aims of the receiving homes and the concentration of them both on unmarried mothers differentiate them from the refuges and so I have not included them.

\(^1^9\)The Sisters, 1885-1985, passim; The Refuge, Norwood, Minute Book, passim; ASGS, Tempe/Arncliffe Register, 1887-1918, passim; ASGS, Inmates Book, Mount Magdala Refuge, 1903-1936, passim; ACAA, 1870s (Diary), Refuge, Fullarton, 10 January 1873 - 17 September 1873. The diary was kept by a sister who did not identify herself. Her knowledge of the full names of the penitent women indicates that she held a responsible position within the refuge. The diary was kept just following the move of the refuge from Mitcham to Norwood; ACAA, Report on Attendance at Religious Instruction, 1879-1883, passim; ASGS, Pitt Street, Register, 1879-1901, passim.

\(^2^0\)Letter from P.M. Stallard - Reverend J.B. Laughton, 25 January 1849.
were refused admission for want of room and means.”

In October 1862 Reverend Sheehy announced in a pastoral letter that since the establishment of the refuge fourteen years earlier the sisters had sheltered over twelve hundred women. When the Sisters of the Good Samaritan moved the bulk of their work to Saint Magdalen’s Retreat, Tempe, in 1887, twenty-five penitent women accompanied them. By 1890 there were forty-three women in residence and the original quarters were adapted to house twice the original number of penitents. The demands on the sisters at Tempe increased during the years of depression and following the closure of the Pitt Street refuge and there were occasions when two hundred women were sheltered at Saint Magdalen’s Retreat at a time.

When W.W. Hewett, the Secretary of the Catholic Female Refuge, issued the First Yearly Report in 1869, there had already been one hundred admissions to the South Australian refuge. There were ten penitents at the time the report was issued but forty-two women had been resident at one point during the year. As demonstrated in Table 1, the numbers of penitent women steadily rose. In 1911 Archbishop O’Reily scrutinised the records of the Catholic Female Refuge for the period 1877 to 1910 and determined that the sisters sheltered 2,083 women and 300 babies in that period. He rued the loss of the early records of the home but estimated that an additional 600 women had been resident between 1868 and 1877. He considered that a

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21 *Annals of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan*, p. 3. Return of the Number of Females in the House of the Good Shepherd on 31st December, 1855.
22 ASGS, Dr Sheehy, Vicar-General to Archbishop Polding, Pastoral Letter, 3 October 1862.
23 *The Sisters*, 1885-1985, pp. 7-16.
24 *Southern Cross and South Australian Catholic Herald*, 20 March 1869, p. 290.
A conservative estimate.\textsuperscript{25} A similar trend was apparent in the other refuges. At the beginning of 1866, three years after the establishment of the Abbotsford refuge in Victoria, there were forty-seven penitents in the home and seventy-three women had been admitted throughout the year.\textsuperscript{26} The Catholic Directory recorded that in 1892 300 women were sheltered at Abbotsford and in 1914 375 women were resident.\textsuperscript{27} The Holy Cross Retreat in Brisbane maintained a steady population of approximately seventy women until the turn of the century, then it climbed and settled at the level of approximately eighty-five adults and thirty babies by 1914.\textsuperscript{28} After a quiet first decade, Mount Saint Canice refuge held fifty-seven penitent women in 1902 and doubled that number to accommodate 124 women by 1914.\textsuperscript{29} In 1903, when the Catholic Directory first referred to the Magdalen Home in Western Australia, there were twelve women in the refuge. In twelve years time, 100 women were in the care of the sisters.\textsuperscript{30} Table 2 demonstrates the growth in the number of admissions to all the refuges between 1883 and 1912.

Catholics across Australia did not often discuss the founding and operation of the refuges yet they responded in perfect uniformity when confronted with fallen women. The support that Australia’s first cardinal,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Southern Cross}, 3 February 1911, p. 89.
\item \textit{Argus}, 2 July 1867.
\item \textit{The Catholic Directory, and Almanac, for the Clergy and Laity in Victoria, 1863-1914}.
\item \textit{Ibid.}, 1891-1914.
\item \textit{Ibid.}, 1900-1914.
\item \textit{Ibid.}, 1903-1914. The statistical records for all the refuges are unreliable. The sisters did not always keep detailed records and did not always maintain or preserve the records they did keep. The figures that are available are incomplete and in some cases conflicting. They are, however, still useful to indicate the general scope of the work, demonstrate trends and show the comparative sizes of the institutions.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Patrick Francis Moran, offered to all the refuges following his appointment in 1885 provided some consistency and reformers.

**TABLE 1**

**Number of Penitent Women in the Catholic Female Refuge, 1883 - 1912**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Penitents</th>
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<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>1884</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<td>1911</td>
<td>85</td>
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<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>95</td>
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</table>

**Notes:** The trends were the same in the other states but the sources are insufficient to tabulate. The availability of sources for South Australia determined the scope of this table.

**Sources:** Reports and Annual Reports of the Catholic Female Refuge, 1883 - 1912, Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart, 1883 – 1884; Southern Cross, 1889 - 1912.
could use newspaper reports to keep informed of practices in other states. The three refuges run by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd were, predictably, almost identical but they differed little from the homes run by the three other orders of religious sisters. The long Catholic tradition of institutionalising fallen women, whom Catholics preferred to call penitents or magdalenes, made this possible. Papal bulls of Gregory IX and Innocent IV recorded the existence of religious communities in thirteenth-century Germany where penitent women could reform their sinful lives. In *The Evolution of Women’s Asylums Since 1500* Sherrill Cohen argues that Catholics in France, Germany and Italy founded refuges for ex-prostitutes as early as the twelfth century.\(^{31}\) She concentrates on three Tuscan refuges established between the 1330s and 1604 and demonstrates that during this period Catholic authorities founded such homes to reclaim or protect the souls and social positions of women.\(^{32}\) Colin Jones and Ann Daughtry argue that this trend continued well after this time. Their studies of fallen women and girls in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France show that convents in that country engaged penitent women in domestic activities with the same aims as the earlier Italian homes.\(^{33}\) Other works confirm that by this time religious sisters were running similar refuges outside the European continent. The research of Maria Luddy into women and charitable organisations in Ireland reveals that

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\(^{32}\)Ibid., pp. 34-118.

were all running refuges in that country by the middle of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{34} In her discussion of the work of the Good Shepherd sisters in New York state, Joan Mullaney demonstrates that Catholic refuges proliferated across North America from early in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{35} Margaret Tennant documents in a study of women’s homes in New Zealand that by 1886 the Catholic community had opened a refuge in Christchurch.\textsuperscript{36} The practice had become entrenched over centuries and evolved into the sanctioned Catholic response to fallen women. By adopting institutionalisation as the primary response to deviants of all types, evangelical Protestant and secular reformers confirmed the suitability of refuges for penitent women.

Catholics in mid nineteenth-century Australia inherited this tradition from continental Europe and adapted it to suit local conditions. They removed much of the severity and austerity that characterised the contemporary refuges in France and did not encourage all penitent women to remain within the home for life. The Australian reformers were less concerned with female honour and less willing to profit from the gains of prostitution than were reformers in Italy. The refuges in Australia demonstrated more concern with retraining women to enter or to re-enter domestic service and more willingness to shelter the illegitimate babies of

\textsuperscript{36}Margaret Tennant, “Magdalens and Moral Imbeciles?: Women’s Homes in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand”, in Barbara Brookes, Charlotte MacDonald and Margaret Tennant, eds., \textit{Women in History II} (Wellington, NZ., 1992), pp. 49-75.
their penitents than did homes in Europe. However, despite the differences evident between countries and over periods of time, all the Catholic refuges shared distinctive features. The reformers believed that the world was a dangerous place and that due to a combination of personal and social factors some women would stray from a moral life. Catholic reformers agreed that women who had strayed should be removed from corrupting influences, offered the opportunity to repent for their sins and be given instruction that would reduce the likelihood of their returning to a life of immorality. They believed that refuges run by firm but kind Catholic religious sisters offering shelter for a protracted period were the most effective means of assisting fallen women.

The literature of the refuges provides a comprehensive account of the reasons for founding the homes, their aims, the means employed to reform the women and the motivations of the reformers. The South Australian Catholic paper, the Southern Cross: A Weekly Record of Catholic, Irish and General Intelligence, recorded in 1897 that from “time immemorial the angels of charity, under the sheltering guise of the religious habit, have gone into the slums to brighten the dismal lives of those whom a base seducer and a cruel world have wantonly cast adrift.” 37 According to the reformers and the Catholic press, this precedent plus “pure, unselfish, womanly love”38 and “pity for the helpless of their sex”39 motivated the sisters to work with the

37 Southern Cross, 26 November 1897, p. 590.
38 Catholic Record, 1 October 1880, p. 9.
penitents. The commentators argued that the sisters wanted to “turn these poor unfortunates from their path of sin, and lead them to the commission of better deeds.”\footnote{Southern Cross, 26 November 1897, p. 590.} The primary sources create a total portrait of the history and operation of the refuges.\footnote{I have integrated nineteenth-century language into the text where possible to convey the tone evident in the records and not to support the moral judgements the reformers made when they used terms such as “sinful past”, “evil lifestyle” or “abandoned and degraded woman”.} They depict a situation where compassion for humanity and devotion to Christ moved the religious sisters gently and selflessly to restore their fallen sisters to physical health and spiritual hope. They argue that the aim of the sisters was to provide the penitent women with the strength and virtue to withstand the temptations of the world and to make a positive, moral contribution to society. Modern commentators greet this portrayal with cynicism.

This cynical response creates problems for scholars because it casts doubt on the only available evidence for the topic. Some scholars of institutions examining women’s refuges deal with the problem by referring to sociological models. Linda Mahood’s studies of magdalene asylums in Victorian Scotland and the work of Nicole Rafter on the Western House of Refuge in Albion, New York, take this approach.\footnote{Linda Mahood, “The Magdalene’s Friend: Prostitution and Social Control in Glasgow, 1869-1890”, Women’s Studies International Forum, Vol. 13 (1990), pp. 49-61; Nicole Hahn Rafter, “Chastising the Unchaste: Social Control Functions of a Women’s Reformatory, 1894-1931”, in Stanley Cohen and Andrew Scull, eds., Social Control and the State: Historical and Comparative Essays (Oxford, 1985), p. 289.} They introduce gender analysis to their understanding of class-based social control theories and technologies of power and conclude that the actions of the reformers were “deeply political” and the refuge was an “apparatus designed for the
surveillance, sexual and vocational control, and moral reform of a segment of
the female working-class population.” Historians use less rigid models
than sociologists but they do employ theory, particularly the analysis of class
and gender, to gain insight into the actions of reformers. In her study of
prostitution in Victorian Britain, Judith Walkowitz argues that philanthropic
acts were politically motivated and were designed to impose middle-class
values and structures of authority on to working-class populations. Lynn
Nead contends in her study of representations of fallen women in pre-
Raphaelite paintings that in England in the nineteenth century there was an
“attempt to bring the masses into accord with bourgeois morality - a process
of social colonisation which produced a particular working-class version of
the feminine ideal.” According to these analyses women’s refuges were
means of both controlling the working-class women whose behaviour did
not fit sexual and vocational expectations and intimidating other women into
conforming to approved standards.

The insights and analyses of these historians and sociologists have
been valuable in my search for a methodology that would guide my research
and provide a framework to evaluate critically the primary sources but not
simplify or pre-determine my findings. This thesis contends that the social

43Mahood, “Magdalene’s Friend”, p. 50. Mahood and Rafter draw on the analysis of a range
of functionalist sociologists, sociologists of crime and deviance, social control theorists and
other analysts including Michel Foucault, Michael Ignatieff and Jacques Donzelot. This
thesis has drawn on these analyses, but the concerns and the approach of this work are
fundamentally different to those of such theorists The sources for Australian Catholic
refuges have not been examined by a sociologist or a social theorist. The topic would
certainly benefit from attention from a theorist who would have entirely different interests
and methodologies and produce a thesis very different from this one.
45Lynn Nead, “The Magdalen in Modern Times: The Mythology of Fallen Women in Pre-
Raphaelite Painting”, in Rosemary Betterton, ed., Looking On: Images of Femininity in the

- 18 -
relations of nineteenth-century Australia engendered an inequality of wealth between classes and an inequality of opportunity between the sexes that disadvantaged women economically. It also asserts that the consequent distribution of power enabled members of the middle class to define and enforce acceptable standards of female sexual and vocational propriety, allowing them to censure working-class women for adopting a lifestyle that often resulted from economic vulnerability. My discussion of these ideas draws on class and feminist analysis and these approaches have provided this thesis with a useful organising principle. Class and feminist analysis do not, however, inform this whole work because I do not believe that either of these perspectives, or any other, offers a complete account of the refuges or the motivations of the reformers.

Most scholarship in the area of refuges for women focuses on evangelical Protestant homes or government refuges run by evangelical Protestant reformers or secular committees. The Catholic refuges in Australia do not fit as neatly into a model of middle-class domination as do the Protestant homes. The position of most Catholics in the mid-nineteenth century was socially and economically precarious. The sisters running the homes and the clergy who supported them had only a slightly stronger connection with the values and authority of the middle class than did their congregations. Drunken priests and impoverished sisters were part of an Irish Catholic social landscape. The attitudes of the clergy and religious

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46 A variety of studies that address such refuges are included in the bibliography. They include the well-known works of Kathleen Heasman, David Owen, Nancy F. Cott, Frances Finnegan and Olive Checkland that cover nineteenth-century British and American evangelical philanthropy.
sisters toward sexual behaviour, especially that of women, did resemble the views of the Protestant middle class by the early twentieth century but their proximity to working-class culture removed much sting from their response to misdemeanours. The similarity of the Catholic refuges across Australia provides an illustration of the limited role that class difference played in shaping the character of the homes. The Sisters of Saint Joseph were from the poorly educated and socially and economically marginalised Adelaide working class yet they ran their refuge in the same way as the Sisters of Mercy and Sisters of the Good Shepherd, most of whom were well educated and socially well connected women from Ireland and France. The reformers did, however, harbour bourgeois aspirations either for themselves or for the Catholic community as a whole and often defended middle-class attitudes toward female sexuality as enthusiastically as did the members of the Protestant middle class. They also occupied a position of authority over the penitents within the refuges and were usually at some advantage socially. They did, therefore, participate in a form of gender-based class struggle.

This thesis attributes to the reformers a range of motivations and impulses that lie beyond the scope of class and feminist analysis. Sociologists and feminist historians such as Nead and Walkowitz reject or ignore the official statements issued by the reformers stressing their concern with the spiritual and physical protection of the penitents. Some Australian historians of philanthropy and charity take this approach and their arguments border on what Joan Higgins terms in her discussion of social policy development in Britain and America “conspiracy theory of welfare” or
In her study of ruling-class women in the eastern states of Australia between 1788 and 1850, Elizabeth Windschuttle argues that the real interest of philanthropic women was “teaching the lower orders the habits of obedience and submission” and that their actions were “attempts to create a system of social control.” Richard Kennedy states in his article on charity and ideology in colonial Victoria that for reformers the term “care” was “a euphemism ... for quite sinister things”. He likens the charitable network to a spider’s web and argues that the “point is that the spider spins its web for its own purposes in order to survive: to catch, paralyse and consume insects” and while “spider onlookers may wish to perceive that spiders help insects, or fulfil the needs of insects .... Categorically we may state that is not the case.”

I do not accept that these views offer a complete account of the motivations of the Catholic reformers and I reject the heavy-handed class analysis of Windschuttle and Kennedy. This thesis is not the work of the “liberationist historian” that he hoped in 1982 would arrive and investigate the “scandalously cruel and sexist refuges” in Victoria. It has more in common with the work of Sherrill Cohen and with Barbara Brenzel’s study of the reform of wayward girls in nineteenth-century Massachusetts. These

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50 Ibid., p. 65.
51 Barbara Brenzel, “Domestication as Reform: A Study of the Socialization of Wayward
historians accept that a deep and genuine sense of charity or humanitarianism accompanied the political motives of the reformers. They do not assume that because the result of some reform activities was to disadvantage women or members of the working class that this had to be the intention of the reformers. Instead, they consider the role of flawed assumptions about the needs of individuals and communities and the general difficulties of administering social welfare. Like the work of Anne O’Brien on the poor in New South Wales, this study attempts to treat the reformers with compassion and understand them, as much as the recipients of their charity, within the context of their class and time.\footnote{Anne O’Brien, \textit{Poverty’s Prison: The Poor in New South Wales, 1880-1918} (Melbourne, 1988), \textit{passim}.}

I have concluded, like most historians, that the period of institutionalisation in the refuges was an intrusion in the lives of many young women and that some of the measures employed by the reformers were harmful to the penitents’ sense of identity and unnecessarily disruptive to their ties to community and family. However, I not only support the comment of Judith Godden that the continuous applications for admission indicate that for many women the refuges served a vital function,\footnote{Judith Godden, “Philanthropy and the Woman’s Sphere, Sydney, 1870-c.1900”, Ph.D. Thesis, Macquarie University, 1983, pp. 122, 126.} but I also agree with Valerie Baxter that the value of the refuges went beyond that of a last resort. Baxter states in her thesis on the Magdalen Home, Sandy Bay, that although “the religious hierarchy within the institution might be considered inappropriate today, it constituted a unique program based on
reward rather than punishment." I would add that the refuges offered a safer and more secure home than some women would previously have known. The sisters also showed more concern for the physical and emotional health of the penitents than many of their acquaintances and families. Any fair evaluation of the refuges must measure their limitations not only against ideal standards of care and treatment but also against the hardships and dangers associated with prostitution in the nineteenth century and the prospects of fallen women without recourse to such homes.

The Australian Catholic refuges have attracted the attention of historians but have rarely been the subject of historical studies. Baxter’s work on the Good Shepherd Magdalen Home in Tasmania is the only Australian study devoted to a Catholic refuge. It concentrates on the details of the founding and the early years of the refuge but includes valuable records of the feelings of some of the penitent women, expressed through their letters to the State Welfare Department. In her research into philanthropy in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Sydney, Judith Godden provides a detailed analysis of the aims and practices of the House of the Good Shepherd and argues that the ideological construct of the woman’s sphere shaped the practice of philanthropy. John O’Brien offers a comprehensive analysis of the origins and aims of the Magdalen Home,

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54 Baxter, p. 46.
Leederville, in his article on the founding of the Convent of the Good Shepherd in Western Australia.\textsuperscript{56}

Other historians use the refuges to support various arguments within the fields of the history of women, welfare or Australian society. In her study of social services in Tasmania between 1803 and 1900, Joan Brown includes information on the Sandy Bay Magdalen Home to argue that attitudes toward the provision of welfare services became less judgmental toward the end of the century.\textsuperscript{57} Helen Jones draws on details of the refuge in Adelaide in her work on women in South Australian history. She uses the example of the work undertaken in the refuge to demonstrate that some groups showed sympathy for women who deviated from ideal standards of feminine behaviour.\textsuperscript{58} Brian Dickey refers to the House of the Good Shepherd and the Catholic Female Refuge in his studies of the history of social welfare in Australia and South Australia respectively. In the introduction to \textit{Rations, Residence, Resources}, he uses the establishment of the refuges and the treatment of the penitent women to support a discussion of what he terms the “construction and management of social dependence.”\textsuperscript{59} In his research into women and crime in colonial South Australia, Luke Scane-Harris argues that the Josephite’s refuge provides evidence that male authorities proposed dramatically different solutions to the problems of the

\textsuperscript{56}John O’Brien, pp. 45-53.
\textsuperscript{57}Joan Brown, \textit{‘Poverty is not a Crime’: The Development of Social Services in Tasmania, 1803-1900} (Hobart, 1972), pp. 156-169.
\textsuperscript{58}Helen Jones, \textit{In Her Own Name: Women in South Australian History} (Netley, SA., 1986), pp. 24-26.
destitution of men and those of women. He argues that the state government created public works to relieve poverty among males but institutionalised poor females.60 Elizabeth Scholefield discusses the Catholic Female Refuge in her study of women and philanthropy in the South Australian suburbs of Kensington and Norwood in the nineteenth century. She employs some details of the home to gain insight into middle-class attitudes toward moral standards and efforts to improve the level of adherence to these standards.61

Other historians use the refuges to illustrate the aims and attitudes to social welfare of the various female religious orders, stressing especially how the sisters’ work led or reflected broader social views and trends. Marie Foale provides the most notable examples of this approach in her two studies of the Josephites in South Australia,62 but the work of Margaret Donovan and Mary Gregory on the House of the Good Shepherd, and Brian Lucas’ analysis of the work of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd have similar aims.63 All of these studies illustrate important features of the refuges themselves and demonstrate that different aspects of their aims and philosophies reflect

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63 Margaret Donovan, R.S.C., Apostolate of Love: Mary Aikenhead 1787-1858, Foundress of the Irish Sisters of Charity (Melbourne, 1979), pp. 139-144; Mary Gregory, S.G.S., “From Refuge to Retreat to Community: The Social Work Ministry of the Good Samaritans at Pitt Street and Tempe/ Arncliffe, 1857-1884”, Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society (March 1984), passim; Brian Joseph Lucas, “The Good Shepherd Sisters and the Adolescent Girl in Need of Care”, Master of General Studies Thesis, University of NSW, 1984, passim. The archives of all the orders contain various other pamphlets and articles by religious sisters that refer to the respective refuges. I have referred only to some of the more scholarly published sources and theses.
contemporary social attitudes. However, no previous study has entailed a detailed analysis of the objects and operations of all the homes or attempted to examine their relationship to Catholic or secular thinking or to place them in a broader social context. The aim of this thesis is to fill this gap. In shedding light on the character of the refuges and recreating something of the lives of both the penitents and sisters who spent part of their lives in them, I hope to offer some insight into both the histories of women and welfare in this country. The main priority of this work, however, is to make a contribution to the broader field of nineteenth-century Australian social and religious history.

The source material provides a one-sided view of the refuges. Apart from the Tasmanian letters found by Baxter, only the reflections of the sisters and their supporters are available. A solid body of descriptive sources consisting of personal letters, diaries, annals, minutes, visitor’s books and records of attendance at classes and services exists. These sources provide substantial details on the living and working conditions in the refuges and some valuable information on the backgrounds of the penitents, their behaviour in the homes, their reasons for seeking admission and their relationships with the sisters and their own babies. However, the

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64 Like the Australian Catholic refuges, the Australian Anglican and Protestant refuges have received attention from historians mainly in the context of broader social and religious histories. Of the works listed above, those by Dickey, Brown, Jones, Godden, Scholefield and Scan-Harris include analysis of evangelical Protestant or Anglican homes. Other studies that discuss these refuges include Daniels, “Prostitution in Tasmania”, in Daniels, ed., So Much Hard Work, pp. 46-49, and Anne O’Brien, passim. Shurlee Swain, A Refuge at Kildare: The History of the Geelong Female Refuge and Bethany Babies’ Home (Geelong, Vic., 1985), is a rare example of a complete work devoted to a Protestant refuge. There are more studies of state refuges and reformatories for fallen women and wayward girls in Australia than of religious homes. The titles of these are included in the bibliography. No historian has, however, made a study of the Anglican or Protestant refuges as social institutions and attempted to place them in the context of Australian history.
prescriptive records such as newspaper items, copies of speeches, pastoral circulars, rules and constitutions, official letters, published reports and pamphlets dominate all the archives. I took this imbalance in sources into account in framing this work and concentrated on the areas with the most concrete sources. Consequently, this thesis focuses on the aims, intentions and philosophies of the reformers and the refuges but acknowledges that the practices did not always accord with the ideals.

This thesis contends that for several decades the object of the refuges was to serve the immediate material and spiritual needs of the women but that late in the century the reformers decided to introduce a level of respectability to the homes. They replaced the simple aims of the refuges with a new commitment to inculcating the penitents with the values of feminine propriety and social usefulness. Chapters 1 and 2 discuss the fundamental beliefs and principles that the Australian Catholic reformers brought to their work. They compare the Catholic attitudes to contemporary Protestant and secular views and evaluate how far the refuges reflected or deviated from traditional Catholic teachings. Chapter 1 examines the reformers’ attitudes toward the penitent woman. It documents how they viewed the sin of the magdalene, the effect the sin had on the character of the woman and the role it played in determining her chance of salvation. Chapter 2 discusses how the reformers understood the social context of the penitent women. It outlines the aspects of the social structure and social relations that Catholics thought could affect the ability of a woman to lead a moral life and the impact that the existence of fallen women could, in turn,
exert on the community. The next two chapters consider the changes that occurred within the management of the refuges during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Chapter 3 documents a trend toward respectability that led the reformers to quietly replace the prostitutes and prisoners for whom they established the homes with younger, more innocent penitents. Chapter 4 examines the corresponding change in the aims of the homes. It charts the replacement of the simple desire to shelter the women and save their souls with the commitment to resocialising them according to the reformers’ perception of acceptable feminine roles and behaviour. The two following chapters discuss the implications of the changes. Chapter 5 considers the regime of work and prayer that was the reformers’ explicit means of reforming the women and discusses the social control strategies underlying their work. Chapter 6 examines how the aims and regime of the refuges, designed to promote the reformers’ perception of appropriate female sexual behaviour, reinforced the economic disadvantages women faced and made them vulnerable to the sexual transgressions the refuges sought to eliminate.

The nature of the available sources shaped the form of this thesis as much as my perception of what was a valuable approach. I have supplemented the relative shortage of descriptive sources and virtual absence of reflections by the penitents with details from similar studies, speculation, empathy and imagination. While I found these to be valuable tools they are not a basis for a thesis. I had to accept that perhaps the most important story - that of the lives and feelings of this generation of penitent
women before, during and after their stay in the refuges - is lost because of the silence that illiteracy and the religious regime imposed on them at the time. While this thesis does suffer from this loss I believe that the result justifies the conviction I held at the beginning of the project that the story of the Australian Catholic refuges was one worth telling.
# TABLE 2

Admissions to Australian Catholic Refuges, 1897 - 1914.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Saint Magdalen’s Retreat</th>
<th>House of the Good Shepherd</th>
<th>Magdalen Home, Abbotsford</th>
<th>Holy Cross Retreat, Lutwyche</th>
<th>Mount St Canice, Tasmania</th>
<th>Catholic Female Refuge, Adelaide</th>
<th>Magdalen Home, Leederville</th>
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<tr>
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<td>50</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>106</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>Mt. Magdala, Sydney</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>110</td>
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</tr>
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<td>128</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>109</td>
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Sources: The Catholic Refuge: Fullarton - A Progress Report (1905); Southern Cross, 1889-1914; The Catholic Directory, and Almanac, 1897-1914.
PART 1 BELIEFS AND PRINCIPLES

Chapter 1

THE PENITENT WOMAN

In an 1870 pastoral letter to the community of New South Wales Archbishop John Bede Polding urged Catholics to support the House of the Good Shepherd, arguing, “you cannot but desire to have some share in a work of so much beauty and acceptableness. Natural humanity loves it and praises it”.65 His attitude reflected the enthusiasm of the Catholic community for the penitent woman as an object of charity. It viewed the figure of the magdalene much as Christ had: as a victim of the more base elements of human nature and society but with the potential for heroic reform. Catholics prized the refuges for assisting the reformation of women and supported the gentle and compassionate treatment of the penitents within the homes. The clergy taught the laity of their responsibility to support the refuges. Archbishop Polding outlined the range of appropriate motivations that could inspire Catholics to work with penitent women:

Some may have heretofore shared in the guilt of the sin of which we are striving to repair the ravages, some may be conscious of having encouraged dangerous vanity and luxury of dress; some may covet a little part in diminishing the horrible wretchedness and social disorder that men’s profligacy and heartlessness have spread over the world; some may admire and honour the devoted life of those Sisters of the Good Shepherd; some may wish to pronounce on God’s side against impurity and against the light estimate in which many hold it; some may desire to magnify and honour simply the great mercy and goodness of God, our Saviour.66

66Ibid., p. 36.
Polding intended to motivate Catholics to support charities of various kinds, but he was among the commentators who stressed that the penitent women were especially deserving of charity. According to Cardinal Moran, “the poor outcast women are the most wretched of all, and for the very reason that they are in the lowest depths of humiliation and bitterness and misery, they have a special claim upon our Charity.”

ATTITUDES TOWARD PENITENT WOMEN

The New Testament depiction of the relationship between the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene provided a potent example of how respectable Catholics were to relate to penitent women. The clergy attached great symbolic value to the scene of the two women standing together at the foot of Jesus’ cross. In an address to the Second Australasian Catholic Congress in Sydney in 1904, Reverend Dean Phelan, the chaplain for the convent of the Good Shepherd in Abbotsford for four years, argued that it was not a chance meeting and represented the establishment of a new relationship between virginal and penitent souls. He added that,

it is no wonder that there should exist a number of virginal souls, who consider it a proud privilege and a sacred duty to devote their lives to elevating and reforming their less fortunate sisters. Innocence and penitence meet hand clasped in hand; every social barrier which so-called society would erect is swept away by the tide of all-conquering love, burning zeal for the salvation of souls.

Cardinal Moran agreed with Reverend Phelan and in a speech in 1886 at a bazaar to raise money for the building of Tempe Retreat, he added that the

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67Ibid., pp. 118-119.
relationship “reversed the sentence of scorn which the world would enforce against the degraded woman, even in her repentance.” The clergy tried to ensure that the work of the refuge reflected this biblical injunction. According to Archbishop Polding, Mary Magdalene was a model of self-abasement, patience and selfless love, and he instructed Catholics to view modern magdalenes in this light and treat them accordingly. The community seemed to respond to the directions of Polding and the clerics who shared his views. The situation in Australia resembled that in late nineteenth-century New York, where, as Joan Brumberg argues in her regional study of community responses to illegitimacy: “because religiously inspired women operated with the model of Christ’s charity to the harlot fully in mind, there was unlikely to be prejudice against prostitutes unless they were diseased.”

This biblical precedent was not the only factor that shaped the special sympathy for magdalenes. The 1866 Customs and Guide of the Sisters of Mercy noted the Catholic belief that women faced the difficult task of having to “combat the world, the flesh, and Satan”. Nineteenth-century society understood that women faced strong temptations through the dangerous and unpredictable impulses of the flesh. The notes of all the orders of sisters on their penitents demonstrate their belief that a struggle with almost uncontrollable sexual instincts ruined the lives of some women. The Book of Customs of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd warned that their penitents

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70 Ibid., Archbishop Polding, Pastoral Letter, 27 October 1870, p. 34.
72 Customs and Guide, p. 132.
would need help to fight frequent attacks of their passions. The entries of the *Annals* of Abbotsford and Sandy Bay indicate that the sisters found this to be true. They recorded that penitents in general “suffered most severe temptations” or “had Many Struggles”. The sisters noted that a young woman who died in Abbotsford in 1881 “had been instructed in the Truths of Faith [but] found herself as a young girl a victim to passion and gave herself up to a life of sinful pleasures. In vain did conscience reprove her.” They realised that even the refuge could not immediately solve the problem and that one woman suffered for years through her inner “constant cry, her insatiable craving ... to regain her liberty and indulge her passions”.

The reformers also believed that Satan led covert assaults on the virtue of women. In their *Annals* in 1897, the Tasmanian sisters recalled with joy the memory of „Clare”, who was “very weak in virtue”, as they believed her death was a victory over the Devil. An article by Marion Miller Knowles published in 1913 in the *Advocate*, the Victorian Catholic newspaper,

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74HR, *Annals Abbotsford*, 1862 - 1914 (2) Abb. III, (1) f. Record of Death of Penitents, (1892-1899), 1894. These *Annals* comprise a series of bound journals containing handwritten records of the sisters on the daily life of the refuge between 1862-1914 and include some newspaper clippings and loose sheets of paper with additional comments. The volumes are not paginated but the entries are accompanied by a date, sometimes only the year, and often the topic, such as Death of a Penitent, Baptism of a Penitent or Consecrated Dress. They are still in their original form but include some undated amendments and additions that I did not include.
75Archives of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Tasmania, hereafter referred to as AGST, *Annals, Convent of the Good Shepherd, Hobart*, Consecrated Dress, 1902. The Tasmanian *Annals* are a compilation of letters, convent records and newspaper clippings from 1896 to 1916 that follows the format established at Abbotsford. The *Annals* have recently been typeset by Valerie Baxter.
76*Convent Annals, Abbotsford*, 1862 - 1914 (2) Abb. III, (1) f, 3 October 1881.
77Ibid.
78*Annals, Convent of the Good Shepherd, Hobart*, Death of a Child, 1897.
described a prostitute as the “unfortunate victim of Satan’s onslaughs”\textsuperscript{79}. Archbishop Polding praised the work of the House of the Good Shepherd because he believed that it alleviated the effects of the corruption that Satan created out of his hatred of God and humankind.\textsuperscript{80} The Sisters of the Good Shepherd feared that Satan would also interfere with the reformation of the penitents, and their instructions urged the sister-in-charge to help women guard “against the discouragement with which the devil assails them”.\textsuperscript{81} The sisters did not always maintain a clear distinction between physical sexual desires and demonic temptations. The \textit{Practical for the Use of the Religious of the Good Shepherd} reflected this confusion by reminding the community that, “these poor children, slaves of their passions await their deliverance from your prayers and mortifications, for, our Lord tells us that there is a kind of devil that is not cast out but by prayer and fasting.”\textsuperscript{82}

These beliefs made it difficult for Catholics to determine the source of sexual urges and so apportion blame when the temptation proved irresistible. They were certain that powerful, unseen forces assailed some women and that many, especially those without the benefits of religion, were ill-equipped to combat temptations that issued from the body, the mind or the devil. However, although self-control was difficult it was possible and Catholics could not completely absolve the women from blame. Even the most sympathetic observers noted that the women had “given in” or “succumbed”

\textsuperscript{79}Advocate, 13 September 1913.
\textsuperscript{80}\textit{Annals of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan}, Archbishop Polding, Pastoral Letter, 27 October 1870, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{81}\textit{Book of Customs}, p. 297.
\textsuperscript{82}\textit{HR, Practical Rules for the Use of the Religious of the Good Shepherd for the Direction of the Classes} (Angers, France, 1898), p. 10.
to temptation. The Catholic social commentators considered this a choice in spite of the pressures the women experienced or the resistance they offered. An editorial on Holy Cross Retreat in Queensland’s *Daily Mail* newspaper in 1908 articulated the dilemma. It preached understanding and forgiveness because society had not reached the period of perfection when sin had been removed from all hearts and souls, but still maintained that some deficiency in the women was the ultimate cause of their situation:

> there are amongst us a percentage of unfortunate women who, not being endowed with an abundance of will-power and determination to subjugate their stronger passions, or to combat the evil influences brought to bear upon them, find themselves estranged from honour and virtue.  

Reverend Phelan placed even more emphasis on the role of individual action. In his work on the Good Shepherd sisters, he acknowledged the existence of external forces but assumed that dispassionate and informed analysis preceded a woman’s fall. In his opinion women reached a cross-road where they had to choose between “honour and dishonour, between virtue and profligacy, between moral life and moral death; when the appetites of the brute and the attributes of the angel meet in council to unroll their destiny or seal their fate.”

Catholic attitudes suggested a predisposition to sin that almost protected women from bearing responsibility for their actions. However, the belief in the ability of women to reason and make moral judgments, even when confronted with natural and supernatural forces, determined that women would assume some share of their guilt. Most of the Catholic community encountered difficulty balancing these factors.

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83 *Daily Mail*, December 1908.
84 Phelan, p. 305.
85 An editorial in the *Advocate*, 17 March 1877, p. 5, argued that some well-educated women were sheltered at Abbotsford and their “intelligence ought to have prevented their rendering themselves qualified for admission to the Asylum”. It was the only time a Catholic publicly
In her study of sectarianism and philanthropy in nineteenth-century Sydney, Judith Godden argues that the “concern for the impure woman” (rather than the impure man) reflected a double standard of sexuality morality and Christianity’s traditional correlation between sin, the flesh and the female.”

Some secular commentators did keep alive the old belief that women were the guilty and dangerous sex. In a newspaper article for the Victorian Argus in 1877 the prominent journalist John Stanley James commended the sisters at Abbotsford for “reclaiming the lowest and worst kind of outcasts, the old miserable man-eaters” of society.” His only concession to the view the Catholics tried to promote was that “man’s wayward passion may bring some to ruin.”

My reading of the sources, however, suggests that Catholics in Australia openly reversed the traditional teaching that men were the victims of the voracious sexuality and deceitful nature of women. Instead, they blamed men for sexual transgression while rarely examining their motives or considering demonic forces or physical, emotional or psychological urges. The Advocate recorded that in 1893 Reverend Butler referred to “man’s ungovernable passions”, but in general Catholics did not consider the influence of uncontrollable forces on the actions of male sexual behaviour as they did with female sexual behaviour.

The celibate male clergy and the devout men of the Catholic press mistrusted male honour enough to accept that in most cases of sexual transgression the man had wilfully led the woman astray. Their editorials, speeches and sermons repeatedly castigated the male character. They

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suggested that a sexual misdemeanour demonstrated a lack of possession or use of intelligence. In all other cases the reformers only considered whether the morality of the woman was at fault.

86Godden, “Sectarianism”, p. 293.
87John Stanley James, The Vagabond Papers (Melbourne, 1983), p. 247. Throughout the 1870s James wrote feature articles for newspapers in Melbourne and Sydney as „The Vagabond” or Julian Thomas.
88Ibid., p. 236.
89Advocate, 28 January 1893, p. 8.
dismissed men as “base seducers”\textsuperscript{90} and “ravenous wolves in human shape”.\textsuperscript{91} They attributed the loss of female innocence to “the heartless treachery of the libertine”\textsuperscript{92} and depicted penitent women as “unhappy victims of man’s sensuality”\textsuperscript{93} and “weary wayfarers on life’s journey whose soul is saddened by man’s inhumanity”.\textsuperscript{94} The \textit{Irish Harp and Southern Cross}, published for a short period by the Catholic Church in South Australia, reported in 1875 that refuges were “one of the visible effects of the wickedness of the stronger and guiltier sex”.\textsuperscript{95} Catholics agreed that men did not prey equally on all women and that the position of the fallen woman was particularly unjust because innocence often attracted the attention of dishonourable men.\textsuperscript{96} However, the knowledge of the corruption of men was as inadequate to absolve women of blame for their behaviour as the understanding of demonic and physical influences. Reverend Phelan saw women as the victims of men but not the innocent victims. At the Second Australasian Congress in 1904 he quoted Oliver Goldsmith, an eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish poet:

\begin{quote}
When lovely woman stoops to folly,  
And finds too late that men betray,  
Alas! What charm can soothe her melancholy,  
What art can wash her guilt away?\textsuperscript{97}
\end{quote}

Other Catholics agreed that woman actively decided to sin. However, they did not necessarily equate this responsibility with blame because they considered the motivations of the women as well as the actions. The theme

\textsuperscript{90}\textit{Southern Cross}, 8 March 1895, p. 3.  
\textsuperscript{91}\textit{Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart}, August 1883, p. 101.  
\textsuperscript{92}\textit{Advocate}, 16 December 1871, p. 5.  
\textsuperscript{93}\textit{Irish Harp and Southern Cross}, May 1875, p. 5.  
\textsuperscript{94}\textit{HR}, \textit{Collection of Newspaper Clippings}, Volume I, p. 15.  
\textsuperscript{95}\textit{Irish Harp and Southern Cross}, 7 May 1875, p. 5.  
\textsuperscript{96}\textit{Advocate}, 5 August 1911, p. 25.  
\textsuperscript{97}Phelan, p. 304.
of the ability and desire of women to express love generously occurred frequently in the literature of the refuges. Catholics cherished this concept, associating it with the sisters and the Virgin Mary who epitomised their ideal of selfless and generous womanhood. The Catholic Record reported in 1880 that “pure, unselfish, womanly love” motivated the Sisters of Saint Joseph to work with penitent women, and the Perth Truth told readers in 1907 that in the Homes of the Good Shepherd they would find sisters showing loving care for the penitents. The reformers extended the idea of the natural female inclination to love to the women in the refuges and concluded that this instinct made them susceptible to the advances of men. In 1861 the Catholic paper of New South Wales, the Freeman’s Journal, stated that “the most imperious desire in the heart of women is to please”. In 1902 South Australia’s Southern Cross reprinted part of an article by Helen Jerome that appeared in the periodical the Golden Fleece expressing the same sentiment. Jerome asked why the public did not offer more charity to these girls when, according to her impressions they were “unfortunate creatures whose lives were glimpses of hell till a little love came into them, who loved not wisely, but too well”. Anne O’Brien found similar sentiments expressed by Protestant reformers through her research into poverty in New South Wales between 1880 and 1918. She notes that G.E. Ardill, the Baptist founder of the Sydney Rescue Work Society, believed that it was “women’s, fond, warm heart”, “strange and sublime unselfishness”, “positive love of self-sacrifice” and

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98Catholic Record, 1 October 1880, p. 9.
99Truth, 27 July 1907.
100Freeman’s Journal, 27 July 1861.
101Southern Cross, 7 January 1902, p. 152.
“aggressive desire to show their affection” that led them to agree to illicit sexual encounters.\textsuperscript{102} By adopting these beliefs, the Catholic community could deplore the actions of the women and mourn the effects of their behaviour without drawing negative conclusions regarding their essential character. It could make the morality of the women neutral by blaming men entirely or find evidence of positive feminine character traits. In allowing herself to gratify male lust, a woman revealed the praiseworthy feminine qualities of eagerness to offer and to receive love and desire to please men. As an editorial in Adelaide’s \textit{Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart} stated in 1883, “many sins are forgiven them because they have loved much”.\textsuperscript{103} While her judgment was in question, her motives and character revealed much merit.

This quality not only mitigated the seriousness of her offence but also provided the penitent woman with great potential for reform. The capacity for love effected the extraordinary reformation in the first magdalene and provided the great hope for her successors. Love ensured they would possess the desire to repent their sins and reclaim their innocence and feel intense gratitude when Jesus inevitably offered them forgiveness. The Catholic newspapers and clergy and public were at pains to recall that Jesus himself forgave Mary Magdalene “because she had loved much”.\textsuperscript{104} The \textit{Catholic Standard} of Tasmania stated in 1892, “Great is the sinner herself - a scandal to the whole city of Jerusalem; yet great is the pardon, nothing less than the

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\textsuperscript{102}Anne O’Brien, p. 121. \\
\textsuperscript{103}\textit{Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart}, August 1883, pp. 101-102. \\
\textsuperscript{104}\textit{Advocate}, 28 November 1885, p. 16.
\end{flushleft}
remission of all her sins, because great is the motive of her sorrow - love for her insulted Lord and God.”

Cardinal Moran explained in a speech in New South Wales in 1886 that the sisters recognised Mary Magdalene in their own penitents and so were aware of the ability of the women to reform through love of God.

L.D.’s poem, „Magdalen”, published in the South Australian Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart in 1884, provides the most overt example of the Catholic perception that love was central to a woman’s reform:

Much did she love! By love alone
Did she for all her faults atone,
From love sprang forth repentant tears,
And swift remorse, and saving fears.
Love wrought her penance, love her prayer!
No more for her the world’s false glare;
But led by love to some dim cell,
In holy solitude to dwell,
She mourned the track her feet had trod,
And spent her life in loving God.

Catholics never reconciled or even acknowledged that the penitence they required of the magdalene seemed to exceed the guilt they placed on her.

Catholics agreed on the awfulness of the sin of the magdalene. In 1870 Archbishop Polding asked the community of New South Wales to consider, “where is there a fouler and more venomous work than this sin of impurity”, and in 1883 the Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart

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107 Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart, September 1884, p. 4.
108 Annals of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, Pastoral Letter of Archbishop Polding, 27 October 1870, p. 34.
Heart called it “the black deformity of sin and wickedness”. They also agreed on the horror of the condition in which it left the penitent woman. Reverend Sheehy, Archbishop Polding’s Vicar-General, stated in a pastoral letter of 1862 that he considered women in this state “wretched with a wretchedness that few can conceive”, and in 1883 the South Australian Catholic press described them as “contaminated and degraded” creatures in a state of “defilement, deformity, destruction and ruin”. In 1893, the year the Mount Saint Canice refuge opened, the Tasmanian Catholic press paid particular attention to the topic of fallen women. It argued that such women “waste their lives away in shame and degradation” and were “festering social sores” and a “foul stain on our city”. The Catholic reformers acknowledged that some women were so scarred by their experiences that they could never lead a moral life. Queensland’s Telegraph reported that a lifetime in a refuge was the only possible pathway to reformation for truly depraved women. In reporting on the Prisoners Aid Society in 1893 the Tasmanian Catholic paper, the Morning Star, was more blunt. It argued that a minority of abandoned women had lost all self respect and charity was wasted on them because they could never be trusted with the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Moreover, the paper expected that eventually the women themselves would make a similar conclusion about

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109Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart, August 1883, pp. 102-103.
110Annals of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, Dr. Sheehy V.G., Pastoral Circular, 3 October 1862, p. 15.
113Telegraph, December 1905.
114Morning Star, 7 January 1893, p. 9.
their own worth. It had reported in the previous year that when penitents became aware of the shamefulness of their lives “they will sink to the cold earth to die, friendless, helpless, self-despising, broken-hearted.”

The reformers, however, believed that hopeless cases were exceptional and argued that for many fallen women the state of sin was a temporary condition. Reverend Phelan wrote in his work on the Good Shepherd sisters in 1904 that,

no matter what the past may have been, to what depths of degradation a soul may have sunk, how wide the chasm or impassable the gulf which separates the child of misfortune from the home of her youth or the honest field of labour ... and if there be in that sin-stained soul a particle of faith, a ray of hope, a spark of charity, then God Himself will bend down to bind up the bruised reed and pour a flame of divine love into the smoking flax.

The reformers believed that most of the women could redeem themselves through penitence, enjoy temporal and divine forgiveness, and actually return to a state of purity. Cardinal Moran argued in a speech in New South Wales in 1886 that the sisters’ work with the penitents succeeded in “restoring to them the lost privileges of innocence.” Others went further and stated that the refuges could restore innocence itself. An editorial in the Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart in 1883 argued that the Josephite sisters succeed “in removing the traces and effects of sin, and bringing back those erring souls to a state of morality and innocence”.

Further, it praised all refuges for penitent women as places where,

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115 Ibid., 20 August 1892, pp. 9-10.
116 Phelan, p. 301.
lost innocence and happiness may be regained, where -
Dwells a light from above,
Which alone can remove
That stain upon the snow of fair Magdalen’s fame.118

The reformers did have some success in promoting the worthiness of
penitent women and the respectability of charity for their sake. The Advocate
expressed disgust in 1869 that in a wealthy community like Melbourne the
sisters at Abbotsford lacked financial support from the community to
undertake their important work.119 „A Protestant” wrote to that paper
expressing the same sentiments in the following year:

their is a charity so noble that the most eloquent tongue is honoured by
its advocacy; an object so important the mightiest intellect may well be
employed in devising means for its attainment; an agency for good so
pure and self-denying the Angels might engage in it.120

On becoming acquainted with the work of Mount Saint Canice, Councillor
Jackson of Tasmania stated to the local Daily Post in 1908 that he had
previously believed that hospitals were the greatest charitable institutions
but was now convinced that the Magdalen Home was of equal importance.121

TREATMENT OF THE PENITENT WOMEN

Like Godden, sociologists working on women’s refuges generally note
that the decision to institutionalise the women was a reflection of the
reformers” differing and unjust responses to male and female sexual
misdemeanours. In her work on prostitutes in Victorian Scotland, Linda
Mahood argues that “the founding of magdalen homes institutionalized the

118 Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart, August 1883, p. 102.
119 Advocate, 13 March 1869 p. 7.
120 Ibid., 13 August 1870, p. 12.
121 Daily Post, 8 September 1908.
double standard by only punishing women”.

In her discussion of the Western House of Refuge in Albion, New York, Nicole Rafter supports this argument, stating that men did not face prison sentences for promiscuous behaviour. Men were not institutionalised for sexual misdemeanour in Australia. However, historians and sociologists do not acknowledge that the treatment of men and women who did not behave according to social expectations, and the language used to describe their transgression and reform, were strikingly similar. Reverend Healy established the Shelter for Discharged, Friendless Catholic Prisoners in Adelaide in 1901 after being chaplain to the men in the Adelaide Gaol for sixteen years. In the style that was so common to the literature of the refuges for women, he argued that it was not possible to reform men who did not have recourse to a home or a job on leaving the prison. He hoped that the shelter would provide men with shelter, clothing, preparation for the Sacraments and assistance to find employment away from the city.

The Shelter was still operating a decade later, and South Australia’s Archbishop John O’Reily reported in 1911 that a man released from gaol “is a waif and stray of humanity ... On his return to freedom he finds himself ,nobody’s child,”with none but ,nobody”to look for help to.”

The Catholic reformers did recognise the injustice of blaming men and institutionalising women. In 1869 the editor of the Advocate asserted that it

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123 Rafter, pp. 290-291.
124 Southern Cross, 7 December 1900, p. 789.
125 O’Reily, The Catholic Charities, p. 29.
was absolutely certain that ninety-nine times out of one hundred the person who had been mistreated was forced to bare the shame and face the consequences of the action.\textsuperscript{126} Where possible the reformers tried to resolve the contradiction and rectify the injustice. According to an editorial in the \textit{Southern Cross} in 1897, the sisters always tried to trace the „seducer” and encourage him to marry the woman or provide financial support for her and their child.\textsuperscript{127} Such measures were of limited value because of the difficulty in locating men and proving their involvement. The reformers placed more importance on reforming social attitudes so that the perpetrators could share the punishment. In 1875 the editor of the \textit{Irish Harp and Southern Cross} published the following statement:

\begin{quote}
until men become better the condition of women must remain as it is. When the Pulpit and the Press shall unite fearlessly to denounce the evil courses of men, then public opinion may be aroused, and a portion of that degradation and odium which now falls solely upon poor misguided, deceived woman may be shared by the partners of her guilt.\textsuperscript{128}
\end{quote}

The same article condemned the work of the South Australian Female Refuge, run by the Church of England, for failing to hold men responsible for fallen women. It accused the Anglican reformers of providing a “new reading of the old apologue of the boys and the frogs [where] all the cruelty and immunity from public abhorrence fall to the lot of the cruel boys, all the punishment to the unfortunate frogs.”\textsuperscript{129}

The Catholic reformers were not alone in promoting these views. In 1877 the Sydney Female Refuge Society recorded the injustice of women

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\item \textsuperscript{126} \textit{Advocate}, 13 March 1869, p. 7.
\item \textsuperscript{127} \textit{Southern Cross}, 26 November 1897, p. 590.
\item \textsuperscript{128} \textit{Irish Harp and Southern Cross}, 7 May 1875, p. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{129} \textit{Ibid.}
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\end{footnotesize}
bearing responsibility for sin when the men involved could “strut unbranded on the world’s highway”. Contrary to the accusations of the South Australian Catholic press, the Anglican reformers in Adelaide adhered to similar views. At a meeting in 1864, Mr. John Colton recommended that men known to frequent brothels should receive a written condemnation of their behaviour. He suggested that if they refused to cease frequenting houses of ill-repute they should be publicly castigated and outcast from respectable circles. Church groups again had some political allies. John Colton was a Member of Parliament during the time of his involvement with the Anglican refuge and also used that forum to present his views on penitent women. According to Viscount Gormanston, the Governor of Tasmania, penitent women were “more to be pitied then blamed for their conduct. In most cases, it was through their mistaken and misguided affection for the other sex that they had fallen awry”. He believed that his own sex had avoided punishment for too long.

While such suggestions seem to support a form of crude justice, the reformers wanted to pressure men into behaving well, thus fulfilling the real aim of all religious and secular moral reformers: to improve the behaviour of all citizens and actually reduce the incidence of sexual transgression. However, realising that any such improvements to society would be slow, the reformers were obliged to act on the immediate needs of the fallen woman. Cardinal Moran explained to the Catholics of New South Wales in

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131 Register, 18 May 1864.
132 Annals, Convent of the Good Shepherd, Hobart, 11 June 1896.
1886 that the poor had the opportunity to support themselves through hard
work but that the community unfairly denied the penitent woman this
opportunity so she required the “heroism of charity to defend and comfort
her in her repentance.” 133 The reformers wished to alleviate suffering and so
proceeded to serve what they perceived as the immediate needs of the
penitents. The understanding that their actions constituted a form of
injustice inspired them to make the conditions in the refuges as agreeable as
possible and to work for fairer long-term solutions.

The reformers demonstrated their faith in the penitents by omitting a
punitive function from the aims of the refuges. Reverend Phelan informed
Victorian Catholics that “nothing of the gloom of a penal establishment
hovers about Abbotsford. All the „children,‟ as they are called, are bright and
happy” 134 The aims of the Catholic homes in Australia varied over the years
but they never existed to punish women. Godden disputes this view in her
study of the religious refuges in Sydney and argues that Catholic reformers
did institute “punitive regimes” of varying rigour. My reading of the sources
suggests that her conclusion is not appropriate to the Catholic home and that
the reformers did not equate discipline with punishment. 135 Evidence exists

133 Annals of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, Opening of New Building, Tempe, 1885, pp. 118-
119.
134 Phelan, p. 304.
135 Godden, “Philanthropy”, p. 299. I draw on Godden‟s evidence and analysis regarding the
Protestant refuge and accept her arguments relating to that home. She contends that despite
the theological differences between Catholics and Protestants the aims and operations of the
respective refuges were similar, see “Philanthropy”, p. 111. On this basis, and because of the
greater number of Protestant sources, she draws conclusions regarding both refuges from the
evidence relating only to the Protestant home, see especially “Philanthropy”, pp. 113, 130
and “Sectarianism”, p. 302. This thesis contends that the theological differences did result in
some salient differences in the way Catholics and Protestants ran the refuges and treated the
penitent women. The differences relate primarily to attitudes regarding blame and
punishment. Godden also uses the commentary written by Sister Mary de Sales Smith in the
to show that other refuges operated without the intent to punish. In contrast to her comments elsewhere,\textsuperscript{136} Linda Mahood argues in an article written with Barbara Littlewood that reformers of the state magdalene institutions of Glasgow, mostly Calvinists of the Free Church of Scotland, believed that “repressive punitive control was counter-productive” and they “did not want to criminalize „magdalens”, or incarcerate them as a form of punishment; they wanted to save them.”\textsuperscript{137}

The Catholic sisters in Australia established the homes to assist the penitents, and the interests, comfort and future of the women were paramount. The refuges were not places of punishment. This is not to suggest that the reformers did not engage classic social control strategies within the refuges. As Michel Foucault argued in \textit{Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison}, “the power to punish is not essentially different from that of curing or educating”.\textsuperscript{138} Nonetheless, the intention of the reformers was not to punish the women and for the most part their behaviour was consistent with their ideal. The reformers sought to rescue women from the moral and physical danger they had faced on the streets and provide them with a means of discovering or rediscovering faith in God and human decency. The sisters aimed to give the penitents a safe and happy home for

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\item[137]Littlewood and Mahood, pp. 161, 172.
\end{footnotes}
life either in the refuge or in the world armed with the skills and values taught in the homes. A secondary aim of the refuges was to remove the women from the streets, where the sisters thought they inflicted moral damage on society. Even this action, however, was preventative and did not include any intent to punish the women for harm they had previously caused.

The sisters were concerned with restitution rather than retribution. Despite the existence of mitigating factors, the penitent women still bore the taint of a sin that was most offensive to God. For this reason the sisters did try to inspire them with repentance and a willingness to atone for their sins through prayer and work. All the reformers asserted the Catholic teaching that penitence was crucial to gaining the forgiveness of God. Archbishop Polding provided leadership in this area. He argued in the pastoral letter he issued in 1870 that the House of the Good Shepherd “means penitence” which was of immeasurable spiritual and temporal importance:

Penitence from this sin confounds the devil in his greatest success and reforms the image of Christ in human souls with the peculiar triumph .... It is, then, to promote penitence with more or less resemblance to this great model that the Sisters of the Good Shepherd devote their lives. They are His representatives in welcoming, soothing, healing, sanctifying those who have a goodwill to leave their sin.139

The sisters incorporated this belief into the daily operations of the refuges. The „Regulations for the Government of the House of the Good Shepherd” of 1867 stated that the penitents make amends for the past by preparing to receive the Sacraments and “conforming their will to the regular fulfillment

139Annals of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, Archbishop Polding, Pastoral Letter, 27 October 1870, p. 34.
of Christian duties in the spirit of true penitence.”

In 1868 the *Advocate* reminded these women of the gravity of their offence, and that “heroic self-devotion is needed; great degradation must be atoned for by great self-sacrifice”. An editorial in the *Morning Star* argued in 1892 that penitent women needed to undergo trial and probation in the refuges to earn the right to return to their position in the world.

The sisters evaluated the progress of the women in the refuges according to these standards. Their ideal penitent was sincere in her regret for previous sins, genuine in her desire to atone for them, and committed to the refuge for at least two years. She was not above anger, temptation, laziness and disobedience, but she did try to keep them under control.

Among the cases in which the sisters took particular pride was “Austin of the Seven Dolours” of Abbotsford. According to the sisters, “Austin” was looked up to by her companions as a model & we gladly numbered her among the Consecrated knowing the benefit her example would be to others”. They held this view in spite of her unsettled inner life. They knew that she suffered most severe temptations & one night retired with full intent that next day she would take off her Consecrated dress, leave it in the Oratory and fly she did not mind where. During night she dreamt she saw Our Lord on the Cross in fearful sufferings & beside Him His Blessed Mother who spoke and told her so distinctly she was the cause of the terrible agony of her Divine Son. The poor child wept over her sinfulness & promised she would give up the intention she had formed.

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141 *Advocate*, 14 November 1868, p. 9.
142 *Morning Star*, 20 August 1892, pp. 9-10.
143 *Annals Abbotsford*, 1862 - 1914 (2) Abb. III (1) f. Record of Death of Penitents, April 1892.
The Josephite sisters in Adelaide similarly admired the progress made by a sixteen-year old penitent who had learnt the art of theft from her mother and spent time in jail for that offence. She suffered from a vile temper and a tendency to lie but determined to break both habits:

Each evening before tea, she would examine her conscience, and see if she told a lie during the day, if so, she would go to bed without any tea. She persevered in this practice, for six months. At the end of that time, she had become as truthful a girl as you would wish to know, and remained so. She was determined to conquer her temper. I have seen her when things would go wrong against her, grow white with temper, and yet answer sweetly as if nothing was the matter. After these acts of self conquest she would often be seized with violent headaches from the effort, but this did not prevent her continuing the struggle to acquire the habit of meekness. By the time she had grown into womanhood, she was a model of virtue.144

The sisters also sought to imbue the refuges with their belief in the innate worth and dignity of the penitents as creations of God. The Practical Rules of the Good Shepherd Sisters urged the sisters to remember the respect they owed to the penitents who were the daughters of God with souls made in His image.145 After a discussion of the illegitimate babies in Holy Cross Retreat in 1898, an editor of the Queensland Courier asked, “and the mothers of these waifs, are they not our sisters, of the same flesh and blood as the Queen upon her throne?”.146 It was not possible to ensure that all members of the Catholic community accepted this view, and comparisons between the sisters and the penitents could also evoke harsh judgments. The Tasmanian monthly paper, the Catholic Standard, reported in 1900 that at Mount Saint Canice “women will be reclaimed by women, the worst saved by the best,

145 Practical Rules, p. 86.
146 Courier, 1 January 1898.
sinners of the lowest by religious of the highest class.”  However, this was not the official view, and the more compassionate approach received the most publicity in the Catholic press. The Perth *Truth* stated in 1907 that “the only passport required of the women and the orphan children is contained in the one word - „Necessity.” They are the sisters of the Sisters, and they are in need.” By affording the penitent women spiritual equality with the religious sisters, and expressing their entitlement to care on these grounds, the paper made the ultimate statement on the innate worth of the penitents. The vocal social critic and Christian socialist, Reverend O’Mahony, reminded the congregation of the Memorial Church in Tasmania in 1910 that all people were sinners in need of mercy, and warned them against making too strong a distinction between themselves and the penitent women.

In some cases this compassion allowed the reformers to cease justifying their care of penitents on social and religious grounds and argue that the misery and loneliness of the women provided sufficient grounds to help them. Archbishop O’Reily focused on single pregnant girls and urged Catholics to help them because:

mentally anguished, fearful of coming bodily pain, so often penniless, so often, too, friendless, for she fears approach to, if she be not positively repelled from the spot she has been wont to call home - the young woman who has strayed is in a pitiable case. Her misery is great.

He hoped that through the care and training offered by the refuge she could return to society “without being too ruthlessly pursued by the consequences

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147 Catholic Standard, September 1892, p. 136.
148 Truth, 27 July 1907.
149 Annals, Convent of the Good Shepherd, Hobart, Opening of the Memorial Church, November 1910.
of her error in the past”. The Catholic press in Adelaide printed a tribute to Lady Colton, a Wesleyan philanthropist who had supported the refuge, on her death in 1898. The *Southern Cross* praised particularly that she was more concerned with alleviating misery than investigating its origin.\(^{151}\)

All of these considerations made high standards of care and respect the ideal in the refuges. All the orders insisted that the history of the women should not influence their treatment in a negative way. The Good Shepherd sisters realised that when the penitents arrived they were ashamed of their past and fearful for their future. The sisters were adamant that the penitents should know they had the opportunity to start a new life and would be judged according to the behaviour they exhibited in the refuge, not that which led them there.\(^{152}\) The *Southern Cross* supported this view, arguing that Catholics should encourage women who desired to reform their lives and “that encouragement is given when those around her act as if unconscious of her fault.”\(^{153}\) The sisters valued this condition and “drew a veil” over the details of the penitents’ lives, concealing their backgrounds from visitors, each other, and all but the most senior sisters. They gave the name of a saint to each woman and instructed her to remain silent about her past to maintain anonymity. The sisters were not trying simply to protect the privacy of the penitent women, but also to prevent the spread of corrupting knowledge. An article in the *Advocate* in 1894 was adamant that the penitents


\(^{151}\) *Southern Cross*, 5 August 1898, p. 489.

\(^{152}\) *Practical Rules*, pp. 174-175.

\(^{153}\) *Southern Cross*, 12 May 1905, p. 298.
should not speak freely to one another in case they discussed their previous lives.\textsuperscript{154} As Michelle Cale noted in her study of Victorian reformatories, all inmates “would have been in possession of potentially dangerous knowledge, even if it consisted only in their own life story”.\textsuperscript{155}

The sisters did not, in practice, ignore the background of the penitents, rather they concluded that their experiences entitled them to special care. The \textit{Practical Rules} of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd stated, “Poor children! beaten about in the great tempest of the world, they have known nothing but suffering; they have never, at least some of them, experienced the sweetness and charms of virtue; it is for you to make them known to them.”\textsuperscript{156} The importance of showing kindness to the penitents was central to the aims of the sisters, and the well being of the women was a clear priority in the refuges. The following instruction provides an example of the sentiment that echoes through the philosophies of all the sisters:

\begin{quote}
We must have charity and compassion for these souls that the Church remits into our hands .... Love them; have great love for them. Console and strengthen the suffering sheep. Make them happy, with the grace of God; this is your duty.\textsuperscript{157}
\end{quote}

The Australian sisters were not alone in holding these views. Margaret Tennant found that the Protestant ladies who established the Auckland Refuge in 1872 determined to use only “means the most gentle and attractive to win back the stubborn wills and depraved natures” of their penitent

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{154}\textit{Advocate}, 27 January 1894.
\textsuperscript{155}Michelle Cale, “Girls and the Perception of Sexual Danger in the Victorian Reformatory System”, \textit{History - Journal of the Historical Association}, Vol. 78 (1993), p. 209. This secrecy must have intensified the isolation the women felt in the home but the conditions were no worse than those imposed on the sisters. The staff in the evangelical Protestant Sydney Female Refuge referred to their penitents only by a number; see Anne O’Brien, p. 123.
\textsuperscript{156}\textit{Practical Rules}, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{157}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 98.
\end{footnotes}
women.  

Stanley Nash discovered similar sentiments in the records of an eighteenth-century Magdalene Charity in London. The governors of that home stressed that the women received the gentlest of treatment. However, such views did not dominate the thinking of those running charitable institutions in either century, and the Catholic reformers in Australia did distinguish themselves with their sympathetic attitude.

The reformers were genuine in their desire to enhance the well being of the penitents. However, they also acknowledged pragmatic grounds for demonstrating compassion in the refuges. The sisters could only legally detain the girls the courts referred to them; the majority of penitents entered freely and could leave freely. The situation in all the refuges was as Archbishop O’Reily described it in Adelaide in an official pamphlet on the Fullarton refuge:

> over the child, as over the mother, the institution has not a shadow of legal control. The gates of the Refuge are open from early morning till late in the evening. An inmate wishing to depart is free to go any day and, by day, at any hour she pleases.

The sisters recommended a two-year stay but they could not enforce one. They had to meet the material and emotional needs of the women so they would want to stay. The forces of altruism and pragmatism worked together to uphold the ideals of the refuges.

The attitude of the reformers to the treatment of penitent women was progressive. In other ways too the Catholic homes demonstrated advanced

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158 Tennant, “Magdalens and Moral Imbeciles”, p. 54.
ideas. Father Bronte, a member of the Prisoner’s Aid Society in Tasmania, promoted the belief that self-esteem and personal worth played an important role in determining whether individuals adopted and persisted with a life of crime or immorality.\footnote{Morning Star, 7 January 1893, p. 7.} This view did not enjoy wide support even within the Catholic Church, but those running and promoting the refuges used its sentiments in their work. The Sisters of Mercy recorded in the *Annual Report* of Holy Cross Retreat in 1909 that part of their work with penitents involved “restoring them to such degree of self-respect as to inspire them with the desire to lead a reformed and honourable life.”\footnote{MC, *Annual Report*, Holy Cross Retreat, Lutwyche, Queensland, 1909, p. 11.} Archbishop O’Reily’s explanation of why the sisters limited visits to the Catholic Female Refuge in Adelaide supports this view. He reasoned that unrestricted admission of strangers would adversely affect the self-respect, peace of mind and general well being of the penitent women.\footnote{MLSA, *Some Catholic Charities and the Secretary of the State Children’s Department: Additional Official Correspondence With Comment Thereon by Archbishop O’Reily* (Adelaide, 1910), p. 4.}

The sisters and their supporters did not always uphold their ideals. Most of the information available is prescriptive and is not necessarily a reliable depiction. Few details remain of incidents that reflect badly on the sisters or the operations of the refuge. However, the occasional entry in the records suggests that the sisters were subject to fits of anger that could result in physical or verbal abuse. Valerie Baxter found some rare examples of residents” reflections in the records of the State Welfare Department of Tasmania. A letter written in 1912 by a young woman from Mount Saint Canice stated,
I absconded from the Home because the day before we left Mother Sacred Heart hit me with a scrubbing brush and the other girl with a footstool - she and the other nuns are always hitting us - there were three others trying to get away the same day as we did.

The Department never proved the allegations and Baxter points out that the wording of the letter and the signature of Charles Seager, the Department Secretary, on the statement reflect his involvement.\textsuperscript{164} However, an entry in the \textit{Annals} of February 1913 stating that a Mother Sacred Heart returned to Abbotsford “for a few months ... suffering with nervous breakdown” seems to corroborate at least part of the report.\textsuperscript{165} An incident in Adelaide shows that the sisters could be insensitive to the most vulnerable penitents out of frustration or to serve the discipline of the refuge. Archbishop O’Reily reported to the State Children’s Council following the death of twin babies in 1910:

> When the twins were lying dead at the Refuge your Inspectress called. In her presence the Sister in charge reproached the mother with having starved her offspring. The charge was made in the hearing of other of the inmates, and was intended chiefly as a caution and warning to them. The Sister had been disappointed at the failure of her efforts to save the lives of the two children. She felt harassed in mind, and did not stay to weigh her words. She did not, however, believe then - she believes less now, that fresh evidence has come to light - that the children died of actual want of nourishment. But she did believe that the children had not been adequately cared for by their mother, and this was all that her words, however sweeping they may seem, were meant to signify.\textsuperscript{166}

Such incidents reveal more about the difficulties involved in running the refuges than the philosophy of the homes. The sisters laboured under severe financial restraints, faced shortages in staff and worked long hours in the laundries alongside the penitents. Many of the women with whom they

\textsuperscript{164} Baxter, pp. 42-43.
\textsuperscript{165} \textit{Annals, Convent of the Good Shepherd, Hobart}, 20 February 1913.
\textsuperscript{166} \textit{Refuge and Reformatory}, letter from O’Reily-Gray, p. 13.
dealt were unco-operative and hostile, and some sisters were unsuited to the work. There are, however, indications that some harshness was accepted as necessary to enforce the required discipline in the refuges. The *Practical Rules* of the Good Shepherd Sisters instructed that “giddy children” be treated with severity, that young and difficult penitents should fear the sister-in-charge and that women who repeatedly display certain faults should be severely punished.\textsuperscript{167} Acts of aggression by the sisters did occur, but they were against the spirit of the refuges not in keeping with it. Even with such incidents and instructions taken into account, the approach to discipline and general treatment in the Catholic homes compared favourably with that in comparable non-religious homes.

In her study of state-run homes for girls in nineteenth-century New South Wales, Noeline Williamson records details of severe and continued physical and emotional abuse within the Industrial and Reformatory School for Girls, Biloela. A Royal Commission in 1874 discovered that,

Black eyes and blood streaming from noses were reported often as the result of heavy blows. The use of gags to subdue the girls was not uncommon. Girls were beaten with fists, canes and broomsticks. All of the girls examined by the Commissioners bore the marks of this indiscriminately applied violence.\textsuperscript{168}

The Commissioners reported that they found eight teenage girls confined in a small, dark, stone-floored room without furniture or chimney, with blocked out windows and “a foul sickly stench, every call of nature being there answered by the inmates”. According to their report four of the girls were

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\item \textsuperscript{167} *Practical Rules*, pp. 91, 110.
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“half-naked” and all were without shoes or stockings. They possessed a "wild glare and half-crazed appearance" and were “fed on bread and water, they drank, as they said, like dogs, from a bucket placed in the room, no utensil being allowed them.”

The appalling cruelty in the state home does not justify any lapses in the Catholic refuges, but it does suggest that they had higher ethical standards and implemented more humane practices than at least some contemporary institutions.

When the Catholic reformers established the refuges for penitent women they first looked for inspiration to the traditional sources of biblical teaching and social attitudes. These two sources carried considerable weight for the Catholic reformers and always influenced their beliefs and manner of dealing with penitent women. However, the reformers went beyond these sources and also drew on their understanding of human nature and the knowledge accumulated by the sisters who knew the penitent women. This approach was valuable because it provided an alternative perspective on the lives and character of the penitent women and the treatment that they should receive. The Catholic reformers looked at the individual circumstances of the penitent women and developed a progressive and compassionate approach to dealing with them at a time when most members of society used only rigid and severe stereotypes to consider penitent women. The value of the approach of the Catholic reformers went beyond the quality of care they provided women in the refuges and the effect that had on the individuals.

169 Ibid., pp. 377-378.

170 In contrast, Kerry Wimshurst argues in “Control and Resistance: ReformATORY School Girls in Late Nineteenth-Century South Australia”, Journal of Social History (1984), pp. 273-287 that physical conditions in state homes were good, as were the dispositions of the girls.
While the ideas of the Catholic reformers did not ever become majority views they did provide a challenge to established stereotypes for nineteenth-century Australians who chose to examine their attitudes toward „fallen” or „penitent” women.
Chapter 2

HER SOCIAL CONTEXT

Judith Godden states in her comparison of the nineteenth-century Catholic and Protestant refuges for penitent women in Sydney that the “refuge managers did not attempt to visualize any temptations or problems outside their own experience”. She argues alternately that “failure of imagination” was to blame and that “broader questions of social justice were seen as distractions from arousing ... individual guilt”.\(^{171}\) The first chapter of this thesis documents that the Catholic reformers were aware that women faced strong temptations and that the sisters took this into account when dealing with the penitents. The sources for all the Catholic homes indicate that the reformers also had a literal understanding of the term „social evil” as a description of prostitution and other forms of immoral living and acknowledged that social conditions did constitute „problems” for women. An 1869 editorial in the Melbourne *Advocate* demonstrated this perspective. In promoting the Magdalen Asylum, Abbotsford, it stated that the “history of some of the inmates is a very painful one, and lets in a strong light upon the social evil, its causes, and its consequences in Victoria”.\(^{172}\) An understanding of the impact of social conditions and problems on women’s lives formed a major part of the attempt by the Catholic reformers to explain the existence of penitent women; it was not a distraction from it.

\(^{172}\)Advocate, 13 March 1869, p. 7.
SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON PENITENT WOMEN

Although the Catholic reformers were aware of the influence of social factors, they experienced difficulty understanding the nature of some social problems and the role they played in women’s lives. Catholics repeatedly blamed society for corrupting women but offered only vague descriptions of how this occurred. In 1853 the *Freeman’s Journal* described the House of the Good Shepherd as a refuge where women “are sheltered for a time from the tempest of immorality that has been raging through our streets, and carrying vice and depravity in its train”.\(^{173}\) In 1875 an editorial in the *Irish Harp and Southern Cross* stated that the Catholic Female Refuge provided a place of rest for the victims of „the sin of cities”.\(^{174}\) Archbishop Polding argued in a pastoral letter of 1870 that by sheltering penitent women the Sisters of the Good Samaritan were saving the souls wounded in a great and continuing battle.\(^{175}\) Cardinal Moran often presented penitent women as victims of undefined but destructive social forces. In an address at Mount Saint Canice in 1893 he encouraged Tasmanian Catholics to support the women in the Magdalen Home, Sandy Bay. To the applause of the congregation he argued, “not, perhaps, that they had sinned much themselves. Very often the world sinned against them ... more than they sinned against the world”.\(^{176}\) The Catholic press, the sisters and the clergy were aware that some aspect of the social structure or social relations worked to the detriment of women but

\(^{173}\) *Freeman’s Journal*, 24 December 1853.
\(^{174}\) *Irish Harp and Southern Cross*, 10 September 1875, p. 5.
\(^{175}\) *Annals of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan*, Archbishop Polding, Pastoral Letter, 27 October 1870, p. 34.
\(^{176}\) *Catholic Standard*, 1 May 1893, p. 68.
they were not always able to perceive it in concrete economic or social terms. Instead, they expressed a belief in a tide of immorality that swept through cities corrupting many of those in its wake. They suggested that the tide reflected the state of society and the morality of its citizens but acted independently of it.

Confusion about the impact of social factors was widespread at the time. In his introduction to one of the articles of John Stanley James in *The Vagabond Papers*, Michael Cannon argues that nineteenth-century secular commentators could not perceive the historical causes of a great gold-rush boom and mass emigration of unskilled women to Australia, followed by an equally great depression; and the formidable difficulties faced by women in finding ways of earning an independent living in a “man’s country” while depressed economic conditions continued.¹⁷⁷

Despite the complexity of the situation and the lack of guidance from other social commentators, Catholic reformers did employ social analysis. They demonstrated an understanding of social and economic forces and the way they affected working-class communities, particularly the lives of women. The reformers comprehended these influences most clearly in periods of extreme social dislocation and showed particular insight into the impact of economic boom and demographic change. Western Australia’s Bishop Gibney explained to the Mother General of the Good Shepherd sisters that a refuge near Perth was necessary because the discovery of gold in the state had resulted in “an overwhelming majority of a male population and, in

¹⁷⁷James, p. 227.
consequence, a great deal of depravity.”\textsuperscript{178} Archbishop Polding took the same approach, stating in the Regulations for the „General Government of the House of the Good Shepherd”, 1867, that since “the discovery of gold in 1851, Sydney had become, every year, more populous and sad to relate, more wicked than ever”.\textsuperscript{179} The Annals of the Magdalen Asylum, Abbotsford, also acknowledged in 1862 that the social and demographic impact of the Gold Rush on Victorian society meant that maintaining a moral life was a constant challenge for women.\textsuperscript{180}

The reformers accepted that even without upheaval social relations and economic pressures could drive women into prostitution or immoral living. Miss Annie Golding offered a discussion of the possible implications of female conditions of employment to the Third Australasian Catholic Congress in 1909. She pointed out that while trade unions in Australia and New Zealand had won important advances for workers of both sexes, the wages for females were at such a low level that it was remarkable that so many women and girls did manage to lead respectable lives.\textsuperscript{181} The Catholic reformers identified poverty as the most influential of the factors impacting on women. The Sisters of the Good Samaritan argued in 1848 that among their penitents were many women who “under the influence of want” turn to

\textsuperscript{178}In John O’Brien, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{180}HR, From the Convent Annals, Abbotsford, 1862.
\textsuperscript{181}Annie Golding, “The Industrial and Social Condition of Women in the Australian Commonwealth”, Proceedings of the Third Australasian Catholic Congress (Sydney, 1909), p. 287. The congress did not permit Golding to deliver her own paper and appointed a male representative to read it on her behalf.
a life of immorality to survive.\textsuperscript{182} Mary Gaunt, a Protestant contributor to the \textit{Advocate}, visited the Abbotsford refuge in 1894 and admitted that she bore a prejudice toward the penitent women and had difficulty seeing beyond their “bad, low faces”.\textsuperscript{183} She qualified her own perception of evil by adding, “I am sure the sisters never think of that. They see only that the slums of a great city have manufactured such women, that from their birth they have hardly had a chance.”\textsuperscript{184} An 1899 editorial in the Brisbane \textit{Courier} reflected on the backgrounds of the penitents in Holy Cross Retreat and also concluded that “poverty whispers dark temptations to the girls”.\textsuperscript{185}

A report in the \textit{Advocate} in 1871 demonstrated that one Victorian preacher had a more sophisticated understanding of the disadvantages that poverty imposed on women and the difficulty of escaping from such an environment. The paper did not name the preacher but quoted that he sympathised with the women in the Abbotsford refuge and with “the ever-downward and almost hopelessly lost condition of the poor unfortunates, to whom so seldom is a helping hand held out, and whom the steady pressure of our social relations keeps thrusting to the dust”.\textsuperscript{186} The reformers believed that the refuges could address the effects of poverty by providing women with an alternative to the lifestyle that it fostered. In 1848 the Sisters of the Good Samaritan recorded that women had little chance of reforming while “remaining in their ordinary haunts ... under the immediate pressure of

\textsuperscript{182} ASGS, \textit{Institutions}, House of the Good Shepherd, 9 April 1848.
\textsuperscript{183} \textit{Advocate}, 27 January 1894.
\textsuperscript{184} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{185} \textit{Courier}, December 1899, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{186} \textit{Advocate}, 6 May 1871, p. 5.
The Sisters of Saint Joseph and the Catholic press in South Australia stressed in 1867 the importance of providing prostitutes with “some home to go to which might prevent them returning from sheer necessity to the haunts of sin”.\textsuperscript{188} They reinforced this point continually over the following years. For example, in 1876 the Adelaide Catholic press stated the necessity of women being “preserved from want and from the evils to which want so often leads”.\textsuperscript{189} The short history of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, written in about 1905, reflected on the experiences of one of the first Adelaide penitents. It recalled that she was determined to leave her life of immorality but was utterly destitute and without shelter being provided had no option but to return to prostitution.\textsuperscript{190}

Poverty was not the only feature that reformers identified as detrimental to the morality of women. Other Catholic commentators referred to the communal factors that influenced women’s lifestyles. The reformers believed the associations that women formed with their neighbours and friends were as destructive as the effects of poverty, and that such relationships accounted for the experiences of some of the women in the refuges. In 1848 the Good Samaritan sisters in New South Wales acknowledged the difficulties faced by women “exposed to the influence of example”.\textsuperscript{191} In 1853 an editorial in the \textit{Freeman’s Journal} described the penitents of Sydney as those “who had fallen in with bad company, where

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\textsuperscript{187} \textit{Institutions}, House of the Good Shepherd, 9 April 1848.
\textsuperscript{188} \textit{Southern Cross and South Australian Catholic Herald}, 20 November 1867, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{189} \textit{South Australian Tablet}, 5 May 1876, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{190} \textit{MF}, \textit{A Short Account of the Institutions}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{191} \textit{Institutions}, House of the Good Shepherd, 9 April 1848.
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they were robbed of the purity of their lives, and left literally bleeding in mind and body.” A similar view emerged from a report of the Adelaide refuge issued in 1868. It stated that the sisters visited the gaol every Sunday and when any woman with a good disposition was discharged they took her to the refuge to prevent her from again falling in with bad company. The reformers also feared that the associations of the penitents would prevent them resuming a moral life after being restored to virtue by the sisters. In 1905 the Queensland Telegraph reported on the prospects of the women leaving Holy Cross Retreat. It concluded that “old associations” offered temptations that women with moral constitutions weakened by years of sin could not resist. The concern of reformers that procurers could lure women into prostitution or immoral living while living in such conditions was both genuine and justified. The limited employment opportunities and poor pay and conditions in the traditional female occupations of domestic service and factory work did make women susceptible to the promise of the luxury and glamour of prostitution. However, the reformers’ attitude also demonstrated their aversion to the style of living that was acceptable within many working-class communities.

Catholic reformers objected especially to what they perceived as the sexual precocity and laxity of women, but also to the lack of religious observance among men and women. Godden notes that nineteenth-century Methodist missionaries found that none of the impoverished families they

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192 Freeman’s Journal, 24 December 1853.
194 Telegraph, December 1905.
met were Christian, and “confusing correlation with causation, evangelicals concluded that the families were destitute because they were disbelievers”. Catholic reformers made the same connection between irreligion and immoral living. By the time the Josephite sisters and their founder, Father Julian Tenison Woods, printed the 1868 report of the Catholic Female Refuge they had concluded that most of the penitents,

had a little education, but were so destitute of religious instruction, that they could be scarcely said to know more than that there was a God. As far as we could trace, their fall was due in all cases to drunken habits in the parents, and the want of proper religious instruction.

The following year they argued in their annual report that young people without religious knowledge were the worst characters they encountered.

An editorial in the *Courier* in 1899 stated that in the impoverished areas of Brisbane, “in the depths of social misery there are children who are born in despair and vice ... the voice of a friend never echoes our Saviour’s words of tenderness and love”. The Catholic reformers blamed the lack of faith among penitents on the negligence of their parents. They considered it a disadvantage that mitigated the blame for the women’s actions rather than further proof of their immorality.

Like other members of the community, the reformers also knew that both men and women involved in prostitution preyed on poor, single women. Police records reveal the details of operations such as that of the prominent Sydney madam, Tilly Devine, who paid staff of the Crown Street

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197 *Southern Cross and South Australian Catholic Herald*, 20 March 1869, p. 290.
198 *Courier*, December 1899, p. 4.
Women’s Hospital to lure new, single mothers into the occupation. Knowing the girls were likely to be homeless and cut off from family ties, Devine had domestics inform them of a lady willing to help them with work and lodging following their discharge. 199 The articles of John Stanley James indicated that people outside the police force understood that this occurred. In a discussion of the “Outcasts of Melbourne”, James argued that women, more so than men, lured young girls into prostitution. He informed readers that these women “never see innocence, but they wish to mar it, and they tempt children to their ruin - some so young that they really may be said to have never known any other state.”200 Margaret Barbalet details in Far From a Low Gutter Girl some of the cases of vulnerable young South Australian girls being led into prostitution201. The Catholic reformers did not have access to all of this information, however, they did realise that brothel-keepers hired procurers to seduce women into the trade. The report of the Adelaide refuge for 1868 recorded that two of the first penitents went from emigrant ships directly to brothels.202 In a report on prostitution in Victoria in 1869, an editorial of the Advocate stated that “the most revolting feature of the evil here is that mere children are ensnared to their ruin by infamous creatures of their own sex”.203

The reformers also knew those young women without ties to family or communities were vulnerable and that others exploited this vulnerability

200 James, p. 31.
203 Advocate, 13 March 1869, p. 7.
and led them into prostitution or immoral behaviour. The 1869 annual report of the Catholic Female Refuge stated that the penitents were “with few exceptions, of colonial birth, from the city, or immigrant girls, either thrown upon the streets, houseless, immediately after landing, or taking situations in bad houses, where they have been easily led into crime.”\textsuperscript{204} In reporting on the penitents in the Holy Cross Retreat in 1898, the Brisbane \textit{Courier} chose to stress that many of the girls came from the bush and did not have any friends of family in the city.\textsuperscript{205} The editor of the \textit{Southern Cross} argued in 1900 that these factors could compound the suffering of women who already had a first experience of sin. The paper reported that in these cases women were so distressed and so disadvantaged in looking for honest work that they were vulnerable to offers of dishonest work or dangerous accommodation.\textsuperscript{206} At times the reformers overstated the role of these types of influences. By stressing the external factors that influenced or restricted the actions of the sexually active woman they not only showed sensitivity to social forces but also diminished the power and therefore the threat the woman posed. In their study of official responses to female working-class sexuality in Victorian Scotland, Linda Mahood and Barbara Littlewood describe this process in sociological terms. They argue that the actions of reformers were part of a “drive to define and discipline wayward sexuality, and domesticate its dangers” to turn “fear of the ‘prostitute’ ... into pity for the

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\textsuperscript{204}\textit{Southern Cross and South Australian Catholic Herald}, 20 March 1869, p. 290.
\textsuperscript{205}\textit{Courier}, January 1898.
\textsuperscript{206}\textit{Southern Cross}, 8 June 1900, p. 366.
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ative ‘magdalene’. The Catholic reformers thus made the penitent woman into a more innocent and sympathetic figure with which they, and the public on which they relied for support, could be comfortable.

The descriptive records of the refuges indicate that the reformers also considered the impact of the collapse of the ties of immediate family, through the breakdown of the marriage of the penitent woman or that of her parents. In 1894 the Advocate recorded the story of one woman,

only 23, with an innocent simple face that makes her appear younger. She, too, the district nurse has found out somewhere in the lanes of Melbourne and brought here. And hers is a sad story, for she comes of decent people; but she married very young a man who beat her and ill-treated her and finally left her, and she took to drink and drifted down, down, till a fortnight ago she was induced to go to Abbotsford.

When ‘Hannah’ died in 1910 the Tasmanian sisters recorded in their Annals that due to the lack of a stable home she had suffered a very harsh life and had been responsible for herself since infancy. They concluded that she was “perfectly resigned to pass from a world that had been for our dear child only thorns and brambles.” They also noted two years later that another young penitent, ‘Clare’, had a cruel father and step-mother and that she and her younger sister had been compelled to run away from home.

Many Australians were interested in determining the causes of prostitution and joined Catholics in examining the role of social factors in

207 Littlewood and Mahood, pp. 172, 171.
209 Advocate, 27 January 1894.
210 Annals, Convent of the Good Shepherd, Hobart, Death of a Penitent, 29 January 1910.
211 Ibid. 21 October 1912.
influencing the behaviour of women. An editorial in the *Adelaide Observer* in 1856 addressed the issue of female destitution and urged the public to concentrate on stopping women from adopting an immoral life instead of just reforming them after they had fallen. It suggested that “when we consider that poverty often leads to vice it may be desirable, when studying the methods of cure, to study also the methods of prevention.”

In 1870 four known prostitutes and two other women presumed to be prostitutes wrote a letter to Adelaide’s local paper, the *Register*, complaining of the limited employment options in South Australia and the poverty that both men and women experienced as a result. The women argued that by assisting female immigration to the colony but not expanding the manufacturing industry to ensure their employment on arrival, the government was contributing to the rise in the incidence of prostitution. Such analysis, however, was less typical of the contemporary discussion of prostitution than the editorial comment that accompanied it. The editors defended the right of the women to express their views and agreed that the government should create more positions for women in the manufacturing industry. They did not, however, accept that the lack of such legitimate employment opportunities forced women into prostitution. They argued that the women “require to learn that nothing whatever can justify their continuing their abominable traffic in the public streets, to the disgust and annoyance of all decently conducted people.”

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212 *Adelaide Observer*, 5 July 1856.
213 *Register*, 25 June 1870, p. 3.
supported this conclusion and failed to show even a vague understanding of the social pressures facing women.

Such commentators placed the responsibility for their situation on weakness of character in the individual women. Some residents of New South Wales gave evidence during a legal case between the Laundries Commission of Sydney and the sisters of the Tempe Retreat laundry in 1910. The records of the trial provide a limited but valuable insight into community views on the causes of prostitution, the work of the refuges and the character of penitent women. One witness questioned on these issues was Mr. O’Grady, an inspector of the police force. He told the enquiry, “I do not think the women fall through poverty. It is through love of pleasure idleness & want of training. I never met a case where poverty was the cause of evil living.” Mr. Carter, a member of the Laundries Board, conceded that girls “may be tempted by pressure of poverty” but told the court that he believed they usually “fall through love of pleasure & hatred of work.”

The comments of these men reflected dominant social attitudes. In 1877 John Stanley James published an article on the Abbotsford Magdalen Asylum in the Argus. It recounted the story of one young woman who gave birth to an illegitimate child and was disowned by her mother and cast out by her neighbours. He hoped that through her history he could “show how the

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214 The Laundries Commission alleged that the sisters undercut commercial launderers and deprived them of their livelihood. All the refuge laundries attracted these accusations and several others also faced legal charges, but no case against a refuge was ever successful.
216 Ibid., p. 59.
forces of society work against the weak”. However, even after he acknowledged the destructive effect of social pressures and expressed sympathy for the penitents he met at the Magdalen Asylum earlier that year, he told a prostitute he met on the street, “none of you want to work. You prefer idleness, and fine dress, and the indulgence of your passions, following out your natural instincts, and going to perdition wilfully.”

These attitudes did not result from the failure of Australians to understand the connection between prostitution and poverty or other social conditions. Most commentators did make this link but did not believe that dire poverty existed in Australia. With this attitude they could only conclude that women who engaged in prostitution and men who engaged in other forms of crime found the particular features of the professions attractive. In his discussion of the 1883 Mount Rennie rape trial, David Walker cites the commentary of the Sydney Morning Herald. This paper asserted that “the difference between crime in London ... and crime in Sydney, was that London’s crime was „begotten of poverty” whereas in Sydney the „case is reversed. Poverty at least is not the excuse.” In the same period David Blair, a journalist and former politician, applied this view to prostitution. He conceded that in European cities women might have been led into prostitution through poverty but argued in a report presented to the parliament of Victoria in 1873 that poverty and wage levels were not the cause of local prostitution. His view was that the love of idleness and luxury

217James, p. 239.
218Ibid., p. 251.
or inherent vicious tendencies accounted for women entering the profession in Australia.\textsuperscript{220}

In 1882 the Anglican Reverend A. W. Webb expressed the same view at a meeting of the subscribers to the South Australian Female Refuge. He concluded that the climate and relative prosperity fostered prostitution in Australia to the same extent as poverty did in other places.\textsuperscript{221} Even those responsible for promoting the Catholic refuges occasionally supported this view. In 1876 an editorial in the \textit{South Australian Tablet} newspaper stated the need to reform the morals of local "abandoned" women. The writer reasoned that economic reform was not necessary in cities like Adelaide that were small and not afflicted by the poverty that fostered prostitution in older cities.\textsuperscript{222} However, Catholics more commonly opposed social opinion and expressed the view that poverty in Australia was at least a partial cause of the incidence of prostitution and immoral living among women.

**SOCIAL INFLUENCES OF PENITENT WOMEN**

The reformers maintained a paradoxical position regarding the fallen woman. They believed that society threatened and endangered her but that she was equally threatening and dangerous to society. Most reformers argued that corruption and evil issued spontaneously from fallen women so that their very existence was a danger. In an address in 1885 promoting the building of the Tempe Retreat, Reverend Butler told the Catholics of New

\textsuperscript{221}Register, 10 August 1882.
\textsuperscript{222}South Australian Tablet, 28 July 1876.
South Wales to think of fallen women as “not only a degradation, but a great 
mental stain, and as that infamy that was flowing through modern 
civilisation”. The Advocate recorded in 1893 that women usually conferred 
a blessing on society but once contaminated by sexual misconduct they 
spread contamination through it. An editorial in the Catholic Record agreed 
with these views and so expressed relief at the arrival of the Good Shepherd 
sisters in Western Australia in 1899. It stressed the importance to the 
community of working with the penitent woman, arguing that a “pestilence 
rests with her and goes out from her, corrupting and blighting, and 
withering.” Other Catholics believed that the danger to society resulted 
from the deliberate vengeful acts of fallen women. An editorial in the 
Morning Star in 1892 considered fallen women “scourges” of the society that 
had ruined then rejected them. It argued that these women

rejoice in deeds that bring ruin and destruction on themselves provided 
only that others too are involved in ruin. They harden their hearts to 
their disgrace and seek oblivion of their wretchedness in scenes of 
drunkenness and riotous disorder.

Reverend Butler agreed. He argued in 1893 that fallen women would seek 
revenge for the injustice of being cast out of society when they had been 
betrayed and brutalised by men.

Whether Catholic commentators believed that the social threat issued 
spontaneously from fallen women or from their vicious and considered 
actions, they predicted a bleak future for communities without refuges.

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223 Annals of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, p. 117.
224 Advocate, 28 January 1893, p. 8.
225 In John O’Brien, p. 46.
226 Morning Star, 20 August 1892, p. 10.
Although the benefit to society was a secondary aim of the refuges, the reformers did argue that by establishing such homes they were protecting the whole community from the effects of the „social evil“. In a pastoral circular of 1862 Reverend Sheehy reminded the Catholics of New South Wales to consider not only the obvious value of the House of the Good Shepherd to the penitents, but also the great benefits it offered to the whole community.228 The Advocate reported in 1870 that the sisters in the refuges mediated between the interests of their religion and their society on behalf of both God and the sinners.229 The Catholic Standard reported in 1893 that Cardinal Moran presented the same argument to a Tasmanian congregation. He urged those present to recognise the Magdalen Home “as a great and lasting blessing conferred on society, freeing it from what would otherwise be a very serious contagion, spreading moral and spiritual disease amongst its citizens.”230 Several years later Reverend O’Mahony also commented on the social importance of the work of that refuge. At the opening of the Memorial Church at Mount Saint Canice in 1910, he appealed to the patriotic sentiment of the audience and argued:

Of the beneficent action of this Convent on the social body, no man is so soulless, so dead to all good, as to have a doubt - Apart from all question of the supernatural, on the plane of the merely natural order, all patriots, - all who would uphold the social well-being, must acclaim them benefactors of their Country.231

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228 Annals of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, Dr. Sheehy V.G., Pastoral Circular, 3 October 1862, p. 15.
229 Advocate, 6 August 1870, p. 7.
230 Catholic Standard, 1 May 1893, p. 68.
231 Annals, Convent of the Good Shepherd, Hobart, Opening of the Memorial Church, November 1910.
The reformers universally supported the belief that the refuges protected the community simply by removing the women from it. However, they argued that the homes made other contributions to social improvement. In 1891, before the opening of Mount Saint Canice, the Catholic Standard reported that the refuge would reform fallen women, “rendering them useful instead of poisonous members of society,” thereby suggesting that the training and education the women received in the home was the source of social benefit. In 1910, when that refuge had been operating for over a decade, Reverend O’Mahony reminded Tasmanians that its practical benefit to society was obvious. He argued that the spiritual effects of the refuge would serve society by regenerating the morals of all members of the community not just the women within the home. He asked his congregation to consider,

what spiritual influence may breathe from this centre over the world around? What purifying streams from the fountains of life may be made to flow over the parched and soiled and sin-laden soil of modern society - this is God’s secret.

NATURE AND EXTENT OF PROSTITUTION

The belief of the Catholic reformers and press that fallen women existed in critically high numbers in Australia exacerbated their fears of their effect. In 1867 the Catholic press in Adelaide stressed the importance of the refuge as a response to “an evil of sadly great magnitude.” The reformers believed that the level of immorality in Australian cities was high compared

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233 Annals, Convent of the Good Shepherd, Hobart, November 1910.
234 Southern Cross and South Australian Catholic Herald, 20 November 1867, p. 32.
to other urban centres as well as in relation to their own small populations. An editor of the *Irish Harp and Farmers Herald* was confident enough to assert that Adelaide was one of the most immoral cities on the face of the earth.\(^{235}\) Such statements are difficult to evaluate but they do resemble those made by secular commentators. Dr. Richard Penney wrote to Governor Grey in 1842 that the number of women engaged in prostitution in Adelaide was out of all proportion to its total population.\(^{236}\) The Hobart Town City Mission reported in 1857 that,

> offences against social morality are so prevalent, that many have grown quite insensitive to their wickedness .... The absence of chastity is hardly deemed a misfortune, much less a fault - hence prostitution is carried on to a reckless extent.\(^{237}\)

Observers from outside the colonies, familiar with the cities of Britain, Continental Europe and North America, also supported the views of locals. John Stanley James stated that the “devil’s tail” seemed “particularly long in Australia”.\(^{238}\) John Casey, a Fenian prisoner in Western Australia, pronounced in the *Irishman* in 1870 that,

> More real depravity, more shocking wickedness, more undisguised vice and immorality is to be witnessed at midday in the most public thoroughfares of Perth, with its population of 1,500, than in any other city of fifty times its population, either in Europe or America.\(^{239}\)

The estimates of modern historians and concerned nineteenth-century commentators regarding numbers of prostitutes in Australia also support the claims of the Catholic reformers. Susan Horan’s study of police records for

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\(^{236}\) Susan Horan, “Prostitution in South Australia: A Proposal for Reform, 1842”, *The Push from the Bush*, No. 4 (1979), p. 34.

\(^{237}\) In Daniels, “Prostitution in Tasmania”, in Daniels, ed., *So Much Hard Work*, pp. 29-30.

\(^{238}\) James, p. 251.

Adelaide revealed that in 1881, 500 known prostitutes were working in the city of Adelaide and the suburbs of Norwood, Kensington and Hindmarsh: approximately one prostitute per twenty-eight adult male residents.\textsuperscript{240} In 1908 the Central Methodist Mission estimated that between 2 000 and 3 000 women were working the streets of Sydney and the Rocks area as free-lance prostitutes.\textsuperscript{241} An anonymous tract produced in Hobart in 1858 from census figures and the records of the Hobart Town City Mission calculated that one in sixteen women resident in the town had worked as a prostitute.\textsuperscript{242} These figures ignore the prostitutes who worked in brothels and on the streets on an occasional basis and the fallen women who were not prostitutes. Such information lacks precision and does not provide a genuine basis for estimating levels of prostitution. However, the combination of contemporary reflections and statistical reporting demonstrates that fallen women were prominent features in the Australian cities.

Despite their insight into the causes and extent of prostitution, Catholics still had a limited understanding of certain aspects of the occupation. The secrecy surrounding the backgrounds of the penitents restricted the details of their lives they were able to pass to the sisters. However, the reformers did acquire some information on the reality of the women’s lives. In 1883 the \textit{Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart}

\textsuperscript{240} Susan Horan, ““More Sinned Against than Sinning?” Prostitution in South Australia, 1836-1914”, in Daniels, \textit{So Much Hard Work}, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{242} “One of Four”, Words to Women: A Plea for Certain Sufferers” (1858), reprinted in part in Kay Daniels and Mary Murnane, eds., \textit{Uphill all the Way: A Documentary History of Women In Australia} (St. Lucia’s, Qld., 1980), p. 96.
warned the public that they were ignorant of the conditions the women suffered:

Of the depths of misery and debauchery, which in their abandoned state they must have recourse to, and the cesspools of iniquity and riot in which they have to live. Most of them dwell in earthly pandemoniums, slaves of human brutes, and become metamorphosed into human demons.243

The secular press supplemented such information with regular reports on the conditions that prostitutes endured. Catholic reformers knew of the poverty and the incidence of venereal disease among prostitutes, their prominence among reported victims of rape, assault and murder, their over-representation among addicts of opium and alcohol and the exploitation and violence they faced from brothel-keepers. However, this knowledge did not prevent them from accepting a romantic portrayal of the lives of prostitutes.244

Catholics presented conflicting images of the conditions of prostitution, alternating between graphic descriptions of its horror and idealised depictions of its glamour. Most commonly, they accepted the dominant belief that a life of prostitution was one of relative comfort and affluence. The *Freeman’s Journal* reported in 1853 that prostitutes lived “riotously on the ‘wages of iniquity’”.245 In 1884 the *Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart* published the poem, “Magdalen”, by “L.D.” without qualification. The poet acknowledged that the causes of prostitution were complex and so judgments about the character of prostitutes were

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244 Venereal disease was prolific enough for three Australian state governments to legislate for its control. Queensland introduced a Contagious Diseases Act in 1868, Tasmania followed in 1879 and Western Australia introduced a less severe Health Act in 1915.
unfair. Nevertheless, the poem ignores the dangerous and unglamorous features of the lifestyle of prostitutes. The first stanza begins:

Much had she sinned! The jewels rare
That clustered in her flowing hair,
The golden clasps upon her arms,
The wealth that heightened all her charms,
The silken robes, the dainty fare,
The cushioned couch, the perfumed air,
The wanton will, the pampered frame,
Bore witness all to sin and shame.

Such views reflect the stereotypes of prostitution that existed at the time and misrepresent the reality of the lives of most women engaged in the profession. Catholics reinforced this stereotype but they did not allow it to influence their view of the character of women. They did not stress the vanity and frivolity of fallen women or argue that their love of finery and luxury contributed to their situation.

Catholics did not restrict their attention or concern to prostitutes. They also assisted and attempted to change the public perception of unmarried mothers and the other fallen women who had not worked as prostitutes. Catholics reserved special compassion for these women, adopting the view presented by the Sisters of Mercy in their report of 1894 on Holy Cross Retreat. The report noted that most of the young girls had “semi-accidentally fallen” and the Retreat protected them from the “terrible hard-heartedness to which they would otherwise be exposed”. A divergence existed between Catholic and broader social attitudes toward these women. Some individuals shared the compassion of the Catholic reformers and

246 Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart, September 1884, p. 4.
demonstrated a sound understanding of destructive economic forces. The 1870 letter of "A Protestant" expressed disgust that the Abbotsford refuge was in debt through lack of financial support. The letter urged the public to reflect on the current circumstances and possible future of the penitent woman, alluding to the importance of preventing infanticide. It asked if it was any wonder “their sin becomes one not of choice but of terrible necessity. What else can they? For they must have food.” In 1873 the *Irish Harp and Farmers’ Herald* reprinted an article by a local social commentator, Geoffry Crabthorn, published several weeks earlier in the *South Australian Register*. The article criticised the way the community deliberately disadvantaged the unmarried mother. He argued that society refused her the opportunity to earn a living, intensifying her misery until she was “too often driven by sheer necessity to abandon her foremost duty as the only alternative against starvation”. He advocated a social revolution to improve her situation. Although this was a far more radical solution than that of the Catholic reformers, the editors stated that they agreed with every word.

However, such attitudes were in contrast to dominant social views. Sympathy and concern for unmarried mothers were not widespread in the community and some prominent bodies promoted intolerance. The medical profession was notable for broadcasting views that ignored the impact of social factors. An article from the *Australian Medical Journal* in 1873 stated that rather than

248 *Advocate*, 13 August 1870, p. 12.
249 *Irish Harp and Farmers’ Herald*, 25 April 1873, p. 4. Crabthorn regularly wrote for the "Echoes of the Bush" column in the *Adelaide Observer* and occasionally contributed articles covering a range of social issues to the *Register*. 
being regarded as a misfortune to become the mother of an illegitimate child, it is frequently looked upon as a piece of good luck, and for this reason:- The increasing prevalent practice of the more wealthy classes to employ wet-nurses has caused a large demand for this class of servants. They obtain double, and often treble, the wages they receive as ordinary servants, and the duties expected of them in this capacity involve no arduous work, and they infer a liberal attention to diet and general comfort. Their own children are easily disposed of.\textsuperscript{250}

The article then recounted how most single women who gave birth in the Lying-in-Hospital of the Destitute Asylum left with healthy babies only to return within a month with the infant emaciated and close to death after being boarded out and neglected. It stated that the mothers took the infant back to the hospital simply to obtain a death certificate then began contemplating “a second venture into an occupation which pays so well, and evolves so little inconvenience.”\textsuperscript{251} The article did not consider the dire economic situation of working-class women, or that although wet-nursing could be detrimental to the health of a new baby it might be essential to the survival of the whole family. Neither did it refer to members of the „wealthy classes” hiring wet-nurses in spite of the possible impact on working-class children or keeping the wages of general service so low as to make wet-nursing an attractive occupation. The assertions of medical practitioners that pregnancy and childbirth involved little inconvenience and that women endured the deaths of several children without experiencing grief or loss contrasted with the compassion of the Catholic reformers and the members of the public who supported them.

Reformers of the Anglican and evangelical Protestant churches also promoted negative stereotypes of penitent women. They did not suggest

\textsuperscript{250}Ibid., 27 June 1873, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{251}Ibid.
that single mothers were necessarily cruel or calculating but they did invoke concepts of personal blame and failing and ignore the impact of social pressures. Reverend W. Harcus addressed a public meeting of the friends and supporters of the South Australian Female Refuge in 1861. Adelaide’s secular newspaper at the time, the *Advertiser*, reported that he told the audience the root of evil was in the heart of the sinner and it was unwise to speak of fallen women as being unfortunates when they were actually guilty criminals in the sight of God and man.252 Godden found similar sentiments in the annual reports of the evangelical Protestant Sydney Female Refuge. She notes that in 1880 the residents of the Protestant Refuge were described as having “sensual and debasing habits, blunted feelings and hard hearts”, and that the reformers believed these characteristics resulted in the behaviour of the women.253 The staff of the Geelong Female Refuge maintained a position somewhere between that of the Catholic reformers and the more judgmental social commentators. They reported through the local press in 1908 that there was a “succession of cases in which young women through their own ignorance, weakness, or evil disposition” required the assistance of the home.254

The records of Mount Saint Canice indicate that the Catholic reformers’ reluctance to place blame on the penitent women and their faith in the ability of the women to reform dictated the practices of the reformers. The refuge at Sandy Bay accepted and retained women deemed unsuitable

252 *Advertiser*, 24 April 1861.
254 In Swain, *A Refuge at Kildare*, pp. 28, 60.
by secular and other religious reformers. On the death of „Hannah” in 1910, the sisters recorded in the Annals that during her youth she “was so utterly neglected that the civil authorities took compassion on her and had her sent to the Industrial School at New Town ... but finding her unmanageable [the staff of the Industrial School] transferred her on to us.”  

Valerie Baxter records the case of a sixteen-year old woman named „Dora” who ran away from domestic service in 1912. She needed shelter after leaving her position and the reformers of the Protestant House of Mercy in Hobart refused her admission but the Catholic sisters accepted her into the Magdalen Home. Baxter also documents the experiences of „Vera” in that year. The State Welfare Department recorded that the “Industrial School did not care to take” her but again the Sisters of the Good Shepherd did. 

Godden found that the Protestant reformers in New South Wales “minutely examined each candidate for admission to decide her suitability”. A report of the House of Mercy, run by the Anglican Church in Walkerville, South Australia, stated in 1903 that applicants had to disclose full written details of their background. Applicants also needed a written character reference from a reliable witness who would testify that they knew her and believed she was truly penitent and would make a suitable resident. The Catholic refuges accepted any applicants for whom they had room, so must have provided shelter to

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255Annals, Convent of the Good Shepherd, Hobart, Death of a Penitent, 29 January 1910.
256Baxter, p. 37.
women who did not meet the rigorous standards necessary for entry to the Protestant and Anglican homes.

The Catholic reformers deliberately used traditional Christian teachings to formulate and promote their views on penitent women and develop a special compassion for them. These teachings reminded Catholics not only of Jesus’ relationship with Mary Magdalene but also of his forgiveness of all sinners. When promoting the Abbotsford refuge through the *Advocate* in 1911, Reverend Phelan recalled that no sin could separate a sinner from the love and protection of the Church. He argued that “His representative on earth must place the same value on human life, and exercise the same forbearance with human weakness as He did”.

Reverend O’Mahony expressed the same sentiments in Tasmania. He told the congregation at Mount Saint Canice in 1910 that the “sinless Son of God was the Kindest of men to sinners .... Sin and suffering were everywhere the object of His love and mercy, our frailty and weakness, all the spiritual maladies of soul and body.” He then instructed those gathered of their duty to follow the divine example.

The Catholic Church was not alone in promising the forgiveness of sin or the reconciliation of sinners with God. It did, however, have a special sympathy for sinners and a special acceptance of human frailty and failure. Patrick O’Farrell notes in *The Irish in Australia* that among this community in the nineteenth century “the Ulster Protestants ... lived in awe of the stern

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259 *Advocate*, 5 August 1911, p. 25.
260 *Annals, Convent of the Good Shepherd, Hobart*, Opening of the Memorial Church, November 1910.
Creator, the Catholics were more softly ruled by a crucified God and His weeping mother”.

In *The Catholic Church and Community* he offers more precise analysis of the differing religious perspectives on human nature, sin and forgiveness:

Attention to moral failings was paramount in evangelical protestantism which combined a stern and rigorous behavioural standard with a firm conviction that lapses were the fault of the individual. The Catholic view tended more to accept the likelihood and prevalence of human shortcomings, and to temper blame of the individual with human sympathy and criticism of the social system. Expecting sin, and with confession so central to its sacramental system, it tended to be less censorious, less readily scandalised by moral lapses.

While perhaps romanticising the response to sin, O’Farrell does provide insight into the philosophy of the Catholic refuges and offers an explanation for the sectarian differences evident between reformers. The argument that Reverend Phelan addressed to Protestant critics of work with penitent women supports O’Farrell’s analysis. Phelan stated in the *Advocate* in 1911 that anyone who believed that a foundling hospital is an incentive to sin understood “nothing of the weakness of human nature and the strength of human passion”. He expressed the Catholic view that a sexual transgression was regrettable but almost inevitable, and that if reformers dealt with the misdemeanour appropriately they could ensure that the individual involved suffered little real damage and prevent greater sins from being committed.

All religious reformers in nineteenth-century Australia struggled to account for the existence of fallen women. Their limited understanding of

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263 *Advocate*, 5 August 1911, p. 25.
economic and demographic change and social dynamics did not provide a strong foundation for investigations into the problem, and the assumptions and prejudices of faith served as a further hindrance. The reformers had to translate their understanding of the problem into refuges that satisfied their own standards but were attractive enough to induce penitent women to enter and stay. Catholics did enjoy some advantages over their contemporaries. The particularities of their religion allowed them to develop a compassionate understanding of the factors that could lead a woman to fall. The proximity of Catholic authorities to working-class culture, their attempts to place this culture in a broader context and their willingness to apply their insights to the situations of the penitent women allowed for explanations other than personal failing and responses other than blame. The Catholic commentaries are far from consistent and are not convincing examples of social analysis, but they do hint at an understanding of the cycle of poverty and lack of opportunity that was endemic to the position of working-class women. The development and promotion of such views and their translation into effective action was a modest but important achievement in the nineteenth century.
The Catholic sisters’ compassion and understanding of social influences did not lead them to romanticise the character of the penitent woman. The reformers established the refuges because they recognised that the most abandoned and hardened women were the most neglected and in greatest need of physical and spiritual comfort. They chose to exercise forgiveness and sympathy in spite of their perceptions of the nature of the women, not because of them. The refuges always accepted women who were single and pregnant or in danger of falling into sin but the reformers were adamant that the more degraded women were the real focus of the homes. The sisters, the press and the clergy did not hide the brutalising backgrounds of the penitent women from the public but used them as a justification for providing assistance. However, like contemporary institutions with the same objects in other countries, after the first decades of operation the aims of the Australian Catholic refuges became more conservative. Before the beginning of the twentieth century the reformers began giving preference to younger, less hardened women, mainly those who were single and pregnant for the first time. The official records of the refuges also began to ignore or deny the original aims of the homes. The compassion of the sisters ensured that they still admitted prostitutes and prisoners but these women became an exception to the stated objects of the reformers.
The rules and constitutions for all the orders of Catholic sisters agreed that the role of the religious sister was to look for the good and the potential in every soul, not to discriminate between people according to their sins. This belief prevented the Catholic reformers from making moral judgments that would restrict admissions to their homes. The *Practical Rules* of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd called each sister to remember that they were working for the salvation of souls and to rejoice every time God sent a woman to seek admission. 264 The sisters tried not to be discouraged or offended when they knew applicants had a long involvement with a life of sin but aimed to feel the most compassion for the most evil women. 265 The Sisters of Mercy in Queensland believed that the worth of their work depended on the flaws of the penitent women. Their *Customs and Guide* stated that mercy did not assume attractive qualities in it object and “can operate only in proportion as destitution, suffering, ignorance, and other miseries call it forth.” 266 Like members of all religious orders, the sisters also sought to ensure their own salvation and restoring sinners to God entitled them to eternal reward. Ultimately, the sisters believed it was for God to judge sinners and for themselves to soothe them and to focus on the social and spiritual benefits of their work.

264 *Practical Rules*, pp. 174-175.
266 *Customs and Guide*, p. 2.
THE PENITENT WOMAN IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The origins of the Catholic refuges reflect the commitment of the reformers to working with the most desperate members of the female population. The *Annals of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan* placed a romantic slant on the origins of the House of the Good Shepherd but even this idealised account, discussed in this introduction, admitted that the reformers intended the refuge as a last resort for women tired of a life of sin. Some confusion exists over whether the Sisters of Saint Joseph or Father Julian Woods first perceived the necessity of a refuge in Adelaide. All the sources state, however, that the Catholic community recognised that the city needed a refuge for women being released from prison. The *Southern Cross and South Australian Catholic Herald* published the first report of the Catholic Female Refuge, based on the meeting of 14 November 1867. It recorded that

> the necessity for such an institution has been long felt, as unfortunately the considerable proportion of young females in our gaol can testify. Many of these unfortunates have frequently testified their willingness to change their mode of life, if on leaving the gaol they had some home to go to.\(^{267}\)

An 1871 editorial in the *Advocate* acknowledged that the Magdalen Asylum at Abbotsford also served the most debased of women. It informed readers that without the efforts of the sisters “many of these poor fallen women would have long since perished in the streets of Melbourne, or have been crowding our over-crowded gaols, or, still worse, have died suicides, hiding their sin and shame”.\(^{268}\)

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\(^{267}\) *Southern Cross and South Australian Catholic Herald*, 20 November 1867, p. 32.

\(^{268}\) *Advocate*, 30 September 1871, p. 7.
The reformers used the same sentiment to frame the conditions of entry to the refuges. All the homes promoted a genuine "open door" policy that involved an implicit rejection of the approach that screened applicants or considered whether they were deserving or respectable. The *Southern Cross and South Australian Catholic Herald* provided one of the earliest statements regarding attitudes toward admissions. In 1867, the year the Catholic Female Refuge opened, it recorded that any "person whose misconduct has made her an object of this charity, will be received on application at the Refuge, Franklin St."269 This policy remained in place for several decades; the Josephites noted in their first official report of the refuge in 1897 that, "distress is the sole passport to admission."270 The same principles were evident in the records of the other refuges. In 1867 the editor of the Victorian secular paper, the *Argus*, stated that the Abbotsford asylum was a penitentiary "to which all comers are admitted".271 In 1892, three years after beginning work in Queensland, the Sisters of Mercy recorded in their report of Holy Cross Retreat that willingness to abandon an evil life was the sole requirement for admission.272 On the opening of the Magdalen Asylum at Sandy Bay the following year, an editorial in the *Catholic Standard* of Tasmania discussed the entry criteria of the refuge and assured readers that

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269 *Southern Cross and South Australian Catholic Herald*, 20 December 1867, p. 59.
270 ACAA, *Catholic Female Refuge: Queen St., Norwood, Report for the Term August 31, 1895 to March 31, 1897*, p. 3.
271 *Argus*, 2 July 1867.
for all applicants “I have sinned but wish to reform,” will be the „open sesame.” 273

The reformers also developed readmission practices. They were not prepared to provide recalcitrant women with unlimited access to the refuges, but neither did they preclude those who failed immediately to adopt a moral life from returning to the homes. Archbishop Polding considered the possibility of women straying after they left the refuge when developing the „House of the Good Shepherd, Regulations for the General Government of the Institution, 1867“. He stated that penitents who strayed from the moral path after leaving the refuge would be readmitted if their conduct in the refuge had been good. They would be barred from readmission if their conduct had been poor. 274 The Committee of Management of the Catholic Female Refuge addressed the problem as it arose rather than when establishing the home, but adopted the same solution as Polding. In October 1883 the reformers in Adelaide wrote into the Customs in Use in the Refuge that the sisters would receive applicants of any denomination at any time of the day or night except where they knew that a woman had fallen twice and still did not desire reformation. 275

The descriptive records of these two refuges indicate that the practice of readmission was even more lenient than the customs and rules suggest. 276

A detailed diary kept by an unnamed Josephite sister for part of 1873 when

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275 The Refuge, Norwood, Minute Book, 29 October 1883.
276 1870s Diary, Refuge Fullarton, passim.
the Catholic Female Refuge was in Norwood illustrates the frequency of readmissions. In June and September of that year admissions included Agnes Murphy and Ellen Billsbury, who had also been resident at the refuge when it was situated in Mitcham, and Anne Cannon, Anne Donahue and Mrs. Gumpus, who had been resident when the refuge was located at both Franklin Street and Mitcham.\textsuperscript{277} The \textit{Report on the Attendance at Religious Instruction and General Conduct - Refuge Inmates, 1879-1883} supported this impression. The report recorded without additional comment the frequent occasions when a “former inmate returned” or a penitent “left but returned” or “returned after a few months”.\textsuperscript{278}

The Sisters of the Good Samaritan have used the admissions registers of Saint Magdalen’s Retreat and the House of the Good Shepherd to compile a listing of all admissions to the refuge from 1887. The document simply entitled \textit{Tempe} demonstrates that repeat admissions were common. The listings of two women particularly make this point. Minnie Brown, „Flavia”, entered the House of the Good Shepherd in November 1905, February 1906, February 1907, August 1908, February 1909 and July 1909. Lizzie Edwards, „Maria”, gained admission in September 1903, December 1903, July 1904, January 1905, November 1905, June 1906, November 1909, March 1914, October 1917 and June 1927.\textsuperscript{279} The admission register itself provides a little more detail of departures and readmissions, and the case of Lucy Kennedy,

\textsuperscript{277} \textit{Ibid.}, 13 June 1873; 22 June 1873; 8 July 1873; 20 July 1873; 16 September 1873.
\textsuperscript{278}MF, \textit{Report on the Attendance at Religious Instruction and General Conduct - Refuge Inmates, 1879-1883}, passim.
\textsuperscript{279}ASGS, \textit{Tempe}: Alphabetical listing of all admissions to Saint Magdalen’s Retreat from 1887 to the present showing birthplace, age and name.
“Barbara”, confirms that women exited and entered Saint Magdalen’s with relative ease. The sisters first admitted Kennedy in 1890, then recorded in January 1897 that she “left to go to friends”, “returned” in April, successfully “requested to leave” later that month, returned later in the year, and left and returned again the following year.\textsuperscript{280} The records indicate that repeated readmission of penitents was also a feature of the other refuges. An editorial from the \textit{Daily Telegraph} in 1891 reported on the Abbotsford asylum and stated that a “great many of those girls who left the institution frequently returned through fear of relapsing, or because they had relapsed. Drink was the principal cause of these lapses.”\textsuperscript{281} The 1889-1892 report of Holy Cross Retreat recorded that of the 182 women admitted in that initial three-year period, the sisters admitted twelve women twice, twenty-one women three times, and five other women four times each.\textsuperscript{282} Table 3 shows the number of some readmissions to the refuges. The practice of the reformers readmitting women reflected their compassion and desire to place the reform of the penitents above moral judgments as well as the practical difficulty of working with unco-operative penitents.

The evidence suggests that the sisters adhered to their principles and offered shelter to any woman who sought it. Most of the women who entered the homes had spent years engaged in prostitution and were often addicted to alcohol or opium. Most were seeking refuge because they were no longer able to earn a living through prostitution or were exhausted by its

\textsuperscript{280} ASGS, \textit{Tempe/Arncliffe Register, 1887-1918}, 27 January 1870; 27 January 1897; 4 April 1897; 21 April 1897; 4 August 1897; 18 March 1898; 3 August 1898.
\textsuperscript{281} HR, \textit{Daily Telegraph}, April 1891.
\textsuperscript{282} Report of the Holy Cross Retreat, For Three Years Ending September 20, 1892, p. 2.
effects. In most cases they sought practical assistance, often short term, rather than the spiritual salving the sisters were eager to offer. The annual

**TABLE 3**

**Women Most Frequently Re-Admitted to the Refuges**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refuge</th>
<th>Penitent Woman</th>
<th>Period of Admissions</th>
<th>Number of Admissions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House of the Good Shepherd</td>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>1903-1927</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House of the Good Shepherd</td>
<td>Flavia</td>
<td>1905-1909</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Magdalen’s Retreat</td>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>1890-1898</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Female Refuge</td>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>1872-1883</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** Tempe: Alphabetical listing of all admissions to Saint Magdalen’s Retreat; *1870s Diary*, passim; *Report on the Attendance, 1879-1883*, passim.

The annual reports of the Catholic Female Refuge in the latter years of the nineteenth century record circumspectly that the sisters regularly provided women with “temporary hospitality” or “temporary care”. Many of the women were disreputable and often dangerous and the reformers admitted this in general discussions of the women in the refuges. The *Memoirs* of Julian Tenison Woods, dictated in the late 1880s, stated that

the Refuge was the most difficult and troublesome of any of the Institutions directed by Father. Many people think that the class of people meant to be reformed by a refuge includes a large number who were betrayed unawares into vice and persevered in it from shame or the difficulty of extricating themselves. Such cases as these Father says were of the rarest kind. All that he met with were hardened, abandoned creatures, drunkards and profligates either from their youth owing to bad parents, evil training, and the wicked example of companions; or else love of drink and habits of intemperance. It was incredible how hardened they were or how little good there was in them to work upon.  

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283 ACAA, *Fourth Annual Report*, Catholic Female Refuge, October 1887; *Sixth Annual Report of the Committee of Management*, Catholic Female Refuge, August 1888 - August 1889; *Seventh Annual Report (Committee of Management)*, Catholic Female Refuge, 1889 - 1890; *Annual Report, Catholic Female Refuge, 1 September, 1891 - 31 August 1892* by the Committee of Management; *Eleventh Annual Report, CFR, August 31, 1893-October 5, 1894; Twelfth Annual Report, Catholic Female Refuge, 1894-1895*, Catholic Female Refuge, *Queen Street, Norwood, Report for the Term 31 August 1895-31 March 1897*.

The *Advocate* reported on the Magdalen Home, Abbotsford, in 1878 and noted that the “penitents are subject to wayward fits, even some of those longest in the house, and no one of sense would be at all surprised at any eccentricities they may commit when so affected.”\(^{285}\)

The details the reformers provided regarding individual penitents indicate that most of the women were of the abandoned type for whom the reformers established the refuges. The *Short Account* of the work of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, compiled in about 1905, reflected on the early days of the refuge. It stated that the first resident of the refuge in South Australia knew the sisters through their visits to the goal.

She and her daughter were among the worst characters of the city .... Some of the new Sisters were afraid of her, but the head of the house persuaded them to allow her remain for the night, undertaking that the unfortunate woman should be watched by a Sister in turn till morning.\(^{286}\)

Contrary to the expectations of the sisters, older women were not the only hardened cases they met. The 1868 report issued for the refuge in Adelaide stated that two of the first penitents were brought to the sisters from brothels. “They were all young and, sad to say, very abandoned” but progressed well under the care of the sisters.\(^{287}\) Mr. Hugh Taylor, M.P., wrote to the *Freeman’s Journal* in 1890 to share his recollections of a visit to the House of the Good Shepherd. He reflected that during a two-hour visit he

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\(^{285}\) *Advocate*, 11 May 1878, p. 10.

\(^{286}\) *A Short Account of the Institutions*, pp. 4-5.

\(^{287}\) *First Yearly Report of the Catholic Female Refuge*, 16 July 1868.
spoke in some depth to some of the penitents and found that many were hard cases, damaged by years of drink and life on the streets.\textsuperscript{288}

The sisters rarely effected changes in the behaviour or language of the penitents and some of the women created instability and disquiet within the refuges. The House of the Good Shepherd’s “Report of Penitents” Admissions, 1848-1851” records frequent cases of women who were “sent away”, “removed” or “broke probation”.\textsuperscript{289} The records of the Catholic Female Refuge confirm that many of the women could be intractable and noted quarrels between penitents, dismissals and early departures. They documented frequent cases of women who were “expelled for bad language”, “ran away that month”, “returned to their former life”, “returned to their evil life after having experienced repeated trials” and “proved themselves incorrigible”.\textsuperscript{290} The records also illustrate some of the cases of corruption of younger penitents by older women that the reformers feared. The 1870s diary from Adelaide records that Mrs. Watson entered in April after her release from gaol but “left the Refuge secretly” in May, enticing Mary O’Loughlin, a sixteen-year old former prisoner with a “good disposition”, to leave with her.\textsuperscript{291} The diary of Mrs. Agnes Harvey, the matron of the South Australian Female Refuge during the 1880s, reveals that one woman who caused much trouble in the Anglican home had been

\textsuperscript{288}Freeman’s Journal, 6 February 1890.
\textsuperscript{289}ASGS, House of the Good Shepherd and Sydney Female Refuges. Legislative Assembly, NSW. Papers Connected with the Occupation of Pitt Street Premises, ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed on 20 March 1884, pp. 20-25.
\textsuperscript{290}Report on the Attendance, 1879-1883, passim; South Australian Tablet, 5 May 1876, p. 2; Second Annual Report, Catholic Female Refuge, September 1884 - August 1885.
\textsuperscript{291}1870s Diary, Refuge Fullarton, 22 May 1873, p. 3.
expelled from the Catholic Female Refuge for striking the sisters.\textsuperscript{292} The reformers always considered the impact of social factors on the lives of the women but also conceded that the outcome of such experiences was to lead them into drunkenness, ill-temper, coarse language, disobedience and immodesty, and to the belief that such behaviours were acceptable.

The reformers always wanted to believe that the women had elevated reasons for entering the refuges and that consequently their behaviour and chances for reformation were improving. As early as 1869, after just the second year of operation, W.W Hewett, the Secretary of the Catholic Female Refuge, stated in the \textit{Annual Report} of the Catholic Female Refuge that the class of penitents received has been altogether better, and they seem to have been actuated by much better motives on entering, and less under the influence of an impulse which the novelty of the Institution at first inspired. At commencing the number of penitents entering who would remain only a very short time, was proportionately large, but now those received generally remain, and seem at once to try to carry out the work of reformation. \textsuperscript{293}

The editor of the \textit{Advocate} was pleased to report to Victorian Catholics in 1877 that “the Magdalen Asylum is from time to time the home and refuge of females who are ladies by education, if not by birth - perhaps by both; women who, for example, are not only well educated in their own language but can speak several tongues”.\textsuperscript{294} To a large extent such comments reflect wishful thinking on the part of Hewett and other reformers, although the sources do indicate there was often cause for the reformers to give thanks. The annual reports and daily journals of all the refuges were punctuated

\textsuperscript{292}MLSA, Mrs. Agnes Harvey, \textit{Matron's Diary, South Australian Female Refuge, 1881 - 1884}, January 1882.
\textsuperscript{293}\textit{Southern Cross and South Australian Catholic Herald}, 20 March 1869, p. 290.
\textsuperscript{294}\textit{Advocate}, 17 March 1877, p. 5.
with references to women who adapted admirably to the life and values of the refuge and were “received into the Church”, “made first communion”, demonstrated “exemplary conduct” or died “most edifying deaths”. Some of these women had spent years or decades with the sisters. The reformers could also take pride in some penitents for their behaviour after they left the refuges. The records praise many women who were “respectably married” or “married a good Catholic” or were “doing well in respectable situations”. Women from the Catholic refuges regularly found work in the homes of notable citizens. The records from Adelaide make special mention that their penitents found work and “gave satisfaction” in the homes of Governor and Lady Kintore and Governor and Lady Tennyson, Chief Justice Samuel and Lady Way, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Barr Smith and Lady and Sir Lehunte.  

THE PENITENT WOMAN IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Important changes took place within the refuges after the 1890s but the records of the daily life of the homes indicate that the backgrounds of the penitents and their behaviour in the refuges remained the same. The reformers rescued women from the same haunts, received applications from the same type of woman and had the same limited success in changing their behaviour. The refuge in Adelaide continued to accept the girls from Saint John’s Reformatory, Kapunda, who were unable to find or keep positions as domestic servants due to poor behaviour. In his study of the founding of the Good Shepherd convent in Western Australia, John O’Brien notes that

295 Annual Reports, Catholic Female Refuge, 1868 - 1900.
296 A Short Account of the Institutions, p. 15.
613 women entered the Magdalen Home in Leederville between 1902 and 1909, and of those eighty-one had been released from prisons and forty-nine referred from the courts. In 1906 „Viator”, a regular contributor to the Catholic Record in Western Australia, praised the work that the Sisters of the Good Shepherd undertook at the Magdalen Home with the “debauched”, “dissolute and depraved” penitents; the “lowest types of womanhood”. Archbishop O’Reily admitted in official correspondence to James Gray, the Secretary to the State Children’s Council, in 1909 that many of the women were affected by drugs when they entered the refuge. In 1912 the editors of the Tasmanian Daily Post warned readers that the sisters “told us that the girls are brought in with all kinds of terrifying tales as to their misdoings”.

After the turn of the century the women also continued to display coarse behaviour in the refuges. In an 1899 register of the death of penitents, the Good Shepherd sisters indicated that even by the general standards of the penitent women some characters in the asylum were of poor character. They recorded that Ellen, „Teresa of Dolours”;

was a sensitive, refined and lady like girl and her companions often wondered how she could remain with those so unlike herself, but dear Teresa had great light from God and her value and gratitude for gifts of Faith enabled her to conquer natural disgusts.

The 1900 Annual Report of Holy Cross Retreat admitted that the penitents were prone to “bursts of ill temper, and the craving for excitement”.

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297 John O’Brien, p. 47.
298 In ibid., p. 49.
300 Daily Post, 27 July 1912.
301 Annals Abbotsford, 1862 - 1914 (2) Abb. III. (1) f, Register of Deaths of Penitents, 30 November 1899.
302 Annual Report, Holy Cross Retreat, 1900, p. 2.
Moule, the Inspectress of the State Children’s Department in South Australia, reported in 1905 that Sister Annette Henschke, the sister-in-charge, did not place a permanent supervisor in the day nursery because the behaviour of the penitents was such that “she would not ask any sister to be in constant companionship with these girls”. Mr. O’Grady, the police officer who gave evidence during the legal action between the sisters in Sydney and the laundries commission, confirmed in 1910 that although he had never been called to a disturbance at Tempe he knew some women did abscond and head for Sydney. He had personally seen some former residents drunk in the hotels and had advised them to leave the area. The *Tempe Laundry Day Book* also recorded in that year that of “the older women addicted to drink few are permanently reclaimed. But 50% are under our influence & when they fall away come back to us.” The *Tempe/Arncliffe Register* included a variety of references such as: “went away for a few hours and did not return”, “very idle and uses bad language”, “fits of passion”, “very abusive”, “habitual drunkard”, “troublesome” and “went away without permission”.

The Catholic reformers were aware that their attitudes toward social welfare were advanced for their time. The *Southern Cross* promoted this in 1903 by stating that in Adelaide the “Refuge is cosmopolitan in its

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305 Ibid., p. 8.

306 *Tempe/Arncliffe Register*, 1906; 1907.
character”307 and reminding readers of the “broad-minded principles on which the institution is founded.”308 The press had some justification for continuing to make such comments after the beginning of the twentieth century. The official reports of that period confirm that the refuges continued to have a liberal policy on admissions. In 1905 the reformers issued The Catholic Refuge: Fullarton - A Progress Report that argued that she “who has strayed and seeks shelter has but to make known her need and her wishes. If, by even any stretching of space, room can be made for her, she will never at the Refuge seek that shelter in vain.”309 In a report on a visit to the refuge by Lady Bosanquet in 1910 the reformers stated, “To the question, „What is the qualification for admission?“ the sister in charge will reply, „None whatsoever, other than the applicant is in distress.‟”310

However, important changes did take place in matters of priority. The prominence given to prisoners and prostitutes waned over the years and was an indication that the reformers were becoming concerned with the backgrounds of penitents and wished to introduce a level of respectability to the homes. The example of the Catholic Female Refuge in Adelaide provides a valuable case study. The prolific writings of Archbishop O’Reily and the continued support of the South Australian press provide a large body of official reports and correspondence that details the admission policy and aims of the refuge between the end of the nineteenth century and the

307Southern Cross, 18 September 1903, p. 594.
308Ibid., 23 October 1903, p. 674.
beginning of World War I. The *Southern Cross* became the first Australian Catholic newspaper to consistently portray the backgrounds of the penitent women as other than destitute and degraded. An editorial in 1897 stated, “it is not, perhaps, generally known that some of the inmates of the Refuge formerly belonged to quite a superior status in society, and not a few of them have been splendidly educated.”\(^{311}\) The following year that paper quoted O’Reily as reporting, “we have the Catholic Female Refuge at Norwood, into which we receive females of respectable character generally, who fall for the first time. Sometimes we receive them after lapses, but that is a rare thing.”\(^ {312}\) These comments mark the quiet introduction of a radical change in policy and focus.

Two years later the paper printed a more faithful account of the aims of the home. The editorial contradicted the previous statements of O’Reily by acknowledging all the women the refuge housed. However, the newspaper confirmed a definite change in emphasis and the editorial did not resemble the earlier frank and honest reports on the women sheltered by the sisters. It stated that it

\[\text{would be a mistake to think that all the inmates without exception are of the unfortunate class. Some find a temporary home in the Refuge, who have for the time being no means and nowhere else to go; others who may have been released from gaol, or who have been in dangerous surroundings outside, and seek there a shelter where the character may be strengthened and the danger passed. Others, again, who have been well brought up, and well educated, and otherwise respectable, have perhaps in a moment of grievous temptation lapsed from the path of virtue, are turned out on the streets by parents or friends.}\]\(^ {313}\)

\(^{311}\) *Southern Cross*, 26 November 1897, p. 590.


\(^ {313}\) *Ibid.*, 8 June 1900, p. 366.
The change in emphasis became more marked the following year when the refuge moved to the larger property at Fullarton. To commemorate the move the Catholic Church published a pamphlet entitled *The Catholic Refuge, Fullarton: A Record of One Phase of Woman’s Work in South Australia*. The pamphlet reproduced the entire speech that O’Reily delivered at the opening ceremony. His initial statement on the object of the home was unequivocal. He told the congregation that the “Refuge is intended as a shelter and as a home for the young woman who, though unmarried, is a prospective mother.”314 He later added that “so far as it may go without detriment to its express mission, it offers to every class of distressed and unhappy womankind such aid, such shelter as it may afford.315 O’Reily provided a charter that bore no relation to that established with the refuge just thirty years earlier. His version promoted unmarried mothers as the prime focus and relegated to secondary status the women who were the focus of the first reformers.

The Archbishop did not provide another public discussion of the refuge until 1909. At this time he published a pamphlet entitled *The Fullarton Refuge and the Girls’ Reformatory at Kapunda: Some Official Correspondence*. It comprised his commentary on both of the institutions and a selection of letters between himself and James Gray, the Secretary to the State Children’s Council, exchanged during 1908 and 1909. All his comments affirmed those he made in 1901. His foreword restated that the Fullarton Refuge was for

new or prospective unmarried mothers. He further severed connections with the original aims of the refuge by not even using vague terms to cover the admission of more abandoned women as he did in 1901. The sisters varied the practice according to the needs of the women but O'Reily's statements reflected the official position of the Catholic Church.

Two years later, in 1911, O'Reily published *The Catholic Charities of South Australia: What They Aim at Doing and How They Try to Realize Their Aims*. This pamphlet reasserted his earlier comments, generally verbatim. He also stressed that the sisters “stringently safeguarded” the “good name of the young woman” who entered the refuge and presented the policy on the admission of pregnant women in a more rigid way. After discussing the general entry criteria, which he still considered most broad-minded, he removed the discretion that the sisters had previously held and added that, “one exception is made. It will be admitted to be made not unreasonably. A second lapse on the part of [the] applicant is a bar to entry.” The comment confirmed his assertion that the reformers expected their penitents to be of respectable character. O'Reily revealed that the whole character and purpose of the refuge had altered. While it still served women guilty of a sexual misdemeanour, by 1911 it concentrated on the fallen women at the opposite end of the spectrum to the original penitents. He never argued that the aims he described were in place from the establishment of the Catholic Female Refuge, but his failure to include information to the contrary in the sections

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316 *Refuge and Reformatory*, letter from O'Reily - Gray, p. 3.
on the history of the institution that appear in each of the pamphlets is misleading. He comments on occasion that he was unable to find any records for the refuge for the years before 1877 and presumed they were lost. Although some of the sources that are now in the archives may have been unavailable to O'Reily, he certainly had access to the Catholic newspapers that provided numerous reports contradicting his argument.

The only feature unique to the Catholic Female Refuge was the extent to which O’Reily documented its work after 1900. As the refuges in the other states did not have such an advocate, their sources are not adequate to detail the changes over time in the same way. However, reformers also used rhetoric to demonstrate the new emphasis of the refuges. By the late nineteenth century colourful descriptions of the misery and degradation caused by poverty and prostitution were disappearing from Catholic newspapers. The press also stopped printing the references to Mary Magdalene and Eve that connected the image of penitent women with moral abasement. Articles, poems or editorials that either ignored or romanticised the circumstances leading to the fall of the woman appeared in place of these earlier reports. Extracts from the editorial entitled “Magdalen Asylums” that appeared in the Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart in 1883 are included in chapters 1 and 2. This piece marked an interesting turning point in representations of penitent women. It provided both the last example of a graphic description of prostitution and the first poignant account of simple, innocent girl sullied by one sexual experience.319

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319 Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart, August 1883, pp. 101-103.
The depiction of the innocent and betrayed young woman conjured for readers an image of the penitent woman as

the delight of a father’s heart; she who in girlhood, with all its beauty of form and grace, with all its charming modesty and virtue, engaged all a father’s affection and a mother’s love; she who, as she advanced in age, became the pride and honour of her family. ... listened to the false one whom she thought she could trust, and lost her honour, her virtue and her fame.

The editorial then praised and endorsed the depiction of penitent women offered by the Irish poet, Thomas Moore, who wrote,

Oh weep for the hour,
When to Eveleen’s bower,
The Lord of the Valley, with false vows came,
The moon hid her light
From the Heavens that night,
And wept behind her clouds o’er the maiden’s shame.\(^{320}\)

Michel Foucault argued in the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* that the “nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood”.\(^{321}\) The same happened in Australia to the nineteenth-century penitent woman.

The higher clergy played an important role in developing this trend and Cardinal Moran contributed to its development as early as the mid 1880s. He ignored the recent pasts of the penitent women and referred only to their supposedly pure childhoods. In a speech in 1886, at a bazaar to raise money for Saint Magdalen’s Retreat, Tempe, Moran stated that in the depths of her shame the penitent woman “goes back in thought to the home of early

\(^{320}\) *Ibid.*, p. 102. Thomas Moore was born in 1779 and died in 1852.

childhood, a home of innocence and sinless peace". Other Catholic commentators developed this style. The editorial in the *Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart* mentioned above at least presented a career of vice as a possible background of a penitent. The commentaries that followed it did not consider that latter, shameful phase of the woman’s life, but referred only to her earlier years to plant the idea of her innocence in the minds of listeners and readers. In 1891 the *Advocate* asked,

> how often the wandering thoughts of the poor forsaken one, who has now not a friend in the world, wander back to that happy time in the long, long past, when her life was free from guilt and shame; to the days of her innocent childhood.\(^{323}\)

The later descriptions then removed even the possibility of a long, depraved background. Reverend Phelan beseeched readers of the *Advocate* in 1911 to consider the woman he presented as a typical penitent of Abbotsford:

> Picture a bright young girl reared up in the harmless enjoyments of country life. She has now come to the years when she is determined to earn her own bread. She finds employment in some of the city houses .... She loses, or is robbed of against her will, the brightest gem in woman’s character; she parts with her virtue.\(^{324}\)

Phelan’s portrayal completed the process of denying the nature and history of the original penitent women and inventing a stereotype that reflected the ideal but not actual penitent of the twentieth century.

The sources for the refuges do not even acknowledge that a change in focus took place and so do not provide even possible explanations for it. Historians offer various analyses to account for the trend toward respectability evident in women’s refuges and asylums throughout the

\(^{322}\) *Annals of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan*, p. 118.

\(^{323}\) *Advocate*, 24 October 1891, p. 10.

\(^{324}\) *Ibid.*, 5 August 1911, p. 25.
world. In his study of women in the Magdalen Society Asylum of Philadelphia, 1836-1908, Steven Ruggles argues that as the numbers of prostitutes in the city rose so did the pool of potential inmates. The futility of trying to restrict the growth of prostitution and the difficulty of dealing with older women discouraged the reformers so they turned their attention to the increasing number of relatively innocent and pliable applicants. According to Ruggles these changes occurred during a shift away from the Calvinist belief in individual guilt and personal responsibility, and, ultimately, “the causes of the transformation of the Magdalen Society Asylum seem to lie with the liberalization of religion and a new “scientific” orientation toward social problems, which viewed deviance as a consequence of environmental factors.”

In her discussion of changing attitudes toward illegitimacy in upstate New York, Joan Brumberg argues that in the 1890s the growth of concern that illegitimate children were a drain on communal resources and the desire to repress female adolescent sexuality led the community to brand illegitimacy with a new stigma. Illegitimacy then affected the economic position and social mobility of the family and this encouraged parents to ostracise the pregnant daughter. Denied the support of family and community, such women created a demand for the services of homes for fallen or ruined girls such as the Anchorage in Elmira, New York. Marie Foale considers the Adelaide refuge in her work on the Josephite sisters and social welfare between 1867 and 1909. She argues that changes in prison

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326Brumberg, pp. 248-261.
legislation, the opening of a reformatory for girls and the “boarding-out” of state wards released from custody met the needs of some of the women that the refuge had originally served. The population increase in the same time resulted in more pre-marital pregnancies, and the absence of a corresponding improvement in resources for unmarried mothers made their position more precarious than that of any other group of women. The vulnerability of these women made them the prime concern of the Sisters of Saint Joseph and explained their new prominence among residents of the refuge.  

The conclusions of each of these historians are grounded in the social conditions of a defined geographic area and period of time and do not help to account for the adoption of conservative attitudes by reformers across Australia. Historians working in the broader fields of social and religious history do provide analyses of changes in late nineteenth-century Australian society that are consistent with the changes within the homes. In both *The Irish in Australia* and *The Catholic Church and Community: An Australian History*, Patrick O’Farrell suggests that after 1850 the members of the Catholic clergy began responding to the “coercive power of the mores of ... Evangelical Protestant puritanism”. In an attempt to tighten control over their congregations, compete with Protestant communities “in the English game of morals and respectability” and fulfil their bourgeois aspirations, clergymen led a vigorous and moderately successful campaign to encourage

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327 Foale, “‘Think of the Ravens’”, pp. 20-21.
Irish Catholics to adopt Victorian standards of sexual propriety.\textsuperscript{328} Since 1980 a number of historians have examined the rise of the “cult of domesticity” in Australia: Kerry Wimshurst, Beverley Kingston, Patricia Grimshaw and Sabine Willis are among the most notable.\textsuperscript{329} Their studies demonstrate that during the late nineteenth century Australian society followed English evangelicals in promoting an ideology that romanticised and revered traditional feminine qualities. It promised to elevate the status of women, but insisted that in return women had to accept not only a role that bound them to the home and the family but also to conceive their identity in terms of that role. Elements of traditional Catholic teaching accorded with these beliefs, and Catholics adopted them without difficulty. Both of these innovations in Australian Catholic social thinking help to account for the decision of reformers to abandon their work with the most hardened of women in favour of those who, although fallen, were less removed from the Protestant ideal of feminine propriety.

During the years that Catholic reformers were becoming concerned with the respectability of their penitents, Australian social attitudes and institutions were changing. The leading members of the Catholic Church in Australia were aware of secular and Protestant movements within the country and abroad, and the external social changes affected the attitudes of the reformers operating the refuges. However, Stanley Nash recorded the

same trend in the Magdalen Hospital, London, between 1760 and 1780. Under a completely different set of social conditions a century before the establishment of the Australian refuges, the English, evangelical Protestant reformers quietly replaced prostitutes, for whom they established the home, with young victims of seduction under promise of marriage. Nash does not account for the change or tie it to social conditions but his work suggests that institutions of this kind tended toward this change in focus. Reformers in both centuries perceived that young women, single and pregnant for the first time, constituted what Joan Brumberg terms “a relatively desperate and docile population, willing to tolerate the exigencies of moral rehabilitation in exchange for their physical care.” The Australian reformers spent decades facing the daily difficulties and limited success associated with working with prostitutes. When the pressure of changing social attitudes compounded the problems of the work itself the Catholic reformers reacted in the same way as both earlier and contemporary Protestant reformers in other countries and altered the focus of their refuges to make the work more manageable and the outcomes more attainable.

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331Brumberg, p. 253.
The Catholic reformers developed the original aims and charters of the refuges to suit the needs of the female prisoners and prostitutes whom they sheltered. They sought first to offer the women shelter and care that would allow them to leave life on the streets or in brothels. Once the sisters had met this fundamental need they hoped to provide the penitents with education and training that would ensure they did not return to an immoral life. This involved instructing the women of the importance of religion and virtue and preparing them to enter a new occupation. The reformers hoped that a stay in any of the refuges would ensure that neither choice nor necessity would lead women back to their former lifestyles. These simple aims did not, however, survive the changes that occurred throughout society and within the refuges during the latter stages of the nineteenth century. As the reformers developed a concern with the respectability of the women they received into the homes they also became pre-occupied with the type of woman they released from the refuges. They took a new interest in the social position that discharged penitents would occupy and in the role the women would play after their return to the community. The sisters were no longer satisfied with just teaching women to reject the lowest form of lifestyle and make an honest living. They wished to educate the penitents according to current social values and encourage them to desire to live according to prescribed feminine ideals and strive to be active participants in society. As the literature of the refuges from the late nineteenth and early twentieth
century stressed, the Catholic reformers wished to educate penitent women to lead “virtuous and useful lives”.332

From the time of the establishment of the refuges, the reformers peppered their reports in the Catholic press with the vaguest descriptions of the aims of their work. They stated that they sought to “reform women”, “restore the fallen”, “reclaim the sinner”, and “retrieve” or “redeem sinful lives”. They used the same terms and explanations from 1848 to 1914 but the definitions remained open. The aims and the meanings of the terms changed according to the shifting priorities of the reformers. Chapter 2 documents that the Catholic reformers understood women needed a refuge away from the streets if they were to escape from an immoral life. The earliest statements on the objects of the reformers demonstrate the importance of the refuges as shelters from poverty and prostitution. An official record of the House of the Good Shepherd from 1848, the year of its opening, stated that the “institution has been founded for the purpose of offering to the Female who wishes to renounce her evil habits, a place of retirement”.333 Similarly, the Catholic press in Adelaide reported in 1867 that the refuge in that city had been established to provide a home and reformation to fallen women who wish to abandon a life of sin.334 Catholic press reports from Victoria indicate that the situation was the same in that state. Melbourne’s Advocate reported in 1874 that the mission of the Good Shepherd sisters “was to rescue from the street those fallen creatures who lead a life of sin, shame, and

332 Catholic Female Refuge Report: August 31, 1895 to March 31, 1897, pp. 7-8.
333 Institutions, House of the Good Shepherd, Sub-enclosure A to Enclosure B, 9 April 1848.
334 Southern Cross and South Australian Catholic Herald, 20 December 1867, p. 59.
wretchedness”. The reports of Holy Cross Retreat demonstrate that, for some years after the founding of the refuge, the Sisters of Mercy maintained a commitment to the original, simple aim of providing women with shelter. Their first report, covering the period from 1889 to 1892, stated that the aim of the refuge was to provide a home for women willing to renounce an evil life.

AIMS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Removing women from the streets was always just the foundation of the work of the sisters and the comments that suggest the reformers aimed only to provide fallen women with shelter are misleading. Nineteenth-century Australians, like contemporary Britons, feared the effects of the provision of any welfare service that was too accessible or too generous. As charity or welfare could “pauperise” the working class, assistance to fallen women could offer an incentive to or put a premium on sin. The Catholic reformers ensured that the refuges would provide more than just shelter. The Reverends Sheehy and Rigney of Saint Mary’s Cathedral, Sydney, addressed this issue in their letter to a New South Wales government official in 1870. They referred specifically to the House of the Good Shepherd but summarised the range of functions that all Catholic refuges for penitent women served:

It is of importance that the corporal mercy of this work should not throw into shade its spiritual mercy. Not shelter only, but teaching, training, kindness, counsel, encouragement, the beauty and happiness of God’s work, the comfort and courage of prayer, the life - energy of Christ’s

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335 *Advocate*, 24 October 1874, p. 7.
sacraments, are offered to the penitents whom the GOOD SHEPHERD’S providence brings to this House.337

When the refuges first opened the reformers stressed the importance of the spiritual reform of the penitents. This was quite separate from the acts of atonement that the women performed within the refuges to expiate their sins. It involved the sisters educating the penitents to love God and to know He loved them. It involved encouraging the women to adopt religious practices to bear witness to the divine love and participate as full members of the Catholic community. The Annals of the refuge in Victoria recorded in 1862 that the aim of the sisters “was to uplift those who had fallen and to safeguard the innocent, and to bring them to know the love of God for them.”338 An editorial in a supplement to the Advocate in 1868 agreed. It stated that the penitents at Abbotsford were undertaking the training offered by the sisters so they could return to the fold of the Good Shepherd.339 In 1867 Archbishop Polding included the idea of teaching women to appreciate religious observance into the „Regulations for the General Government of the Institution“ for the House of the Good Shepherd. He wrote that the “women admitted into the house of the penitents shall be instructed in the principal mysteries of religion to the end that they may fulfil their Christian obligations”.340 In 1883 an editorial in the Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart praised the Josephite sisters” work with the penitent women. It argued that they had to exercise much skill and effort “to change habitual,

337 Letter from Dr. Sheehy, V. G. and Reverend John Rigney, Saint Mary’s Cathedral - an unnamed government official, 1 September 1870.
338 From the Convent Annals, Abbotsford, 1862.
339 Supplement to the Advocate, 4 September 1869, p. 1.
defiled, case-hardened sinners like these into good and exemplary Christians, which they generally become.”

The sisters, however, sought more than to house the penitents and foster their spiritual reform. They also wanted to bring about their moral reform and convince the women to adopt the kind of life that the religious and secular community deemed virtuous. The reformers did not doubt that knowledge of God and His love would naturally inspire women to crave a virtuous life, but they realised that the penitents needed instruction in the ways of virtue. They did not outline the features of a virtuous lifestyle for the rest of the Catholic community because commentators and readers understood that they meant a life of sexual restraint - chastity before marriage and modesty and fidelity afterward. An editorial in the *Advocate* in 1870 mentioned all the aims of the sisters at Abbotsford but stressed that through working with the penitents they aimed to “restore the heart to virtuous sensibilities”. Other early statements about the aims of the refuges promoted the importance of moral considerations over practical concerns. The Sydney reformers recorded in 1848 in the official document *Institutions* that the sisters working with the penitent woman hoped to “gain the poor erring soul to Virtue.” The *Catholic Standard* made the same point in 1893. It reported that the Good Shepherd sisters taught penitent women “how to reform mis-spent lives, and, with the Divine Grace, to persevere in the path

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341 Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart, August 1883, p. 103.
342 Advocate, 6 August 1870, p. 7.
343 Institutions, Sub-enclosure A to Enclosure B, 9 April 1848.
of virtue.”  The first statements by the reformers reflecting on the success of the refuges focused on the penitent women who accepted their ideas on reform and did adopt a virtuous life. The Advocate reported in 1870 that of the 365 women admitted to the Abbotsford refuge between 1863 and 1869, 260 returned to the community and “are now leading virtuous lives.” The Sisters of Mercy confirmed the importance of evaluating the success of the refuges in terms of the spiritual and moral reform of the penitent women. They recorded in their 1897 Report that the “work of converting and of resuscitating and nourishing a Christian spirit in the inmates is giving most satisfactory results. Many of them are awakening to the recognition of God’s mercy in leading them to this home”.

The reformers realised that the women needed to be able to earn an honest living if they were to persevere with a virtuous life. They were, therefore, committed to bringing about the “vocational reform” of the penitent women to protect their new morality and spirituality. They wished to ensure that no woman would have to turn to or return to prostitution in order to survive. They considered that a penitent was successfully and totally reformed if she achieved a stable record of employment to accompany her new morality. The shortage of domestic servants in Australia at the time meant that a well-trained woman was in an excellent position to obtain a situation in the home of a respectable family. Apart from the availability of

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344 Catholic Standard, March 1893, p. 41.
345 Advocate, 6 August 1870, p. 8.
346 Report, Holy Cross Retreat, 31 December 1897.
347 The “servant problem” in nineteenth-century Australia, that is, the chronic shortage of suitable domestics and the trouble this caused middle-class householders, is well
the work, the Catholic reformers discerned two major advantages in this form of employment: it offered the penitent woman accommodation and continued moral guidance, and kept her from the second largest employer of young women - the factories. The Catholic community shared with the broader Australian community an objection to the employment of women in this area. Factory work involved loud noise, heavy machinery and male company, and was regulated by commercial rather than moral values. All agreed that these were unsuitable features for any workplace for women. Catholic reformers did not, however, share with some sections of the community recognition that most of these features characterised the work undertaken by women in the laundries in the refuges. The „factory girls” from Britain, Glasgow and Belfast in particular, arrived with a reputation for drinking and loose morality that served as a warning to the reformers of the dangers of women being employed in inappropriate settings.

While the reformers did not argue that domestic service was the only employment suitable for women, the occupation served their purposes so well, and other potential occupations were so patently inappropriate, that they did not consider preparing women for any other. Catholic newspapers were happy to report on the variety of tasks undertaken by penitents within the refuges. „Scribbler” noted for special praise in the Argus and the Advocate in 1906 a penitent who worked an entire carpet for the sanctuary in the documented. Graeme Davison, The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne (Melbourne, 1988), pp. 202-205, and Kingston, My Wife, pp. 29-33, cover the discussion. Religious reformers in Britain faced accusations from the press and the public that the desire to increase the size and quality of the pool of domestic servants was a significant motivating factor in the type of training offered in refuges. The press or public in Australia never levelled such accusations against the Catholic reformers.
chapel. The *Southern Cross* recorded that in the Catholic Female Refuge one woman learned the trade of boot repair and undertook soling and heelng within the refuge. The same paper reflected years later on the penitent “Mary” who from 1901 drove the laundry van for twenty-three years. However, there was never a suggestion that such diverse forms of employment would be suitable outside the refuge walls. So the sisters designed the regime of the homes to provide the penitents with an education in the domestic arts.

The stated aims of all the refuges make clear that a major objective was to prepare women for domestic service. The Sisters of Mercy stated in the 1892 report of Holy Cross Retreat that they kept the penitents until they were trained and reformed and then found them suitable situations. They commented again in the *Annual Report* in 1895 that the refuge helped the women “to see the danger of the path they have got on; and, after a short time of instruction and thoughtfulness, it rehabilitates them by obtaining for them safe and suitable situations.” The *Southern Cross* made the aims of the Josephites explicit by stating in 1897 that the sisters trained the penitents for domestic service. The reformers allowed themselves to take public pride in their success when penitents entered service. An editorial in the *Advocate* in 1869 commended the work of the sisters at Abbotsford in 1869. It measured the success of the refuge by “the gratifying circumstance that the

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348 *Advocate*, 12 May 1906, p. 25.
349 *Southern Cross*, 6 May 1910, p. 343.
353 *Southern Cross*, 30 July 1897, p. 363.
bulk of the penitents, after remaining for a period of about two years in the asylum, enter into domestic service, and conduct themselves with exemplary propriety”. In 1899 a rare reference to Aboriginal penitents appeared in the report of Holy Cross Retreat. It stated with pride that the Aboriginal women were “docile and apt to learn, and if left long enough will make good domestic servants. Already two such girls have gone to service and are giving satisfaction.”

The destinations of women leaving the South Australian refuge in the latter years of the nineteenth century, represented in Table 4, provide some insight into the success of the reformers in placing penitents in service. The records from Western Australia and Tasmania do not include any information on the destinations of penitent women released from the refuges and the archives in New South Wales and Queensland indicate that the sisters only noted the destination of their penitents sporadically. The figures in the records from Victoria do not distinguish between women who returned to friends and those who entered domestic service. The few extant records are included below in Table 5 and demonstrate that domestic service was by far the most common destination for women leaving all the refuges in Australia. While there were variations in certain places at certain times, service generally accounted for almost half of the women who left the care of the sisters in all the states. The numbers of women who left the refuges for marriages, friends or other institutions, including the destitute asylums, lying-in hospitals and prisons did not, at any time, approach the numbers of

354 *Advocate*, 13 March 1869, p. 7.
TABLE 4

Destinations of Penitents Leaving the Catholic Female Refuge, 1884 - 1895

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Marriage</th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Another Institution</th>
<th>Left Freely</th>
<th>Sent Away</th>
<th>Died</th>
<th>Domestic Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Reports and Annual Reports, Catholic Female Refuge, 1883-1912, Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart, 1883-1884, Southern Cross, 1889-1912.

TABLE 5

Number of Penitents Entering Domestic Service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number of Departures</th>
<th>Numbers Entering Domestic Service</th>
<th>Domestic Service as % of Total Departures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>40.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872-1876</td>
<td>Qld</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Annual Reports, Catholic Female Refuge, 1868 and 1885; Gibbons, Report of the House of the Good Shepherd, 1848-1869; Report of the Holy Cross Retreat, 1892.

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women who became domestic servants.

**AIMS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

The original aims of the refuges did survive the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1901 the *Southern Cross* still reported on the practical role of the Catholic Female Refuge. It informed South Australians that “its mission is to help poor and friendless women in the time of their direst need, and to provide a home for them until they are able to once more face the world for themselves”.\(^{356}\)

As late as 1913 the * Advocate* printed a feature article on the Abbotsford refuge by Marion Miller Knowles that demonstrated the continued importance of spiritual considerations. She argued that when the bodies of the women had been nursed “the soul is nourished, and responds with wonderful fervour to the voice of Almighty God.”\(^{357}\) The moral reform of the penitents still received constant attention after the turn of the century and continued to be an aim and indication of success. Archbishop O’Reily stated in 1902 that most of the Adelaide penitents “proved not unworthy of the Sisters” kindness and the Sisters” training. They amply redeemed the past. They lived unbrokenly blameless lives.”\(^{358}\) A report on Holy Cross Retreat that appeared in Queensland’s *Telegraph* in 1905 argued that penitent women left the refuge physically and morally strong enough to face life’s

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\(^{356}\) *Southern Cross*, 20 September 1901, p. 678.

\(^{357}\) * Advocate*, 13 September 1913.

\(^{358}\) Catholic Female Refuge: One Phase of Woman’s Work, p. 18.
struggles. In 1906 Monsignor Long of the Bathurst Diocese stressed that the Sisters of the Good Samaritan were still concerned with the moral regeneration of their penitents. He told the Advocate that Saint Magdalen’s Retreat was a place for weak and fallen women to gain the “moral stamina” needed to withstand the temptations they would face back in the world.

The employment of penitents in domestic service also continued to satisfy the reformers after the beginning of the twentieth century. An editorial in the Southern Cross in 1910 praised the work of the Josephite sisters on the grounds that of the women who did not return to their own families, a large percentage “leave for good homes with strangers.” Other sources confirm that reformers in the other states retained this ambition for their penitents. A 1905 editorial in the Telegraph stated that the penitents in Holy Cross Retreat received thorough training in a useful occupation. The Annual Report for the following year stated with pride that, “during the year the women were docile and anxious to improve in the different branches of work, so as to fit themselves for good general servants.” In 1911 the Social Worker’s Guide for Sydney and New South Wales recorded that the sisters at Saint Magdalen’s Retreat aimed to provide the penitent women with clothes and then find them suitable situations. The refuges also maintained their reputation for providing training in domestic service. The Brisbane Courier

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359 Telegraph, December 1905.
360 Advocate, 4 August 1906, p. 16.
361 Southern Cross, 6 April 1910, p. 343.
362 Telegraph, December 1905.
363 Annual Report, Holy Cross Retreat, 31 December 1906.
reported that the Protectoress of Aborigines in Queensland sent a group of women to the Holy Cross Retreat in 1902 specifically for training as domestic servants.\footnote{365}{Courier, December 1902.}

However, by the end of the century the reformers only rarely made statements supporting the original aims of the refuges. This was the crucial time in the development of the homes when the reformers were beginning to offer assistance to young women at the expense of prisoners and prostitutes. At the same time, the sisters and the clergy decided that providing just shelter, domestic training and employment for penitent women was inadequate. The reformers continued to offer these things but they became a means to an end instead of the real aim of the refuges. When Cardinal Moran spoke at a bazaar to raise money for the opening of Saint Magdalen’s Retreat, Tempe, in 1886, he told the gathered crowd that an aim of the home was to provide for women leaving the refuge “a home of industry and virtue.”\footnote{366}{Annals of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, Fundraising Bazaar for Tempe, 1886, pp. 118-119.} This was not exactly a departure from earlier statements but it had a precision that was new and it anticipated future changes. The report of the Catholic Female Refuge issued in March 1897 provided the first clear indication of the changes that would take place in the refuges across Australia. The reformers in Adelaide recorded that:

Though as was to be expected the Sisters have to deplore at times the failure of their efforts for the permanent improvement of their wards, the great bulk of the inmates, we are pleased to think, receive lasting benefits from their stay in the Institution, and after parting from the Sisters lead, and persevere in leading, virtuous and useful lives.\footnote{367}{Catholic Female Refuge Report: August 31, 1895 to March 31, 1897, pp. 7-8.}
At the 1901 opening ceremony for the new Fullarton premises of the Adelaide refuge, Chief Justice, Sir Samuel Way, confirmed the change and told the audience that the refuge was more than a “shelter and a home”, it was “a training institution as well.”

These reports demonstrate that the reformers still accepted that they were responsible for encouraging penitent women to lead virtuous lives but they also introduce the concept of reformers encouraging the women to lead useful lives. This became a recurrent theme in the local Catholic papers. The *Southern Cross* reported in 1901 that when the women were reformed “everything possible is done to restore those who desire to live a useful life outside the institution.” A pamphlet published in that year to promote the work of the Catholic Female Refuge demonstrated that the reformers now viewed the success of their work in these terms. The publication stated that in most cases the penitents justified the care the sisters showed them because they “became useful and respected members of society.” Until this point the literature of the refuges and the recollections of the reformers did not suggest that women leaving the refuges had a responsibility or even an ability to make a positive contribution to society. The aim of the reformers was that women would be a benign presence and fail to contribute to the destructive force caused by women without appropriate sexual and social standards.

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368 *Southern Cross*, 27 September 1901, p. 691.
370 Catholic Female Refuge, Fullarton: A Record, p. 18.
DOMESTIC IDEOLOGY

In developing the concept of “usefulness” the reformers refined their idea of “virtue”. The established characteristics of virtuous behaviour did not change, but extra demands were placed on women. The change was one of the effects of a sweeping new ideology transported from Britain. In the 1880s the “cult of domesticity” or “true womanhood”, or what Graeme Davison terms the “sentimental cult of Home”, entered the Australian social scene gaining enthusiastic adherents from all sections of the community. The cult exerted a potent and enduring influence on ideas and social institutions for most of the following century. It defined femininity for current and future generations by imposing rigid ideas about the emotional, sexual, physical and intellectual nature of women, and by setting strict limits on the expectations of women’s behaviour and roles. Catherine Hall charted the origin and development of domestic ideology in England. She argues that the process of women being defined as domestic beings developed with industrialisation between 1780 and 1830. Industrialisation separated work from the home for the first time and in so doing divided the spheres of men and women and created space that was either male and public or female and private. This division provided the foundation for situating women physically and ideologically within the home.

The desire of the new industrial bourgeoisie to distinguish itself culturally from the proletariat and the aristocracy led them to pressure

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371 Davison, p. 137.
women of this class into the role of wife and mother. The concurrent rise of Evangelicalism, with its emphasis on home and family and belief in the different abilities and roles of men and women, bolstered the ideal of family relations preferred by the new bourgeoisie. The success of the new domestic arrangements rested not just on women occupying the central place within the home, but adopting a set of defined personal characteristics that have persisted as traditional feminine qualities. As Lynne Strahan, the New Zealand-born historian, found through her own education in Australia a century later, the Christian woman had to be “compliant, patient, pure-minded, strong only in charity and endurance”. She had to maintain a commitment to the community and the extended family but devote herself primarily to her home, her husband and her children - and take pride and pleasure in these tasks. She was responsible not only for the efficiency of the home but also its status. Members of religious and secular society acknowledged that it was a difficult task and entailed a heavy workload and much responsibility. However, they reassured women that with efficiency and diligence it was a manageable role and one that offered her great rewards. They also confirmed that her participation in this role was not an option but a duty. If a woman could fulfil these duties society guaranteed her personal satisfaction, the love and respect of her family and the knowledge that she was providing the foundation for a healthy, productive and moral society.

373 Ibid.
In her pioneering work on women and the family in Australian history, Patricia Grimshaw documents the transfer of domestic ideology to Australia and accounts for its success in this country. She argues that by the 1880s the economic situation in the colony was ideally suited to the family relations and ideology by then entrenched in the English bourgeoisie. Industrialisation and urbanisation thrived, suburbia expanded, and trade unions promoted the idea of the male breadwinner and won the “family wage”. The economic changes freed middle-class women and some working-class women from the financial need to work outside the home and the prevailing ideology instilled them with a desire to remain within it.\footnote{Patricia Grimshaw, “Women and the Family in Australian History”, in Windschuttle, \textit{Women, Class and History}, p. 46.} The development of the urban sprawl brought about a greater geographical separation of home and work than that occurring in England, and was particularly conducive to a new sentimental approach to domestic arrangements. The work of Marilyn Lake on the “politics of respectability” several years later supported the analysis of Grimshaw and offered other explanations for why the separation of home and work was so pronounced in Australia. She argues that the employment of large numbers of men in the pastoral industry resulted in their absences from the cities and that even within the urban centres much of the work was available on a casual basis, which led to a high degree of physical mobility. According to Lake, these factors were so influential that “sexual apartheid” was a characteristic of Australian cities.\footnote{Lake, p. 120.}
The geographical separation evident in all the Australian cities established domestic ideology as a suburban ideal. Australians accepted the notion that a man needed and deserved a refuge from the stresses of commercial life - what the English evangelicals termed a “haven in a heartless world” - and that it was the duty of his wife to ensure that his home was such. This made women’s place in the home sacrosanct and the home itself, in the words of Kingston, “the great temple of Australian society”.

Though English, bourgeois and Protestant in origin, the domestic ideal expanded beyond class and religious boundaries in this country. The economic boom of the 1880s and the strong union movement made the ideal accessible to the working class, even if their larger families and less prudent ways did prove to be obstacles to its appropriation. The social aspirations of this largely Irish Catholic group accounted for its attraction to the bourgeois, domestic ideal rather than the attractiveness of the particular features of the lifestyle it promoted.

In keeping with the growth and social importance of domestic ideology, the Catholic sisters developed a desire to inculcate the penitent women with the values of feminine propriety. As chapter 1 argues, although the Catholics running the refuges were independent and progressive in important ways they did assimilate secular and Protestant values into their work. As the over-riding aim of the reformers was to ensure that the penitent women who left the home assumed a respectable place in society it was prudent that they responded to changing attitudes and social conditions.

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377 Kingston, p. 5. The studies undertaken by Australian historians in the 1970s and early 1980s remain the definitive works on this topic.
The literature of the refuges occasionally referred to the importance of feminine character traits before the rise of the cult of domesticity. Chapter 1 also includes some poetry by members of the Catholic community and records of the reformers arguing that women often “fell” because they loved generously and wished to please men. These attitudes illustrate that Catholics believed in the existence and the importance of what later became known as traditional feminine qualities.

This view of ideal feminine behaviour did occasionally enter into the perception of the work of the refuges immediately following their establishment. The Freeman’s Journal recorded in 1861 that “women deprived of modesty may become an object of sensuality, but can never attract the heart by that mysterious sentiment which we call love”. It went on to state that while it was natural for a woman to want to please men as soon as she lost her modesty “she displeases and disgusts us, so that by a wise law that which wounds her heart most deeply becomes the punishment of her fault.”

In 1868 the Advocate reported on the “marvels” that the sisters at Abbotsford worked on the natures of the penitents in the refuge. It stated that,

where all has been vice, hard-heartedness, perfect corruption and desperation - purity, gentleness, all womanly virtues are made to bloom again; and the poor, fallen creature, from whose very touch or presence the pure-minded shrank away, lives restored in feeling, and by that restored in all - purified and regenerated.

However, these reports and the examples of poetry were isolated almost anachronistic examples of the type of attitude that dominated the

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378 Freeman’s Journal, 27 July 1861.
379 Advocate, 14 November 1868, p. 9.
philosophies and discussions of the reformers in the latter years of the
nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century.

From the 1880s domestic sentiment steadily became more frequent
and less subtle in Catholic newspapers and the daily records of the refuges.
The material fell into two categories: that prescribing the ideal nature and
character of woman, and that defining her role as wife and mother. Father
Ginalty summarised both approaches in 1886 when he promoted the
establishment of the first Catholic home for penitent women in New Zealand.
The Good Shepherd sisters opened the refuge in Christchurch using the
model of the Abbotsford asylum. Ginalty was involved in the founding the
home and assured readers of the Lyttleton Times that “an endeavour will be
made to instil into their minds an idea of the nobility and dignity of
womanhood, so that, once habituated to virtue, they may come away good
women and good mothers” and be prepared to assume their rightful social
position.380 Some Australian editorials ignored the aim of preparing the
women for domestic life and focused on imbuing women with the ideals of
feminine behaviour for its own sake. The Advocate reported in 1878 that
through the work of the Good Shepherd sisters at Abbotsford “the hardened
heart in perverted womanhood is reclaimed and bedewed with soft graces
which it had lost beyond recovery in any other sphere.”381 Similarly, a report
in Queensland’s Telegraph in 1905 commended the work of the Sisters of

380Lyttleton Times, 17 February 1886.
381Advocate, 6 April 1878, p. 10.
Mercy at Holy Cross Retreat because the penitents there were “taught the beauty of true womanhood.”

However, by the end of the nineteenth century the reformers usually argued that while feminine behaviour was in itself proper and positive, the desirable outcome of training in the virtues and ways of “true womanhood” was marriage and motherhood. Part of the reason for reformers encouraging the penitents to marry was because, like domestic service, it provided them with accommodation and a respectable livelihood. However, under the influence of the cult of domesticity the reformers attached greater significance to this domestic arrangement than the simple practical advantages. Like their Protestant and secular contemporaries, Catholic commentators were convinced that the stability of the nation depended on stable homes and nuclear families financially supported and governed by men but managed on a daily level by women. Catholic newspapers and forums for discussion argued these points frequently after the beginning of the twentieth century. At the opening of the Lady Tennyson Maternity Home in South Australia in 1901, Archbishop O’Reily remarked to the editor of the Southern Cross: “All praise to the soldier! In honor he does his duty, his doing it being at keen cost to himself. All praise, too, to the wedded mother. At keen cost she also renders service to the State!” A Miss Macready made the same point in her discussion of domestic training for girls that was presented to the Second Australasian Catholic Congress in 1904. She argued that “upon the ideal of the woman depends the rise and fall of the home, and

382 Telegraph, December 1905.
383 Southern Cross, 15 February 1901, p. 115.
upon the character of that home follows the advance or retrogression of the State, for what is the State but a collection of homes?” 384

These attitudes began increasingly to influence the practices and inform the philosophies of the refuges. The records of this period begin to reflect discussions of the usefulness or utility of correctly trained and educated women in maintaining social order. An 1893 editorial in the *Advocate* discussed the work of the Abbotsford refuge and reported, largely on the authority of Reverend Butler, that the purity and security of the nation rested on the behaviour of its female citizens. He argued that if “a woman forgot her duty the very foundations of society would be sapped. Upon the honourable and religious discharge of her obligations did the good of the family, but not only that, the good of the race, depend.” 385 The comments on the success of Holy Cross Retreat made by the Sisters of Mercy in the first years of the twentieth century demonstrated a marked shift away from their original aims and from the proud reflections of even the prior decade. They reported in the 1906 *Annual Report* that the “work done here amongst women, a large percentage of whom may not improbably yet become reputable wives and mothers, should prove of the very greatest value to the State.” 386 Most of the support that reformers showed for the new emphasis on marriage and domesticity was, however, less explicit. Their attitudes towards the marital prospects of the penitents serve as a major indicator of the changes that occurred in the aims of the refuges throughout the course of

386 *Annual Report, Holy Cross Retreat, Queensland, 31 December, 1906.*
the late nineteenth century. The sisters and other reformers did not ignore the incidence of marriage among their penitents in the early years. In praising the work undertaken at Abbotsford, an editorial in the * Advocate* in 1869 made special mention of the fact that six of the women who left the refuge in 1867 married.\textsuperscript{387} This was, however, a minor concern and few references to marriage occur in the literature of the homes despite the frequent notes in statistical records that penitents did marry after their departure from the refuges.

From the time of the establishment of the refuges, every report on the departures of penitents recorded women who married immediately, often “respectably” or “well”, and other reports commented on women who had married after having spent some time in domestic service. The reports do not indicate whether such unions resulted from the pressure of the sisters or families, or from the wishes of the couple. However, they do establish that a significant proportion of women left the institutions of reform for the institution of marriage. In 1869 Mother Scholastica Gibbons, the second Mother Superior of the House of the Good Shepherd, compiled a report on the admissions and departures from the refuge. This report demonstrated that in 1848 seven women departed the refuge, and of these three left to marry.\textsuperscript{388} This was an unusually high proportion. More typically, seven of the thirty-three women leaving that refuge in 1851 married immediately.\textsuperscript{389} Although the figures confirm that women did go directly from the refuges to

\textsuperscript{387} * Advocate*, 13 March 1869, p. 7.


\textsuperscript{389} Gibbons, *Report*. 
marriages, they understate the numbers that married soon after their departure by ignoring those that underwent a short transition period in domestic service or with friends or family before marrying.\textsuperscript{390}

Women who left the refuges for either domestic service or to live with friends always dominated the records of departures. Together, marriage and domestic service accounted for seventeen of the twenty-five women who left the House of the Good Shepherd in 1850,\textsuperscript{391} and thirty-four of the forty who left that refuge in 1855.\textsuperscript{392} In 1869 thirty-two women left the Catholic Female Refuge, and thirteen went to one of those two destinations.\textsuperscript{393} The pattern was the same in Queensland where sixty-seven of the 119 who left Holy Cross Retreat between 1889 and 1892 also entered domestic service or stayed with friends or family.\textsuperscript{394} The women who “returned to friends” were returning to established social and communal networks that were conducive to contracting marriages. The \textit{South Australian Tablet} recorded that between 1872 and 1876 six of the women who left the Catholic Female Refuge went to the care of their friends and confirmed that after the women gave “satisfaction to their friends”, they all married.\textsuperscript{395}

Leonore Davidoff argues in her study of Victorian and Edwardian England that domestic service restricted the social activities of young women and disadvantaged them in the marriage market. However, she also

\textsuperscript{390}Many of those women “dismissed as incorrigible” or who “left of their own accord” must also have joined friends and family but cannot be included in the statistics as such.

\textsuperscript{391}Gibbons, \textit{Report}.

\textsuperscript{392}\textit{Annals of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan}, p. 3. Return of the Number of Females in the House of the Good Shepherd on 31st December, 1855.

\textsuperscript{393}\textit{Southern Cross and South Australian Catholic Herald}, First Yearly Report, 20 March 1869, p. 290.

\textsuperscript{394}\textit{Report of Holy Cross Retreat for Three Years Ending September 1892}, p. 2

\textsuperscript{395}\textit{South Australian Tablet}, 5 May 1876.
demonstrates that despite such disadvantages few women made a lifetime career of service and most did eventually marry.\textsuperscript{396} Historians have shown that the case was the same in nineteenth-century Australia. Margaret Barbalet’s study of South Australian state wards between 1887 and 1940 demonstrates that domestic servants often married and that middle-class employers and authorities expected this to be the case. Although they regretted the inconvenience to themselves and their households, they accepted it as a natural and appropriate situation.\textsuperscript{397} In the discussion on domestic service in \textit{My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann}, Beverley Kingston argues that the marriage of servants was frequent enough to be a continuing source of concern and frustration to employers. Her proposition is that the trouble was that the best servants also made the best wives, being girls who were well-trained, neat, methodical and resourceful. A superior lady’s maid would be quickly snapped up by a young man with prospects in the civil service. A knowledgeable dairymaid was an invaluable asset to an aspiring farmer.\textsuperscript{398}

Despite the high proportion of marriages among discharged penitents, the events evoked little comment from the sisters until the last years of the nineteenth century. During this period, prospective and actual marriages went from being occurrences of little consequence to the key aim and measure of success of all the refuges. In 1898 the \textit{Practical Rules} of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd expressed the hope that former penitents would “one

\textsuperscript{397} Barbalet, pp. 75-111.
\textsuperscript{398} Kingston, p. 30.
day take their place at the head of a family”.\textsuperscript{399} Mother Mary Dominic, of Saint Magdalen’s Retreat, recorded in the \textit{Tempe Laundry Day Book} in 1910 that “as a rule 90% turn out excellent girls, respectable and are respectably married & come to see us with their husbands and children.”\textsuperscript{400} The sisters from Mount Saint Canice took pride in the same result. The Tasmanian \textit{Daily Post} reported on an interview with the sisters in 1912 and recorded, “when asked if they got encouragement from their work, the sisters grew quite enthusiastic, and told us of girls who had gone out to satisfactorily fill domestic positions and many finally to marry and settle into homes of their own.”\textsuperscript{401} It is interesting to note that this is the earliest comment made by any reformer to connect training and employment in domestic service with an eventual role as wife and mother. Before this time the Catholic reformers only considered the practical advantages of the occupation and did not advocate it because it prepared women for a domestic role in a household and family of their own. Protestant reformers and clergy recognised the potential of domestic service as preparation for marriage much sooner. Graeme Davison notes in \textit{The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne} that at the opening of the Servants Training Institution in 1883, Melbourne’s Bishop Moorhouse praised domestic service as a “school of wifely duty”.\textsuperscript{402}

The rise in official Catholic interest in the marriages of penitents did not coincide with an increase in the occurrence of marriage. In fact, the reports of the departures of women from the refuges during the last years of

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{399} \textit{Practical Rules}, p. 68.
\item\textsuperscript{400} \textit{Tempe Laundry Day Book}, p. 8.
\item\textsuperscript{401} \textit{Daily Post}, 27 July 1912.
\item\textsuperscript{402} Davison, pp. 202-203.
\end{itemize}
the nineteenth century show a downturn in the overall number of women who married immediately following their departure. This was despite an increase in the numbers of women entering and departing the refuges. In contrast to the earlier figures, the 1895 Annual Report of the Catholic Female Refuge recorded that marriage was the “destination after the refuge” for only one of the sixty-eight women departing in that year. A more comprehensive report compiled for that refuge two years later revealed that between 1895 and 1897 the Sisters of Saint Joseph recorded that only five of the ninety-eight women leaving the refuge during that period went to the care of new husbands. The decline in immediate marriages may itself have prompted some of the concern of the sisters but there is no indication in the sources that that was the case. The new interest in the acquisition of husbands owed more to contemporary social changes than changes in the marriage prospects or practices of the penitent women.

The influence of evangelical beliefs and secular social movements on Catholic thought and action is evident in the prominent position domestic ideology came to occupy. However, the reformers did not allow evangelical or secular ideas to diminish the importance of their own traditional beliefs. They integrated Protestant ideas with mainstream Catholicism and established that Catholic beliefs and models were still a vital means of expression. The reformers chose to express the new domestic ideology through one of the most traditional Catholic symbols: the model of the Virgin Mary. With the decline in the number of prostitutes and abandoned women

403 Twelfth Annual Report, Catholic Female Refuge, 31 August 1894 - 1 September 1895.
404 Catholic Female Refuge, August 31, 1895 - March 31, 1897, p. 7.
entering the refuge and the decision to deflect attention from those that did, the popularity and relevance of the images of Mary Magdalene and Eve also declined. Even by the rigorous moral standards of the time the young, pregnant women in the homes bore little resemblance to the famed prostitute or the sinner expelled from the Garden of Eden. With the redundancy of these two figures the image of the Blessed Virgin was the only powerful and recognisable, Catholic feminine image available to the reformers. They used the model of the Virgin as the ideal to which all women, pure and penitent, should aspire - no matter how vain the aspiration. The moral contrast between the Virgin and the women in the refuges made her a potent symbol in any discussion of penitent women. Images of the Blessed Virgin also serve to illustrate the changes that occurred in the reformers’ attitudes toward the role of women and the family under the influence of the cult of domesticity.

Representations of the Virgin Mary appeared in Catholic discussions of the refuge in mid-nineteenth-century Australia. Articles and public addresses of this period focused on her innate qualities - particularly her purity. This image of the Virgin did not ever disappear. Cardinal Moran praised the sinlessness of Mary to the crowd at the bazaar to raise money for the Tempe Retreat in 1886, calling her the “spotless Virgin Mother, the solitary boast of our fallen race.” As late as 1904, in a discussion of the work of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Australasia, Reverend Phelan also focused on this quality, referring to her as “Mary the Immaculate on whose virginal soul the slightest stain of sin never rested”. He explained her

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importance to Catholics in those terms, arguing that she “is honoured as the Queen of Saints, and imitated as the most perfect model for those seeking perfection.”  By the end of that century, however, her role overshadowed her nature as the feature of her life most worthy of imitation. In 1895 the *Southern Cross* published a two-part feature entitled “Mary, The Model of Women”. The articles praised the virtues of the Virgin but went on to admire especially the fact that she exhibited “the conjugal love and fidelity of the wife, and the untiring care and devotion of the mother” that should serve as a “pattern” for other wives and future wives.

The Catholic reformers used the image of Mary as more than a simple role model. Newspaper articles on the Virgin were infused with attempts to use guilt to encourage women to conform to Catholic expectations. Contemporary newspaper articles reminded women of their duty to follow Mary’s example in order to repay the Catholic Church. The clergy and the press believed the Church raised the status of woman by giving her an honoured position within the institution of marriage and the broader society. The clergy argued that the Church had saved Catholic women from the oppression that pagan and Protestant women suffered. “Mary, The Model of Women” stated:

> Every impartial student of history is forced to admit that woman is indebted to the Catholic religion for the elevated station she enjoys today in the social and family life. We all know in what contempt and degradation woman was held in pagan times. She was in a state of perpetual bondage and perpetual tutelage. She was treated rather as the slave of man and the instrument of his passions, than as his equal and

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406Phelan, p. 302.
407*Southern Cross*, 8 March 1895, p. 3.
champion; and she is still so regarded in all countries where Christianity
does not prevail.\textsuperscript{408}

The Catholic commentators assumed that women were aware of the
service the Faith had done them and would want to devote their lives to
repaying the debt and giving thanks for their elevated position. However, in
case women did forget, they constantly reminded them of the debt and their
responsibility to discharge. Some addresses directed to the penitent women
sought to use the example of the Virgin to blame and threaten as well as to
inspire. Reverend Butler spoke at the ceremony marking the opening of a
building at the Tempe Retreat in 1885. After supporting the sentiments
expressed in the \textit{Southern Cross} praising the Virgin Mary, he unfavourably
contrasted modern women with the ideal of womanly behaviour. He
complained that because of the evidently low standards of female behaviour,
society could not “look and think today of woman ... in her high position -
not as that being that man loved and reverence - not as that being who shed
blessings on the domestic circle.”\textsuperscript{409} In 1880 the \textit{Catholic Record} reprinted an
article called “Women and Infidelity” from the \textit{Catholic Review} of New York.
It reminded women that they owed the Catholic Church for the dignity of
their social position and had a responsibility to follow the model provided by
the Mother of God. The article warned women that “if she forgets that
dignity, she will fall again to the level on which paganism kept her. She will
become the slave and toy of man.”\textsuperscript{410}

\textsuperscript{408}\textit{Ibid}. The second article of the series appeared 25 March 1895, p. 3, and reinforced the
points made in the earlier piece.
\textsuperscript{409}\textit{Annals of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan}, Opening of New Building, Tempe, 1885, p. 117.
\textsuperscript{410}\textit{Catholic Record}, 22 October 1880, p. 11.
To the Catholic authorities of the late nineteenth century, a woman’s sexual behaviour was no longer a matter of just personal or even religious significance. Private morality or immorality had grave repercussions on a social level. By definition an immoral woman was not performing or preparing for the role of dutiful wife and mother. She was, therefore, not only failing to contribute to the stability of society but acting as a destructive force. This belief had dire consequences for the treatment of penitent women. The Catholic reformers did not compromise their commitment to compassion or understanding in the refuges but their work took on a social importance and therefore a certain urgency that changed their preoccupations. By the beginning of the twentieth century the reformers had to be more vigilant than ever. When they began their work they had only to satisfy their humanitarian and religious impulses by returning to the world women with the moral strength and employment skills to lead a virtuous life. Within a fifty-year period the aim to produce simply the virtuous woman had become inadequate. The reformers had to take more serious social considerations into account and assess the value of their work in relation to its broad social benefits. They became convinced of the importance of creating the useful woman. This meant that they had to provide their penitents with a rigorous ideological training and try to postpone the departure of the women from the refuge until they could make a positive and particular contribution to society. Like women in the broader society, penitent women faced greater responsibilities and restrictions in exchange for the potential for greater social prestige.
PART 3 IMPACT OF THE CHANGES

Chapter 5

MEANS OF REFORMATION

The commitment of Australian Catholic reformers to educate penitent women to lead “virtuous” and “useful” lives arose easily from their religious beliefs and the social values they absorbed from other religious denominations and the secular community. The challenge for them was to develop a practical regime for the refuges that would enable the sisters to guide the penitent women to shun the life of moral and sexual laxity in favour of the life of modesty, propriety and dutiful service to the Church, the family and the community. In 1877 the Mother Superior of the Abbotsford asylum discussed with John Stanley James the methods employed by the Victorian sisters to reclaim penitent women. She informed him that “work and prayer are the means used to bring fallen ones to repentance” and explained that the penitent women “work hard, which keeps down the devil, and pray some, which arouses softer feelings in their hearts.”

Her brief description provided a neat summary of the means employed by Catholic reformers across the country. The practice of engaging women in work and religion to bring about their reform was in place in each of the refuges from the time of their establishment and it continued throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, as with other practices and aspects of the philosophy of the refuges, the means of reformation evolved throughout the-147-
the period and the reformers chose to stress the importance of work and the importance of religion at different times.

The Catholic reformers made frequent reference to the fact that like their contemporary Protestant reformers throughout the world they would rely on work and religion to reform penitent women.\textsuperscript{412} An editorial in a supplement to the \textit{Advocate} stated in 1869 that the reformers in Victoria based the regime of the refuges on penitents “undergoing the prescribed discipline in religious and industrial training”.\textsuperscript{413} The 1894 report of Holy Cross Retreat stated that the penitents “avail themselves of the aids of religion which are largely supplied to them. These influences, together with gentle but regular discipline and systematic employment of time, have produced very beneficial results.”\textsuperscript{414} The reformers took pride in the presence of commitment to religion and work above other qualities in their penitent women. „Austin of the Seven Dolours” was a favoured penitent at Abbotsford and on her death in 1894 the sisters praised her character in the \textit{Annals}, noting especially that she was both “prayerful” and “industrious”.\textsuperscript{415} The \textit{Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart} reported in 1883 that it “is most edifying to witness the religious and reverential conduct of those converted Magdalenes, and the docility and industry they display in their daily conduct”.\textsuperscript{416}


\textsuperscript{413}Supplement to the \textit{Advocate}, 4 September 1869, p. 1.


\textsuperscript{415}Annals Abbotsford, 1862 - 1914 (2) Abb. III. (1) f, Register of Deaths of Penitents, 1894.

\textsuperscript{416}Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart, August 1883, pp. 101-102.
Religion and work each had a distinct but related function in the process of unlocking the moral and social potential of the women. Sociologists share with the Australian Catholic reformers recognition of the efficacy of these methods, but not affection for them. The processes that sociological discourse describes as “moral regulation” and “industrial training” correspond to those that the Catholics reformers understood as reformation through religion and work.\textsuperscript{417} Linda Mahood argues that work and religion represented a new, insidious form of punishment aimed at the mind of the women that replaced older forms of punishment directed at the body. According to her analysis, work diverted and tired women, and religion taught them of their sinfulness, and together they “epitomized a punishment so rational that offenders punished themselves.”\textsuperscript{418}

**RELIGION**

The potential of religion to reform penitent women occupied the thoughts and directed the actions of the reformers immediately. They built the refuges on the belief that women who adopted the practices of prayer and religious observance within the refuges would abandon the immoral life when they re-entered the community and live according to the teachings of the Catholic Church regarding modesty and propriety. In leaving clear records of their views on the value of religion, the Australian Catholic reformers have also left their response to the twentieth-century commentators who argue that religion was the least influential factor in the

\textsuperscript{417} Mahood, *The Magdalenes*, p. 82.
establishment and operation of religious institutions. Historians and theorists influenced by the work of Michel Foucault and Erving Goffman now view the establishment of institutions as a method of social control.\textsuperscript{419} They argue that this strategy was adopted by societies increasingly preoccupied with supervising, incarcerating and normalising the behaviour of their members. Foucault identified this as a trend that gained momentum across Western Europe throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and reached its zenith in the nineteenth century when societies were generally “panoptic”, incarceration was omnipresent, and disciplinary institutions of various kinds were increasing in number and social importance.\textsuperscript{420} Modern commentators working from this perspective argue that institutions including schools, hospitals, prisons, monasteries, convents, reformatories, refuges and factories emerged from this trend, and so reflected the social impulse to institutionalise and normalise that characterised that particular period. In contrast, the Catholic reformers in Australia believed that their refuges developed from an impulse that was unique and related directly to the teaching of the Catholic Church.

The Catholic reformers placed their own commitment to institutionalising penitent women in the context of a Catholic history and philosophy that was unrelated to social trends. The Catholic Church in Europe founded refuges specifically for prostitutes as early as the twelfth century. This evolved into a Catholic tradition that was strong enough and distinct enough to deter reformers of other denominations in Great Britain.

\textsuperscript{419}Erving Goffman, \textit{Asylums} (Harmondsworth, 1973).
\textsuperscript{420}Michel Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish}, pp. 209, 301-303.
from undertaking work with penitent women. In the popular imagination, refuges for fallen women were so strongly associated with Catholic convents and presumptions of clandestine Catholic activity that Protestant reformers feared being associated with the popish practices.\(^{421}\) The nineteenth-century Catholic reformers in Australia were careful to associate their work with this long, independent Catholic history of institutionalising penitent women and to distinguish their motives and methods from the efforts of secular philanthropists. Cardinal Moran demonstrated the importance of maintaining the division between Catholic and secular reform efforts in an address at the Tempe Retreat in 1904. The *Freeman's Journal* printed this report on his speech:

> Some might say had they not other houses in different parts of the city for such penitents? Well, he had been reading some time ago of the institutions got up on the utilitarian principle and of the institutions got up on the principle of Christian charity and Christian love. The comparison he read was that there was the same proportionate difference between the religious and between the utilitarian institutions as between a masterpiece by Raphael or Michel Angelo and a three penny reproduction of the same picture. Necessarily, the institution inspired by Divine charity was a masterpiece.\(^{422}\)

The *Freeman's Journal* published the speech without editorial comment. The *Catholic Press* ran the same story but added that it was a humiliating comparison for those in the audience working in the humanitarian institutions.\(^{423}\)

In his discussion of the work of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in 1904, Reverend Phelan used an analogy similar to that of Moran to stress the importance of religion in reforming penitent women. He stated that

\(^{422}\) *Freeman's Journal*, 26 March 1904, p. 25.  
\(^{423}\) *Catholic Press*, 24 March 1904.
distinguishing between a secular and a Catholic institution of that kind involved “distinguishing between the counterfeit and the real article.” All of the Catholic reformers adhered to these principles. They believed that religious inspiration was the motivating factor in establishing the refuges, that religious practice was the means of reforming penitent women, and that religious conversion was a sign of the success of the work.

As documented in chapter 2, the Australian reformers had always assumed that the absence of religious belief and practice contributed to women becoming eligible for the refuges. The reformers, however, had equal confidence that the damage caused by a lack of religion could be redressed in the refuges and that religion could effect the desired changes in the character and behaviour of penitent women. This confidence led them to employ it as the primary tool of reformation. At the Second Australasian Catholic Congress in 1904, Phelan reflected on his experience as chaplain of the Abbotsford refuge. He praised the sisters running that home and commented favourably on their efforts to reform penitent women. He addressed those present:

What is the secret of this marvellous success? And a single word answers that question: Religion. To the elevating, and enobling, and subduing influence of religion we can trace the change of life and reformation of character effected within the convent walls .... I have no hesitation in stating that if you remove the influence of prayer and the effects of the Sacraments from the souls who enter here, you destroy the very foundation on which a new life is built.425

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425 Ibid., p. 305.
Other members of the clergy confirmed the central role that religion played. Archbishop O’Reily wrote to James Gray in 1909 to discuss the Catholic Female Refuge and the Girls’ Reformatory run by the Sisters of Saint Josephite in Kapunda, South Australia. O’Reily informed Gray that within both institutions, “our chief reliance is upon the influence of religion.” He added: “To my mind, the hope of reforming Catholic girls, who have begun to tread the wrong path, is, unless the help of religion is invoked, the vainest of vain imaginings.”

This view influenced the actions of the sisters. When „Hannah” died in 1913 she was aged sixteen and had suffered from consumption for six months. During this time Mother Superior had a chalet built on the grounds so that the sisters could still care for her and she would not have “to be removed to the Government Sanatorium, where religion is set a naught.” A penitent committing to a sodality was always a cause for celebration in the Abbotsford refuge but the sisters expressed particular joy when „Joseph” adopted the consecrated dress. For as the sisters recorded:

“Joseph was our first child and since she entered the fold of the Good Shepherd has had Many Struggles, but grace conquered this proud rebellious heart in the bud.”

The reformers provided precise details on the “aids of religion” that helped to reform the penitents. These aids included morning and night prayers, sodalities and annual retreats, daily mass and a regular attendance at the sacraments. The Annals of the Good Shepherd sisters in Tasmania

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426 Refuge and Reformatory, letter from O'Reily – Children’s Council, pp. 31-33.
427 Ibid, 21 August 1913.
428 Annals, Convent of the Good Shepherd, Hobart, Consecrated Dress, 1902.
recorded in 1898 a discussion by Father Delaney on the “utility and necessity of the Sacraments”. He explained that religious observance was as necessary to the women after they left the refuges as during their stay. In his view the sacraments “were most necessary for girls living in the world as no virtue could exist long without fidelity to them.”\textsuperscript{429} The Annual Report of Holy Cross Retreat for 1901 supported his faith in the sacraments, arguing that after penitents left the refuge they would need the sacraments to maintain the strength to fight temptation.\textsuperscript{430} Reformers cited penitents’ religious observance as an indication of moral improvement, and an indicator that they would embark on a virtuous life after leaving the shelter of the Church.

Anne O’Brien discusses the differing attitudes to moral reform expressed by religious reformers of different denominations in nineteenth-century Australia. She argues that while “evangelical Christians demanded inner conversion and radical change of heart”, “the Catholic hierarchy seemed satisfied with outward professions of faith.”\textsuperscript{431} Her view of evangelical reform receives support from other historians and sociologists. Linda Mahood found that the reformers of the nineteenth-century Scottish magdalene asylums used religious teaching and Scripture reading to “reveal the extent of the inmate’s sin, defilement, and guilt [so] she would learn to accept herself as a ‘sinner’”.\textsuperscript{432} F.K. Prochaska found that during this period reformers working in English reformatories and refuges for women used religion to influence the self-perception of penitents. According to his

\textsuperscript{429} ibid.
\textsuperscript{430} Annual Report, Holy Cross Retreat, 31 December 1901, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{431} Anne O’Brien, p. 197.
\textsuperscript{432} Mahood, The Magdalenes, pp. 82-83.
analysis, religion was a tool to indoctrinate the penitents. This “indoctrination had one overriding aim - to break down deceit and pride and replace it with guilt.” 433 The Australian evangelical approach borrowed from the methods and aims of British evangelical reformers. As the Protestant reformers were more likely to blame sexual misbehaviour on individual failing, they were more concerned with instilling a sense of guilt in the women. O’Brien notes that a New South Wales penitent expressed appreciation for George Ardill of the Sydney Rescue Work Society: Through his “continued instruction I was led to see myself a poor guilty worm”. 434 Australian Protestant reformers were not always this successful in convincing women to internalise evangelical attitudes, but they did persevere. Godden found that in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Sydney Female Refuge reformers made frequent references to the importance of women being “aroused to a sense of their degradation.” 435

The records of the Catholic refuges do not contain any references to instilling the penitent women with a sense of guilt or shame, although the reformers did assume that truly penitent women would feel both. Rather the Catholic reformers sought only to encourage the penitents to observe the practices of the religion: attend mass, accept the consecrated dress, receive the sacraments and bear witness to the faith through icons and ritual. The reformers were pleased to report when a penitent woman did experience the "change of heart". The Tasmanian sisters noted in the Annals that when "Clare"

433 Prochaska, p. 156.
434 Anne O’Brien, p. 192.
died in 1897 she was fortified by the sacraments and “died quite resigned to God’s holy will, spending days before her death in repenting acts of true sorrow for sins.” However, they never expressed this as an aim of their work. Notes about obvious signs of conversion were far more common.

The sisters cherished the memory of women who adopted the practices of the Catholic faith. The Annals recorded that in 1896 the Good Shepherd sisters in Tasmania celebrated the baptism of a penitent woman who had entered the refuge as a Protestant. Among her praiseworthy qualities the sisters noted that this penitent had for “some time ... been wearing a Picture of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour.” In the same year the sisters in Victoria made similar references on the death of one of their penitents. Their Annals record that after some years in the refuge Rebecca converted from Judaism and

nothing could exceed her happiness the day she was Baptized by Fr. Cahill SJ. She looked up into his face with such astonishment & anxiety that all present smiled when he said to Rebecca “do you believe in the Catholic Church” of course you know I do Father was her answer, & she certainly in her after years proved it by her love & devotion to its practices. She received all the rites of Holy Church in most humble & contrite disposition.

The sisters at Abbotsford considered „Teresa of Dolours” a model penitent. They recorded with pride that on her death in 1899, “she was asked did she ever neglect Sacraments and answered, “‘No Mother, nor I never once absented myself from Office of Our Lady of Dolours.’” The Catholic reformers did not seek the inner changes for which those working in the

436 Annals, Convent of the Good Shepherd, Hobart, Death of a Child, 1897.
437 Ibid., Baptism of Penitents, 22 July 1896.
438 Annals Abbotsford, 1862-1914 (2) Abb III, (1)f, Register of Deaths of Penitents, February 1896.
439 Ibid., 30 November 1899.
Protestant refuges strived, and they were surprisingly silent on the matter of the inner spiritual life of their penitents. They took comfort in the appearance of Catholicism and did not indicate that they viewed these observances as reflections of inner conversion. In reflecting on the success of the Holy Cross Retreat in 1900, the *Annual Report* used the standard Catholic argument that the success of the sisters was due primarily to religious aids. It added, however, the honest comment that the penitents had “the advantages of a comfortable home, nourishing diet, healthy surroundings, and care in illness and trouble”, 440 which also contributed to the success.

**WORK**

Work was the other priority of the reformers. It was a central concern of all the reformers from the earliest stages of planning each of the refuges. The first concern of those wanting to found a refuge was always where to accommodate the women but the second concern was always how to employ them. Catholic reformers across the country, like their Catholic and Protestant contemporaries the world over, opted to open laundries and have the penitents and sisters do the washing of local residents and businesses. The small-scale laundry operations developed into competitive commercial steam laundries as the numbers in the refuges increased and the efficiency of the sisters and penitents grew with experience and improved machinery. The principle of the exchange of the penitents’ labour for shelter and keep seemed to all a fair and reasonable one, and the reformers assured the public that the type and amount of work required were equally fair and reasonable.

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The records of the refuges do not provide a clear impression of the amount of work performed by the penitents but the reformers were careful to state that they did not place undue demands on any women. Archbishop Polding specified in the „Regulations for the General Government of the Institution” in 1867 that to the penitents in Sydney, “employment shall be ... proportionate to their capacity”.\textsuperscript{441} Later reformers in all the Australian states supported this statement. A pamphlet promoting the Catholic Female Refuge informed South Australians in 1902 that no penitent was ever forced to work in the home: “what each one does must be - like each one’s staying - a purely voluntary act. Each inmate is helped when helpless. In strength she is expected in turn to aid those who are in need of aid”.\textsuperscript{442} When the Victorian writer, „Scribbler”, visited the Magdalen Asylum at Abbotsford in 1906 he did not find laborious work part of the penitents’ lives. His article published in the \textit{Argus} and the \textit{Advocate} stated that the women were interested in their work and took pleasure in it, and that some younger women were singing while ironing.\textsuperscript{443} The Sisters of the Good Samaritan commented on the work commitments of their penitents in the \textit{Tempe Laundry Day Book} in 1910:

\begin{quote}
\textit{at work no set task is given to them they do as much as they feel inclined to. Some have a sense of honor & do a fair share, others do as little as they can. They are encouraged to work but they go away from it when they like, & sit down. Sometimes they sit down for half a day at a time when they are not in good humour.}\textsuperscript{444}
\end{quote}

The reformers believed it was important that penitent women had time to undertake activities other than work while they were resident in the

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\textsuperscript{441}\textit{Annals of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan}, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{442}\textit{Catholic Female Refuge, Fullarton: A Record}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{443}\textit{Advocate}, 12 May 1906, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{444}\textit{Tempe Laundry Day Book}, pp. 78-79.
\end{flushright}
refuges. An editorial in the Hobart *Daily Post* reported in 1912 that it was once a common belief that women rescued from an evil life were not entitled to any pleasure or entertainment. The report stated that this was unfair and that it was important to the sisters in the refuge in Tasmania that the penitents had time for relaxation and amusement. They ensured the women had time for reading, story-telling and outdoor games and exercise, and the sisters helped the penitents prepare entertainments and plays in the evenings. The records demonstrate that the reformers in the other states also wanted the regime of the homes to reflect this belief. The refuges had libraries of „useful and interesting works“ and penitents were allowed to take leisurely strolls and have visitors with the approval and supervision of the sisters-in-charge. Picnics and concerts were organised for them to watch or join every few months and in Adelaide the penitents were free to attend to their wardrobe or pursue other interests on Saturdays. In Western Australia the refuge was visited by singers, ventriloquists and from 1908 Mr. Molloy’s moving pictures made regular appearances. Special arrangements were made on special occasions, particularly the feast day of Saint Mary Magdalene and Christmas. Activities and meals were planned at these times to break the work routine and bring a genuine sense of celebration. The *Courier* reported on a visit to the Holy Cross Retreat at Christmas 1899. The visit revealed “flowers, interspersed with Christmas cards; the dormitories with cleverly-made paper flowers and ornaments; the

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446 *Catholic Female Refuge: A Record*, p. 14.
cool larders off the kitchen plentifully stored with ... large plum-puddings, turkeys, hams, fowls, geese, cakes, confectionery.”

The evidence regarding the actual workload of the penitent women is limited but the official records support the statements that work did not dominate the penitents” day. An 1883 timetable of the Catholic Female Refuge indicated that the women performed approximately seven hours of work per day. Their schedule involved:

6.00  rise in silence  
6.30  mass  
7.10  morning prayers  
7.30  breakfast and domestic duties  
8.30  laundry etc.  
12.00  Angelus  
12.30  dinner  
1.00  recreation  
2.00  resume duties until 5  
5.30  tea and recreation  
6.45  Rosary  
7.00  classes for needlework  
8.00  Night prayers  
8.15  Retire to bed

The Advocate reported a similar regime for the penitents at Abbotsford in 1906. An editorial stated that the “time for work is from 9 a.m. to 6.30 p.m., with two hours intermission - that is, seven and a half hours.” The official, standard timetable adopted by the refuges allocated approximately two hours per day for the recreation of the penitents. Official records from the mid nineteenth century until early in the twentieth century present a uniform picture of the reformers” compassionate attitude toward work, the well-

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448 Courier, December 1899.  
449 The Refuge, Norwood, Minute Book, October 1883.  
450 Advocate, 4 August 1906, p. 16.
regulated and manageable number of tasks assigned to penitents and the high level of control that women possessed over their level of participation in household duties. The impression that both prescriptive and descriptive sources create is that arduous labour was not a part of the regime of the penitents and that the sisters shared the workload with them. The official records indicate that the sisters were left with a greater share of both the laundry work and the general domestic chores because their period of residence was more secure, they had a higher sense of responsibility, and felt greater loyalty to the institution and obedience to the clergy.

The laundries were the main source of revenue for all the refuges and the only viable means of maintaining the homes that was apparent to reformers of the nineteenth century. The homes did not receive any government subsidies (although they were exempt from most water and council rates) and public donations from members of all religious denominations were generous but not reliable. The Catholic Church offices in all of the states supported the homes but they had to consider the claims of other Catholic charities and also relied heavily on fluctuating public subscriptions. The reformers had to at least aim to make the refuges self-supporting. This involved making enough profit to feed and clothe the penitents and the sisters, to purchase and maintain the property and equipment, to finance the general upkeep of the buildings and grounds, and to pay the wages of the small number of male employees responsible for carting the laundry and general maintenance. Steam laundries were a sound business at the time and were well suited to the requirements and situation
of the refuges. They allowed the sisters and penitents to undertake work for profit within the safety of the refuges in an industry where they could afford the required machinery, and attain the required level of proficiency with an untrained and not always co-operative workforce. Importantly, the domestic connotations also made laundry work acceptable to the public. However, difficulties did arise.

The whole laundry business suffered a decline in the winter months, and at all times the laundries of the Catholic refuges had to compete with those of the Protestant refuges and established commercial launderers. At any one time some penitents were unable to work yet still required support. The Catholic Female Refuge, Fullarton: A Record of One Phase of Woman’s Work in South Australia acknowledged the problem in 1902 by recording that the sisters faced the continual problem of sheltering nursing mothers, “many ailing adults”, the “weakly” and those who were “by reason of ... debility, or sickness, always disqualified from adding to the common store.”\(^{451}\) The competitive nature of the business and the number of people dependent on the refuge for support created an economic imperative to keep the laundries functioning as close to full capacity as possible. The survival of the refuges depended on the success of the laundries, and allowing the healthy women to control their level of participation in work would have endangered the viability of the refuges. The evidence is not conclusive on the amount of work performed by the penitents or the amount of freedom they had to determine their level of participation in domestic or commercial tasks. The

\(^{451}\) Catholic Female Refuge, Fullarton: A Record, pp. 9-16.
sources do, however, provide some indications that economic pressure and attitudes toward work led the reformers to place more pressure on the penitent women than they admitted publicly.

In a discussion of South Australian Catholic charities published in 1911, Archbishop O’Reily provided a firm stand on the participation of penitents in assigned duties. He began by referring to an old saying: “If any man will not work, neither let him eat.” He continued by stating that in the refuge: “Honest toil is the appointed lot, it is the appointed rule, for all .... Work is the law at the Refuge - work neither long-houred nor heavy - but work still - work such as the physical condition of the inmates permits”.

Neither O’Reily nor his supporters would be pleased at the comparison between that comment and the reflection of Michel Foucault over half a century later that every disciplinary institution that existed in the nineteenth century was “a miniature, simplified coercive society in which the maxim ‘he who wants to live must work’, would be clearly revealed.”

The probable objection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Catholics notwithstanding, modern social theorists can effectively apply such analyses to the regime of work in the Catholic refuges.

The rule of work was certainly in place in the refuges. A letter from Sister Annette Henschke to Mother Mary MacKillop, the foundress of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, in 1884 hints at the pressures on all of those working in the refuge in Adelaide. Sister Annette apologised for a lengthy delay in communication by explaining that they were so busy with large washes that

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there was little spare time. The second annual report of the Catholic Female Refuge recorded that in August of that year only twenty-five penitents sheltered in the home. The women capable of work would have carried a heavy load at this time. When that refuge moved to the larger Fullarton property in 1901, the new laundry was fitted with machinery that could wash and iron 6,000 articles per day, and there were still only sixty-six women living there at any one time. In 1887 Mr. Hugh Taylor, a New South Wales M.P., visited the Tempe Retreat and reported favourably on the home. He intended to commend the discipline and industry of the institution when he reported that the penitents “work hard from daylight until dark”. In the same way, the editor of the Advocate intended to help the Victorian sisters when he published an editorial in the same year praising the penitents of Abbotsford for enduring the “hard and incessant toil” that was part of the regime of the refuge. Holy Cross Retreat held the contract for the laundry of several large shipping companies in Queensland. In 1902 the Courier reported on the work undertaken by the penitents to demonstrate the success and efficiency of the laundry. It stated that in “the outhouse are piled cartloads of huge bags of soiled linen (that used by the Jumna on her last voyage) which contains about 4,000 pieces.” With only a total of

455 Second Annual Report, Catholic Female Refuge, September 1884 - August 1885.
456 Southern Cross, 11 October 1901, p. 729.
457 The Catholic Refuge, Fullarton, p. 16.
458 Freeman’s Journal, 6 February 1890.
460 Courier, December 1902.
seventy women resident at the time, the workload must have been substantial.\footnote{Catholic Directory, and Almanac, 1902.} 

A report on the Catholic Female Refuge, also issued in 1902, lauded the new, efficient steam laundry equipment installed in the Fullarton premises, and mentioned in passing that until “1901 such work was done by hand.”\footnote{Catholic Female Refuge, Fullarton: A Record, p. 20} At no time in the previous decades did any of the sources mention that the penitent women did all the commercial laundering by hand. Similarly, Mother Mary Dominic stated in the \textit{Tempe Laundry Day Book} in 1910 that in the House of the Good Shepherd: “We never work at night, not done so for ten years.”\footnote{Tempe Laundry Day Book, p. 84.} The sisters had never provided any indication before 1900 that work was undertaken at night. Mother Mary Dominic also stated that steam was only kept on in the refuge for thirty-nine hours per week and argued that was the maximum anyone could work.\footnote{Ibid., p. 79.} However, this statement does not mention the range of other household chores that occupied the women and might have engaged them in addition to laundry duties. A letter written in 1912 by a former resident of the Magdalen Home, Sandy Bay, provides details of a rigorous work regime and evidence that involvement in laundry duties did not free penitent women from other chores.\footnote{Chapter 1, notes 100-101, provides further details of the letter and the problems associated with using it as evidence.} The woman wrote to the Tasmanian State Welfare Department that sometimes during harvesting she had to begin carrying sheaves at 4.30am.
and then clean out the stables before a full day of ironing. The records of the refuges refer, almost in passing, to penitent women undertaking cooking, general cleaning, sewing, needlework, tapestry, gardening, bootmaking and carpetmaking.

The reformers were silent on the nature of the work that the penitent women actually undertook on a daily basis, especially the work in the laundries. However, their pride in the machinery used in the refuges and the frequent reassurances that modern, commercial equipment was in place establishes that the practicalities of work resembled those of commercial laundry businesses. The Commission on Female and Juvenile Labour in Factories and Shops of 1910 targeted the laundry industry for special attention because of the difficult working conditions. Both the washing and drying rooms in laundries had demanding and risky features. In the wet areas women had to lift wet blankets and other linen all day in stifling heat generated by the furnaces for the coppers. They stood for long periods on floors without adequate drainage, often saturated in water that escaped from the machines during washing and spinning. The tubs themselves had to be scrubbed and polished regularly. The work in this area also involved the risk of disease, especially from the linen from hospitals and ships. The ironing equipment used in the dry rooms could be dangerous and the coke heaters used for the irons also gave rise to extreme temperatures. The difficulties were compounded for the penitent women who were pregnant or had recently given birth. As the commercial launderers pointed out, the women in the

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466 Baxter, pp. 42-43.
467 Kingston, pp. 66-68.
refuges did not receive wages, the refuge laundries were not subject to inspection or regulation, and the penitents could not access support from trade unions officials. A handwritten note was left at the refuge in South Australia in 1902 by a woman identified only as W.W. Her note reads: “Dear Sir, I have come to see if you can give me any assistance Because of the accident to my eye at Fullarton and I have been in and out of the hospital ever since nearly Eight months i would be very thankful”. The archive does not have any further information on this incident and contains no indication that the request brought any response from the sisters or the clergy. The note demonstrates not only the type of accident that could occur in a refuge but also the vulnerability of penitent women in trying to gain assistance in the event of an accident or injury.

The limited and conflicting evidence on the topic partly obscures the amount of work the penitents undertook, and the fact that the workload was not constant or predictable compounds the difficulty in making a reasonable estimate. The winter months were always quiet but other seasons brought an excess of work that had to be finished even if the regular working hours of the women were not sufficient to cope with it. The Protestant reformers sometimes hired extra workers for the refuges during busy periods but the Catholics did not. The sisters and the penitents were responsible for meeting any extra orders. The sources demonstrate that any work schedule was

468 ACAA, letter from W. W. - the management of the Catholic Female Refuge, 15 March 1902.
469 The records of the refuges between 1848 and 1914 do not refer to the dangers associated with laundry work. However, correspondence between lawyers and the Catholic Female Refuge indicates that in 1945 the hand of a sixty-five year old woman was amputated by laundry equipment, and in 1966 Miss Nora Bulla lost four fingers in a laundry accident. ACAA, Collection of Letters, 1938-1968.
necessarily flexible and that the pressure of work over-ruled any concept of fair working conditions. A 1901 pamphlet on the Catholic Female Refuge stated that with the “occasional exceptions necessitated by press of work the laundry is in operation for but five days a week.”\textsuperscript{470} Reverend Phelan indicated in his discussion of the work of the Good Shepherd sisters in 1904 that the same arrangement was in place in Victoria. He praised the penitents in Abbotsford for being “generous in their labour when an unusual supply of work comes in.”\textsuperscript{471} The \textit{Annals} of the Abbotsford convent supported his impressions. The sisters recorded in 1906 that during the Feast of Saint Alphonsus Ligouri, “through pressures of public work the children of the S[acred] H[earth] Class could not take part in the festive celebrations until today Saturday.”\textsuperscript{472} The practical pressures exerted by work commitments and the competitive nature of the commercial laundry business meant that even genuine commitment to limiting the working hours of the penitent women did not confine laundry or other work to the hours set down in the official timetable.

Work was central to the daily life of the refuges from their establishment yet featured rarely in the literature of the homes throughout the nineteenth century. A few Catholic commentators were beginning to explore the moral implications of work and to try and place labour in a moral context during this period. Father Bronte, a member of the Prisoner’s Aid Society in Tasmania, argued in 1893 that neglect of work was a cause of

\textsuperscript{470}Catholic Female Refuge, Fullarton: A Record, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{471}Phelan, “Work of the Good Shepherd Sisters”, p. 305.
\textsuperscript{472}Convent Annals, Abbotsford, (2) Abb. III A (1) Annals - Abbt 1902 - 1913, 4 August 1906. The sisters at Abbotsford referred to the penitent women as members of the Sacred Heart Class.
moral failure.\textsuperscript{473} However, such analysis was rare and never applied to the refuges. The references to work that do occur in the early records of the homes demonstrate that work was a practical necessity rather than a topic for discussion. In 1898 the Queensland \textit{Courier} offered the progressive comment that the instruction in domestic work the women received from the sisters in Holy Cross Retreat ensured they were able “to earn good wages and to face the world with the courage and assurance that competence and well-doing give.”\textsuperscript{474} However, in general the early reformers argued that work was good for the penitents because it occupied and financially supported them during their time in the refuges and provided them with the training to find honest employment outside the homes. They did not suggest that any qualities inherent to work would actually help reform the women.\textsuperscript{475}

However, from the beginning of the twentieth century the reformers endowed work with greater importance. The work ethic had never been part of Catholic culture as it had been in English Protestant communities, yet by the end of the nineteenth century the work itself was as important to the sisters in the Catholic refuges as its outcome. The Protestant work ethic influenced the thinking and modified the practices of Catholic reformers in the same manner and for the same reason as Protestant attitudes toward sexual behaviour and temperance. The \textit{Courier} provided one of the earliest, substantial discussions of the role of work. An editorial stated in 1899:

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{473} \textit{Morning Star}, 7 January 1893, p. 7.
\item \textsuperscript{474} \textit{Courier}, January 1898.
\item \textsuperscript{475} \textit{Freeman’s Journal}, 24 December 1853; MacKillop, \textit{Instructions}, p. 79; \textit{Advocate}, 13 March 1869, p. 7; \textit{Ibid.}, 27 January 1894.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
In the early days of our century, charity was little more than the sentimental pampering of paupers. “Supported by voluntary contributions” was the inscription over many of our British institutions. To-day in many cases this record may be substituted, “Supported by the efforts and labour of the inmates.” Here the Sisters have touched the keynote of progress and independence; they do not ask their sisters to eat the bread of charity in idleness.476

This editorial marked the beginning of a new attitude to work that would characterise the thinking of the Catholic reformers throughout the early twentieth century. The new commentary established that gainful employment was valuable and virtuous in itself: that aside from the economic result, to undertake work was a reflection of good character and a way of achieving personal betterment. Conversely, failure to engage in work was a sign of poor character and an indicator of future moral decline. It took several decades but eventually the reformers viewed the effect of neglect of work and the curative value of work in the same light as the absence and presence of religion. The sentiment regarding prisoners and work that Father Bronte expressed in the 1890s became evident in the literature of the refuges. When Archbishop O’Reily stated in an official report in 1909 that the “Sisters believe in work. They believe that heaven helps most readily those who strive to help themselves”,477 he reflected the broad changes in attitudes toward work.

These arguments anticipated those of Carter and O’Grady, included in chapter 2, who argued during the court case between the Sisters of the Good Samaritan and some commercial launderers in Sydney in 1910, that a causal relationship existed between aversion to work and prostitution. Catholic

476 *Courier*, December 1899, p. 4.
477 *Refuge and Reformatory*, p. 4.
commentators preferred to consider the possible positive connection between work and the reformation of prostitutes and other penitent women rather than to dwell on the dangerous effects of the lack of work. This feature did distinguish their views on work from their views on religion. An editorial in the *Telegraph* referred to the moral associations of work in 1905. It argued that by “working hard themselves” the sisters in Queensland “teach those under their care the value of love of work, and it is evidently on these lines that they seek to effect the objects of the institution.”\(^478\) The reformers cited the adoption of disciplined work practices as a sign of improvement. After referring to the arduousness of the work routine at Abbotsford, the 1877 editorial in the *Advocate* stated that the fact that the penitents voluntarily participated in the regime “suggests the earnestness and sincerity of their repentance.”\(^479\)

Modern commentators argue that work performed a social control function in institutions and that the tasks set for residents were intended to channel their energy and distract them from their pasts and their present circumstances. The Catholic reformers were unabashed that work did have this function in their refuges and openly presented the approach as conventional wisdom. The 1898 *Practical Rules* for the Sisters of the Good Shepherd stated that the sisters expected the penitents to work according to their ability because they believed that “idleness is the mother of vice”.\(^480\) Similarly, the *Tempe Laundry Day Book* made clear the role that work played

\(^{478}\) *Telegraph*, December 1905.  
\(^{479}\) *Advocate*, 3 March 1877, p. 14.  
\(^{480}\) *Practical Rules*, p. 125.
in distracting women from the desire to leave the refuges. It stated in 1910 that “if there was no work for them it would be impossible to reclaim them. In the dull months May & June the girls are miserable and the women want to go out.” In 1906 the Advocate supported this view in an editorial that reflected on the views of the penitents at Abbotsford. It stated:

One woman, whose face has still some of its past good looks, is quite a character. She expresses her fears that the winter will be dull, and washing not plentiful. „And it doesn’t do to be idle,” she says. „You get restless, and want to get out into the world when you’ve nothing to do but think.“

The comment may not represent the views of the majority of penitent women as well as the editorial suggested but it does confirm that the importance of work as a means of distracting the women from other concerns was established in the philosophy of the regime.

Work was, however, more than a distraction. The reformers believed that it also exerted a positive influence on the character of the women. Catholics, Protestants and most members of the middle class agreed that work instilled in penitent women, as it did in all other members of the community, the virtues of industry, discipline, patience and duty. However, the sisters also endowed work itself with a special value beyond the influence it could exert on the character and behaviour of the penitent women. The sisters, clergy and lay philanthropists that constituted the community of the refuges displayed a tendency to treat certain select features of refuge life in this manner. Their attitude toward cleanliness provides an example of this tendency. The Catholic Female Refuge maintained a Visitors Book from 1884

481 Tempe Laundry Day Book, p. 81.
482 Advocate, 12 May 1906, p. 25.
to 1907 in which members of the public and the clergy recorded their impressions of the home. The entries of the book reveal that the Catholics who visited the refuge praised cleanliness above all other features of the home. The visitors commented on order, cheerfulness, industry and sanitation, but references to the “cleanly appearance” and “exquisite cleanliness” of the home dominate the records.  

The stress on cleanliness by reformers and visitors went beyond concern with hygiene and took on an importance beyond that necessary to satisfy medical and social standards. The comments reveal a preference for hyperbole and lavish metaphors over rational argument. The report the reformers in Adelaide prepared to commemorate a visit of Lady Bosanquet to the refuge in 1910 reflected this style. It stated that “the fresh air wafted in through the windows and made the atmosphere of the room as pure as that without. Along each wall was placed a row of beds the whiteness of the counterpanes of which rivalled the snows of Kosciusko.” The report discussed the laundered articles in the same manner. It stated that after shirts were “thoroughly boiled and cleansed in soap and hot water ... they come out with a shinier face than careful mother ever yet gave a careless schoolboy.” It continued:

before a shirt has half recovered from its indignation at being ignominiously dumped into a hot bath, it becomes so dry, clean, and comely an article that all its animosity disappears in an overweening conceit of itself.

483 ACAA, Visitors Book, Catholic Female Refuge, 1884 - 1909, passim.
485 Ibid.
Australians occasionally made a connection between moral and physical cleanliness. An editor of the Perth *Truth* visited the Abbotsford refuge in 1907 and reported that, “absolute cleanliness, both of person and of mind, is, of course, insisted upon.” However, the reformers in Australia did not follow their contemporaries in Britain, Europe and America and attach symbolic importance to the cleansing aspect of laundry work. Reformers in these countries supported laundry work because they believed that truly penitent women who spent their days cleansing articles of clothing undertook a ritual that would serve as the basis for the cleansing and purification of their souls. The Australian reformers did not use this analysis, or any other, to provide an explanation for their focus on the issue of cleanliness.

This digression on cleanliness demonstrates that Catholic reformers could take a simple issue or practice, invest it with a significant moral value, and strive to teach the penitent women to do the same. The reformers subjected both work and cleanliness to this treatment. These ideals occupied a revered position in the traditional value system of the English, Protestant middle class that exerted pressure on Catholic views in nineteenth-century Australia. A sustained commitment to work and cleanliness involved the expenditure of a considerable amount of effort and the occupation of a considerable amount of time. It testified to serious restraint and self-control

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486 *Truth*, 27 July 1907.
487 Mahood, “Magdalene’s Friend”, pp. 55-56 provides a detailed discussion and reference to the historiography of the area. Joanne Monk argues in “Cleansing their Souls: Laundries in Institutions for Fallen Women”, *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, No. 9 (Autumn 1996), pp. 21-32, that laundries were the “allegorical centre” of the refuges and that the reformers did attach symbolic and moral value to the ritual of cleaning. I found no evidence for this connection in either the primary sources or Monk’s article.
on the part of the individual and promised order and stability for the whole of society. The absence of commitment to work and cleanliness revealed sloth and threatened chaos. The members of the middle class detected that the members of the working class lacked respect for the ideals of work and cleanliness and neglected them to the immediate detriment of themselves and the eventual damage of society. In accepting these views, the Catholic reformers created a climate where the promotion of the importance of work was an urgent matter. Work was, by then, as important as religion in the process of reforming women and the work habits of the penitents were subject to the same scrutiny as their sexual habits.

The Sisters of Mercy reflected on the success of work as a means of reformation in the 1892 *Report* of Holy Cross Retreat. They were pleased to report that except for the occasional quarrel the penitents had behaved well and worked hard. They stated confidently that the “effects of systematic labour and discipline are manifest in the penitents.”\(^488\) The *Courier* praised the work routine in place in Holy Cross Retreat. An editorial in 1899 argued that instilling in penitent women a high regard for work was being “just to the individual”, because it offered them “the elevating influence that self-help bestows, and the independence it represents in after struggles with the world.”\(^489\) The Perth *Truth* reported in 1907 that the penitents in the Abbotsford refuge were genuinely happy due to the “consciousness of a noble duty nobly done”.\(^490\) The report was based on the reflections of a

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\(^{488}\) Report of Holy Cross Retreat For Three Years Ending September 30, 1892, p. 3.
\(^{489}\) Courier, December 1899, p. 4.
\(^{490}\) Truth, 27 July 1907.
group of recent visitors to the home who had found that the women accepted so completely the teachings of the reformers that they aspired to happiness through domestic work. The basis of this view was the impression that as the penitent women “perform their daily tasks they sing and hum as contentedly as if they were in their own homes.”\textsuperscript{491} An entry in the \textit{Tempe Laundry Day Book} in 1910 provided the strongest statement on the influence of work. Mother Mary Dominic reflected on the influence of the refuge on penitent women and concluded:

Their manner & demeanor improve and after they have been here two or three years they are fit for service & would make good domestics .... They are trained in tidiness & cleanliness & general household duties and I believe become domesticated. They come in useless and go out useful.\textsuperscript{492}

The changing attitudes of the previous half-century were distilled in the comments of the Reverend Mother. Her reflections demonstrate that the attitudes and experience of the reformers has crystallised into the view that work provided the training necessary to befit penitent women to contribute to society through domestic activity. A woman who could not or would not contribute in this manner was of questionable personal and social value.

The Australian Catholic reformers could be pleased that they developed a means of reformation that was consistent with the teaching and traditions of the Catholic Church but flexible enough to respond to the changes in aims that occurred around the turn of the century. It was as clear to Protestants as it was to the Catholic reformers that the aim to train women to meet standards of virtuousness and usefulness was appropriate and a

\textsuperscript{491}Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{492}Tempe Laundry Day Book, p. 74.
regime of religious and domestic training was an ideal means of fulfilling those aims. Sociologists have criticised the regime of work and religion that was adopted around the world. The interpretations of sociologists appear as accusations against the reformers and yet the substance of their allegations contains little to which the reformers would be inclined to object. Chapter 2 demonstrates that reformers had an overt concern with social order and believed that female sexuality and vocational behaviour were powerful agents and could exert a dangerous influence on society. It also establishes that the work in the refuges was designed to protect society from the penitent women as much as protecting the women from society. Reformers would not have denied or apologised for this fact and few of their contemporaries would have requested it of them. The introduction to this thesis rejects the approach of Australian historians who take an entirely cynical view of reformers” motivations and deem their actions social control strategies devoid of humanitarian motives and without religious impulses. However, such analysis does provide insight into unstated or recognised motivations and is not only appropriate in the context of the means of reformation engaged in the Catholic refuges but also essential.
Chapter 6
SUCCESS OF THE REFUGES

The compassion and understanding of social influences that characterised the work of the Catholic reformers are impressive in the context of the social attitudes of the nineteenth century. Their beliefs translated into action that improved the lives of hundreds of penitent women across the country. However, the improvement of individual lives was not the primary goal of the reformers. Their aim was to effect social change for all members of the community. The Southern Cross reported on this aim in the article “Catholic Institutions and their Influence” in 1902. It argued that it “must be a source of great satisfaction to all interested in this important subject” that the Catholic Church “is helping, not only to remedy the social evils when caused, but by her teaching to prevent the inroads of vice and crime.”

It was not the case, however, that the work of the Catholic reformers made an impact on the social conditions of nineteenth- or twentieth-century Australian cities. At the time that the refuges attained a level of stability the reformers adopted domestic ideology as a philosophical basis for their work. This ideology not only proved unsuitable as a motor for social change but was not always compatible with the practical necessities of running the refuge. The reformers, therefore, faced a conflict between their ideals and immediate practicalities. The overall effect of their work was to maintain and in some

493 Southern Cross, 19 September 1902, p. 604.
cases worsen the social conditions that made women vulnerable to the sexual transgressions the reformers sought to prevent.

**CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT**

The reformers set out to effect social change by altering social attitudes and sexual behaviour. While many Catholics were giving serious attention to social and economic relations and conditions, this period in Catholic history was not conducive to progressive social thought. Pope Leo XIII issued the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, “On the Condition of the Working Classes”, in 1891.\(^\text{494}\) This document aimed to define the rights and responsibilities of employers and workers and to forestall the conflict that Pope Leo feared the growing influence of socialist beliefs would incite between the two groups. Its focus was on the importance of maintaining patriarchal conditions within the home and existing economic and property relations within society. It provided support for conservative Catholics who did not wish to change social relations. However, the encyclical also contained enough criticism of the nineteenth-century version of industrial capitalism and the conduct of employers operating within it to provide Catholic social reformers with material to construct radical arguments. Some Catholics did express Christian socialist ideals within Australia. Reverend O'Mahony of Tasmania married progressive social ideas with traditional biblical and theological evidence for presentation to a popular audience. He sought to establish God as a social

reformer by arguing that, “He came to restore all things, to reorganise humane Society, to reestablish the brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God, to raise the downtrodden poor, from under the feet of pride and lust and power.” O’Mahony was convinced that God had not completed this work and that “today the same poor, still listen to the lying cries of their enslavers”. He taught that it was the role of Christians to continue the work for disadvantaged people by educating them about the inequities under which they laboured and to work for a fairer distribution of wealth and power.

O’Mahony was familiar with the work of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd at the Sandy Bay refuge in Tasmania. He perceived that the sisters had radical objectives and commended their work, as Pope Leo XIII had commended benevolent Catholic institutions in *Rerum Novarum*. However, a significant difference was evident in their emphases. The Pope regarded charitable institutions as an integral part of a stable social structure - one of the compensations of workers for their lack of wealth and position. He applauded such works as manifestations that the Church attempted to ameliorate the condition of workers. O’Mahony did not laud charitable institutions because they sheltered those in need but because he envisaged that they could educate people and assist with the restructure of society along more equitable lines. Of the oppressed in Tasmania, he commented that “if ever their eyes are to be opened, it will

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495 Annals, Convent of the Good Shepherd, Hobart, Opening of the Memorial Church, November 1910.
surely be through the instrumentality of such Institutions as this of Mount Saint Canice”. O’Mahony was one of the few Catholics who ever saw the potential of the refuges to enact significant social change and he over-estimated the social role they would play.

The reluctance of other Catholics to support social change did not necessarily reflect their perception of the fairness or unfairness of the social system. It had more to do with their view of their place within the system. The topic of social reform dominated debate at the Second Australasian Catholic Congress in 1904. Mr P.W. Crowe of Brisbane criticised socialism because it “dethrones God, and substitutes man as the regenerator, the newly-created god, who will change, free and redeem human society”. Reverend Michael Maher of Victoria explained that Christianity would effect social change without the influence of socialism by bringing about religious improvement which would lead to political and social improvement.” The Catholic reformers did see a need for social change but their conception of such change was framed by their belief in an active God and a regenerating religion that when widely accepted and followed would transform the nature of social arrangements and the quality of personal interactions. Other factors also prevented Catholic reformers from supporting radical change. Any passion for social change was tempered by the biblical teaching that “you always have the poor with

497 Annals, Convent of the Good Shepherd, Hobart, Opening of the Memorial Church, November 1910.


you”.500 Catholics did accept this inevitability and it influenced their beliefs and actions. Archbishop O’Reily announced through the Southern Cross in 1898 that he wished to find larger premises for the Catholic Female Refuge because “the infirm, the weak and the fallen, and the poor will always be with us to the end of time”.501 It was also the case that at times the task of social reform seemed too daunting for the reformers to tackle. The Irish Harp and Southern Cross reported in 1875 that dealing with the effects of the social evil was “utterly beyond the power of any Association”.502

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE REFORMERS, THE PENITENTS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

The Catholic reformers face the retrospective criticism that their work was a form of class-based oppression. The religious sisters working in the refuges occupied a subordinate position within a Catholic hierarchy that itself held little social prestige or economic security. The position of the sisters gave them a special proximity to the women they sheltered. Erving Goffman has argued that the level of “staff-inmate differentiation” within institutions is an indication of the level of power held by those in positions of authority.503 The differentiation between the sisters and the penitent women in Catholic refuges was low - assuredly lower than in any other institution of this type. The sisters resided with the penitent women,

501 Southern Cross, 29 July 1898, p. 474.
502 Irish Harp and Southern Cross, 7 May 1875, p. 5.
503 Goffman, p. 110.
ate with them, and worked beside them without receiving wages. Unlike those who worked in other refuges, the sisters did not leave at night to assume their place in middle-class family and communal life. The lives of the sisters were ones of hard work, little free time and institutionalisation. They had less freedom than the penitent women did to exercise any personal autonomy either within or outside the refuges. As the penitent women were in the refuges on a voluntary basis and the sisters had no legal right to detain them, they did not have the weight of law or state support to enable them to establish power over the penitent women. The sisters certainly did desire to influence the behaviour of the penitents and were able, at least on occasion, to impose their will on them. The Victorian sisters noted without embarrassment on the death of Annie Walsh, or ‘Frances Borgia’, that they were in the process of arranging for her to be placed in service when they received news of her father’s death. “She was nearly distracted with grief but after much sympathy & reasoning Religious influence brought her round & she said my Fathers wish must be fulfilled I will stay with Nuns.” 504 However, their ability to exert emotional pressure is not evidence of real power.

The voices of the sisters working in the refuges rarely emerge from the records. A unique example does exist in the form of a letter from Sister Mary Francis Borgia, of the Good Shepherd sisters in New South Wales, to the Mother Prioress of Mount Saint Canice, that was written shortly after the formal opening of the Good Shepherd sisters’ Infant’s Home in

504 Annals Abbotsford, 1862 - 1914 (2) Abb. III. (1) f, Register of Deaths of Penitents, April 1892.
Ashfield, New South Wales. Most of the letter is reproduced below. It is a touching message that establishes the fragility and vulnerability of some of the young sisters and challenges assumptions about the power relations in the refuges:

We were keenly disappointed no one from Melbourne ... should come along, unfortunately our loved Mother was ill - but still I think someone should have come to represent M. Provincial & Abbotsford however here we are all on our own. People here say it was good for a week day. We did the very best we could, of course from the very beginning we hadn’t anything to do with the opening. Fr Phelan had the carrying out of it, - he got ill and just a fortnight before the 31st of July [day of the formal opening] he said to us, we must do the whole thing ourselves, we refused on the plea not knowing anyone in Sydney, but we had to do it, so we ended up by being in the moving pictures. Well I know you will be pleased to hear we have eighteen children, very good, but not like Melbourne children, very low and fiery often they seem to be, we can get plenty souls, but can’t get by washing and dried and so we are frightened to engage in them till we have our drying room. Our building is going up and will soon be furnished and we will be thankful then we hope to do good works, and try to encourage all our dear good kind friends in the Province. I think this will be a grand place, not a hand has touched our souls in Sydney, yet, its full of poor children, but not one of them anxious to come to a convent. How can we thank you for all your kindness to us, all the good things you have sent to us, well; God will reward you for all. I could not tell you even a bit, all Abbotsford has done, and sent us, every time a case comes I cry for hours, it seems too much & we so helpless.

The letter is a reminder that power and power relationships are more complex than institutional structures. Some religious sisters were as young as sixteen and all were away from their own friends and families and received little practical support from the Church. They usually took responsibility for the operation of all aspects of a refuge, including the supervision of women beyond them in age and worldly experience. To

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AGST, letter from Reverend Mother Prioress, Sister M. Francis Borgia, Infant’s Home Ashfield, New South Wales - Mother Prioress of Mount Saint Canice, Tasmania, 15 August 1913. The Infant’s Home is not included in this study because it had a more narrow focus than the refuges. However, the issues and practicalities the sisters confronted in Ashfield were identical to those facing the sisters in the refuges, and this particular source is valuable enough to warrant inclusion.
suggest that the sisters always or necessarily exerted power over the
women in the refuges is to simplify the intricacy of the institutions and the
relationships they held.

The women approaching the sisters had limited options and
opportunities and were typically at their most vulnerable at the time they
sought assistance. Nevertheless, they voluntarily entered the refuges,
voluntarily submitted to their regimes, and were free to leave at any time.
The records of the refuges demonstrate that the penitent women did have
the freedom to leave the refuge at will. The reformers developed strategies
to entice the women to stay because they had no way of compelling them
to remain. The usual incentives were to provide the women with cash
payments, references, clothing, employment and certificates of character
after a stay of the agreed two-year period.506 The records of admissions
and discharges for all of the refuges contain numerous references to
women who “left voluntarily”, “left before their Probation”, “went away
for a few hours did not return”, “went away without leave”, “absconded”,
“left the Refuge secretly” and “remained only one week”.507 So the women
who stayed actively participated in the relationship with the sisters and
supported the existence of the homes. When Mrs. Taylor, the wife of
Hugh Taylor, the Mayor of Parramatta, visited the House of the Good
Shepherd in 1890, she asked the penitent women why they remained in

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506 Advocate, 4 August 1906, p. 16; Annals of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, House of the
Good Shepherd, Regulations for the General Government of the Institution, 1867, p. 8; Practical Rules, pp. 174-175.
507 Tempe/Arncliffe Register, 1887 - 1918, passim; Inmates Book, Mount Magdala Refuge, 1903 -
1936, passim; 1870s, (Diary), Refuge, Fullarton, passim; Report on Attendance at Religious
Instruction, 1879 - 1883, passim; Pitt Street, Register, 1879 - 1901, passim; The Refuge, Norwood,
Minute Book, passim; Tempe Laundry Day Book, passim.
the refuge. She reported to the *Freeman’s Journal* that “the reply was invariably ‘We are happy here; there is no temptation; we get plenty of everything; the Sisters are good to us.’”\textsuperscript{508}

The penitents’ decisions to remain in the refuges or to return to visit or be readmitted after leaving, are not the only signs of their attachment to the institutions. Women who decided to remain in the homes for an extended period and who had distinguished themselves for piety and industry were able to join sodalities. Sodalities were fellowships dedicated to particular saints, and involvement allowed penitent women to make reparation for their own sins and for the sins of others. Sodalities for Mary Magdalene and Martha and Mary were popular because they were particularly valuable exemplars for penitent women. Members of sodalities underwent an act of consecration, received the sacraments and appropriate instructions, and committed themselves to providing spiritual guidance to other penitents. Membership of these groups gave the penitents an identity and status within the homes that was immediately apparent. Uniforms of different colour or distinguishing stripes, and hats or badges marked the different stages of commitment.\textsuperscript{509} Membership of the sodalities was ostensibly a sign of commitment to Catholicism and the sisters praised it as such. However, as sociologists argue, voluntary participation in such organisations also represents attachment and commitment to the institution and its staff.

\textsuperscript{508} *Freeman’s Journal*, 25 January 1890.

\textsuperscript{509} *Southern Cross*, 26 July 1907, p. 492; ASGS, Rules of the Sodality of Consecrated Penitents of St. Magdalen’s Retreat, Tempe, 1904.
The sodalities served the interests of the reformers as fostering loyalty and commitment among the women improved their behaviour and increased their conformity. The penitents may also have used participation in the sodalities for practical gain. Certain privileges and rewards were associated with membership, and in the Abbotsford refuge „sodality points” could be converted into money. Nonetheless, continued inclusion in the sodalities involved a commitment of time to retreats and other spiritual activities and was evidence of a level of commitment to the sisters and the refuge. The fact that the Sisters of the Good Shepherd found that exclusion from sodalities and denial of their badges were effective disciplinary actions for penitents indicates that the women took them seriously.\(^5\)\(^{10}\) The editor of the *Southern Cross* in 1905 reported that some of those in the sodalities in the Catholic Female Refuge “are women of education, who have good homes to go to if they desire; and it is no small sacrifice for women of the world, with good positions awaiting them ... to consecrate their lives to this object.”\(^5\)\(^{11}\)

Through her research into the Magdalen Home, Sandy Bay, Valerie Baxter found a collection of letters written by residents of the refuge in 1912. The sisters did read all letters written by penitents before allowing them to be sent but the sentiments from the young women seem genuine. After a year with the sisters „Edith” was desperate to leave the refuge and return to the care of her aunt. She admitted to Secretary Seager of the Tasmanian State Welfare Department that she was “giving the Nuns great

\(^{5\)\(^{10}\)Practical Rules, pp. 110-117.  
\(^{5\)\(^{11}\)Southern Cross, 19 May 1905, p. 317.  

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trouble”. However, she assured Seagar that the “Nuns would not put anyone out although we give them great trouble ... I am very sorry for [Aunty’s] sake and the Nuns alas who have been very kind to me but I can’t help it now.” Delia” told her mother: “I am in good hands the Nuns do all that is in there power for us to make us happy and contented,” and in a letter to Secretary Packer of the State Welfare Department, „Maude” wrote, “I have been with the nuns three years, I am very greatfull for all they have done for me”. A letter from „Emma”, written while she was in domestic service and not in touch with the sisters, provides even more compelling evidence. She wrote to the Department:

I will never be able to stay down here. I miss the nuns very much they were very kind to me but I will let them see that I am grate-ful by being very good ... I would like very much to get at the place where Eliza was at just across from the Convent ... I would like to be there because I would be able to go across to see the Sisters.

The relationship between the refuges and the communities was as complicated as the relationship between the sisters and the penitents. The institutions were not simply technologies or strategies of middle-class repression over working-class culture. Some penitent women were referred to the refuges by courts or police, but this was not common. The sources of the refuges indicate that the most common scenario was that family members took the women to the sisters. Comments like “brought
by her Father and Sister” are common in the admissions registers.\textsuperscript{515} When the sisters chose to record more details about the penitents they further highlighted that families were involved in the arrival of the women. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Victoria recorded in 1899 that „Teresa of Dolours” was still young when a sexual transgression caused her separation from her family and that her “Mother gladly consented” when a Catholic friend suggested she send her to Abbotsford.\textsuperscript{516}

„Gertie” was taken by her mother to the House of the Good Shepherd in 1907 at the age of eleven and a half. She was supposed to remain with the sisters until she was fifteen years old, but her Mother removed her in 1909.\textsuperscript{517} In 1912 Mrs. Parsons “voluntarily surrendered her children” to the sisters as well as admitting herself to the refuge.\textsuperscript{518} The letter of „Edith” to Secretary Seager included the detail of how she came to be in the care of the sisters. She told Seagar to

See Aunty for me and ask her to come down and take me home again .... When she b[r]ought me down here she told me to be good for three months and she would come for me but she never came I don’t want to run away but if she doesn’t come I’ll have to do something. I’ll promise to be so good and help her all I can if she will only take me.\textsuperscript{519}

The involvement of families did not cease once women were installed in

the refuge. When „Ellen” was in Abbotsford, her mother “always visited

\begin{footnotes}
\item[515]Tempe/Arncliffe Register, 1887 - 1918, passim.
\item[516]Annals Abbotsford, 1862 - 1914 (2) Abb. III, (1) f, Register of Deaths of Penitents, 30 November 1899.
\item[517]Tempe/Arncliffe Register, 1907.
\item[518]Baxter, p. 39.
\item[519]Ibid., p. 40.
\end{footnotes}
and encouraged her to remain.”520 When „Clare” died in the Sandy Bay refuge the sisters recalled that “her Sister and relations came to see her frequently during her illness”.521 The relatives were not necessarily passive in their mediation between the penitents and the refuges, as the case of Annie Walsh, referred to earlier in this chapter, demonstrates. The sisters noted on her death that she was very delicate when she arrived “but after a while became apparently strong & then her mind was full of going out to work, but her Father who loved her tenderly feared this step & said I will leave you in the hands of the Nuns.”522 Annie was unable to resist the will of her father and stayed with the sisters until her death at the age of nineteen.

**CONTRADICTIONS IN THE WORK OF THE REFORMERS**

Although the result of the work of the reformers failed to make a dramatic social impact, their actions did have serious implications for the penitent women who left the refuges and some implications for the community. To some extent their work reinforced the conditions that led women to the refuges, making the actual outcome of their work the direct opposite to the desired outcome. Chapter 4 demonstrates that the one feature of the refuges that remained static throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century was the commitment to placing penitents in domestic service. The reformers knew that training in this occupation would not guarantee a

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520 *Annals Abbotsford*, 1862 - 1914 (2) Abb. III, (1) f, Register of Deaths of Penitents, 30 November, 1899.
521 *Annals, Convent of the Good Shepherd, Hobart*, 21 October, 1912.
522 *Annals Abbotsford*, 1862 - 1914 (2) Abb. III, (1) f, Register of Deaths of Penitents, April 1892.
future of morality for the penitents but argued that it provided the best chance for a woman wanting to adopt a virtuous life. Despite the shortage of domestic servants and the strong demand for trained women, penitent women with domestic training were not guaranteed a home in which to work. The Tasmanian *Morning Star* demonstrated that the whole Catholic community could not be relied on to support sentiments of compassion and forgiveness toward penitent women. An editorial referring to women leaving the Sandy Bay refuge stated in 1892: “Human sympathy and Christian charity may impel kindly hearts to dare much, but no mother with a due sense of what she owes to her own children would care to admit such individuals in any capacity whatever into her home.”

The families that did accept penitents into their homes as domestic servants did not always prove to be suitable. The Catholic Church acknowledged this problem in a report on the Saint John’s Reformatory for Girls in Kapunda, South Australia. The reformatory was run in the same manner as the refuges, for girls who had engaged in sexual activity or who gave the impression that they might. The report, published in the *Southern Cross* in 1907, admitted that not a single girl had been placed in service during the year because of the shortage of suitable homes:

> It is only in excellent homes that these girls succeed - homes where the employers take a kindly interest in the girls, where their protection is freely extended, where the girl is taught to find friends in them, and where there is still firmness and self-respect. Such homes are never abundant, and yet no others are fit for these girls. Returns are frequently as much caused by the failure of the home as that of the girl.

523 *Morning Star*, 20 August 1892, p. 9.
524 *Southern Cross*, 6 September 1907, p. 595.
The reformers did not take into account that many of the penitents required shelter in the refuges as a direct result of their previous employment in domestic service. John Gillis’ study of servants and illegitimacy in nineteenth-century London reveals that domestic servants accounted for more than 57% of single pregnant women in three London workhouses in 1857, and for 47% of the 10,000 single mothers included in a Scottish study in 1883. The percentage of domestic servants among unwed mothers was high even in communities where servants were relatively under-represented in the total female population.\(^{525}\) Linda Mahood’s study of Scotland confirms that more than half of the inmates of magdalene institutions in that country were former servants.\(^{526}\) Like other aspects of British domestic service, the situation in Australia was similar. Barbalet documents the cases of sexual abuse of South Australian state wards in domestic service.\(^{527}\) Her research indicates that more of these girls were assaulted in the homes or on the properties of their employers than on the city streets.\(^{528}\) She cites cases of girls raped by the master or sons of the house in which they were placed as well as by workers employed by the household or farm. The high number of domestic servants included in incidences of illegitimate pregnancy and rape was due, in part, to the fact that so many women were employed in that area. Domestic service accounted for approximately half of the total female workforce in Australia.


\(^{526}\)Mahood, “Magdalene’s Friend”, p. 55.

\(^{527}\)Barbalet, pp. 90-97.

\(^{528}\)Ibid., p. 90.
in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{529} However, research
into prostitution in Australia by Kay Daniels, Raymond Evans, Judith
Allen and Ann McGrath identifies domestic servants as being vulnerable
to sexual advances.\textsuperscript{530}

Mahood explains the tendency of reformers to place women in
domestic service despite the evident dangers. She comments on the
Glasgow Magdalene Institution that:

over one-half of the inmates were former servants, if the directors saw
any contradiction in sending women back into the very same
situations that had got them into trouble in the first place, they
soothed themselves with the knowledge that that the education
inmates received would neutralize and fortify them against “evil
influences and temptations”.\textsuperscript{531}

The reformers in Australia worked from a similar perspective. They
supported the argument that the training in the refuges would change the
way the penitents dealt with the temptations of the world. Reverend
Phelan stated in his discussion of the Good Shepherd sisters and the
Abbotsford refuge at the Second Australasian Catholic Congress that the
care of the sisters “will calm the turbulent passion of the human heart, and
nerve the whole system to launch out again and travel with comparative
security the ocean of life.”\textsuperscript{532}

\textsuperscript{529}Raymond Evans, “‘Soiled Doves’: Prostitution in Colonial Queensland”, in Daniels, ed.,
\textit{So Much Hard Work}, p. 150.
\textsuperscript{530}Daniels, “Prostitution in Tasmania During the Transition from Penal Settlement to
Proletariat in Early Twentieth-Century New South Wales”, p. 200; Ann McGrath, “Black
Velvet”: Aboriginal Women and Their Relations with White Men in the Northern Territory,
1910-1940”, p. 235, all in Daniels, ed., \textit{So Much Hard Work}.
\textsuperscript{531}Mahood, “Magdalene’s Friend”, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{532}Phelan, p. 305.
Due to the sisters’ commitment to confidentiality, the records of the refuges are discreet and do not indicate how many women had been domestic servants before their admission. The registers and other records do, however, include general entries that noted domestic service as the previous occupation of some of the women, or record that on their departure from the refuge women “returned to service” or were “taken by former mistress”. An 1891 editorial in the *Daily Telegraph* that referred to the Protestant refuge in South Yarra, Victoria, demonstrated the connection between service and sexual transgression. It stated that “all the children brought to the home were illegitimate, and were chiefly those of domestic servants.” Mary June Hicks, the young woman at the centre of the much-publicised Mount Rennie rape case, was a domestic servant who regularly spent time in the House of the Good Shepherd between positions. In fact, the Reverend Mother of the refuge testified publicly to Mary’s good character during the trial of her attackers. A sixteen-year-old girl named „Dora”, who was found sleeping in the doorway of the Anglican, House of Mercy in Tasmania in 1912 and subsequently entered Mount Saint Canice, was homeless because she had just run away from domestic service. The records of all of the refuges provided evidence of a connection between domestic service, pregnancy in unmarried women

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533 *Tempe Laundry Day Book, passim*; *Tempe/Arncliffe Register, passim*; *Inmates Book, Mount Magdala Refuge, 1903-1936, passim*; *1870s, (Diary), Refuge, Fullarton, passim*.
534 *Daily Telegraph*, April 1891.
535 *Globe*, 3 January 1887; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 September 1886.
536 Baxter, p. 37.
and precocious sexual activity. However, the reformers continued to strive to place women in service despite the evidence.

Perfect training in domestic service did not guarantee a successful placement for a penitent woman. However, the type of training the reformers employed as preparation for domestic service compounded the problem. The ideal was for all work undertaken in the refuges to serve as preparation for domestic service, but again economic imperatives and practical necessities intruded. The participation of the penitents in every aspect of running the refuges was necessary to keep the homes operating. As outlined in chapter 5, the women routinely helped with cooking, cleaning, sewing and other general household duties. Some women also did needlework and tapestry for the general public and the clergy. The women performed specialised tasks, including lacework, carpetmaking and boot repair, and routinely undertook farming work and gardening.²³⁷ However, all of these activities were additional to the real business of the refuges, which was the operation of the commercial laundries. Most penitents were engaged in laundry work most of the time. The Queensland *Daily Mail* summarised in 1908 the general view on the prospects of penitent women trained in the refuges: “they have a year’s instruction in laundry work, which renders them eminently well adapted for service.”²³⁸ In reality, the laundry work did little to prepare the women for domestic service. The refuges used heavy industrialised machinery that was quite different from that used in households, and the women had

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²³⁸ *Daily Mail*, December 1908.
specialised tasks within the laundering process. All the domestic tasks were undertaken on an institutional scale or for commercial purposes and provided little experience of the work undertaken in a middle-class home.

The actions of the reformers affected the lives and the life chances of some women who were not residents of the refuges. The laundries of the refuges attracted a lot of custom. The quality of the work was consistently high and the price of the service was competitive. As a result, the refuges in all of the states were able to gain a large share of the local commercial laundry business. The number of complaints and legal cases against the refuges testifies to the success of the sisters in the laundry business and the impact their work could exert on parts of the community. In 1903 the *Southern Cross* reprinted a letter from „Launderer” that outlined the concerns repeatedly expressed by others in that trade. The letter originally appeared in the *Advertiser* and argued that the Fullarton Refuge should be subject to the same regulations as private firms:

> It takes the work at prices that other laundries cannot touch, for the simple reason that it pays such a small wage, if any, to some of the women .... I would not find fault if the charitable institutions competed in a fair way, and got a fair price for their work, so as to give us a chance, seeing that we have to pay a fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work.  

The refuges did not deliberately undercut other launderers and the refuges sometimes failed to gain lucrative contracts. The Sisters of Saint Joseph unsuccessfully tendered for the railway washing in South Australia in 1902 and 1903, and several times tried unsuccessfully to gain the business.

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539 *Southern Cross*, 6 November 1903, p. 706.
of the local steamship companies.\textsuperscript{540} However, the refuges did enjoy advantages over commercial operators. They did not have to pay salaries, Catholics and Protestants supported their laundries as a form of charity, and the Catholic diocesan administration assisted with the cost of machinery and operations. The refuges did damage the businesses of commercial launderers and endanger their livelihoods.

Laundering was not, however, divided between the owners of laundering businesses and the sisters. Women in the community also took in laundry or took employment in the commercial laundries to support themselves and their families. The ability to work from home made it a convenient occupation, particularly for widows and women with small children. It has not yet proved possible to estimate the number of Australian women employed in the laundry business, but Beverley Kingston notes in \textit{My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann} that it was one of the industries that employed “large numbers of women”.\textsuperscript{541} These women did not have the skills or resources to contest the way the refuges operated their laundries, but the impact of that work on established, commercial laundry businesses indicates that the livelihoods of women relying on laundry work must also have suffered. The reformers never acknowledged this possible effect of their work. The only extant reference to the women who were disadvantaged in this way is a quote from Mr. McVicars, of McVicars Steam Laundry, in the \textit{Tempe Laundry Day Book} in 1910. His primary concern was to discredit the work of the sisters for the

\textsuperscript{540}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{541}Kingston, pp. 36, 66.
sake of his own business but his comment before the court that: “we heard that Tempe prevents honest widows from getting work” has a ring of truth to it.542 Judith Godden considers the impact of the introduction of steam laundry equipment in the laundries on the “undercapitalized neighbourhood washerwomen” in her discussion of the Catholic and Protestant refuges in Sydney. She accepts that these women were disadvantaged and argues that the “irony for the laundresses underpaid or deprived of their livelihood through such means was that one of their few alternatives was full- or part-time prostitution”.543 The reformers engaged in reform efforts with one group of women that imperilled another, making them vulnerable to the very transgression they sought to eradicate.

Attempts to ensure the marriages of the penitents occupied the minds of the reformers in varying degrees throughout the period 1848-1914. They argued that domestic service offered respite to women leaving the refuges but that marriage provided a permanent haven for them. They considered that a married woman was, by definition, a respectable woman and that a wife was assured the protection of her husband. Yet the admissions records of the refuges demonstrated that marriage did not provide women with a permanent respectable livelihood and that the reformers knew well that significant numbers of their penitents were not single. They did not dwell on the fact that the refuges sheltered women with husbands. This may have been simply because single women were

542Tempe Laundry Day Book, p. 104.
the intended object of the refuges. The reformers would also have worried that the members of the community who thought refuges for single mothers encouraged sin would also fear that refuges for married women encouraged divorce and undermined male authority in the home. Such fears had the potential to diminish support for the institutions. The reformers might also have been aware that acknowledging that married women could routinely need the services of the refuges would undermine the foundation of their work. When discussing the demographics of the South Australian refuge in 1883, the Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart provided a public admission that married women were sheltered in the refuge. It stated that in the home, “we find representations of every grade of society ... from the highest as well as the lowest grades of society; married and single.” Such public statements, however, were rare.

The comments in the records that were not for public view establish that it was not unusual for a married woman to reside in the refuges. Numerous references to the inclusion of married women appear in the official records of all the refuges. P.M. Stallard, of the House of the Good Shepherd in Sydney, included the statistics on admissions to the home in his letter to the Reverend J.B Laughton, the Secretary to the Sydney Female Refuge Society, in 1849. This was the first official report for a Catholic refuge in Australia and it stated that among the 100 women to take refuge with the sisters in the previous decade were “thirty persons of respectable

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544 Catholic Monthly and Messenger of the Sacred Heart, August 1883, p. 103.
connections, some through drunkenness or other causes, living apart from their husbands". The 1870s diary of the unnamed sister from the Catholic Female Refuge recorded that when the sisters shifted the home and their ten penitents from Mitcham to Norwood in 1872, three married women were included: Mrs. Heffernan, Mrs. Haygill and Mrs. Dogherty. Women with husbands still living continued to feature in the diary entries in the following year. In January 1873 “Mrs Green came. remained only a week, and then went home to her husband” [sic], and in April the sisters received Mrs. Watson from the jail. In May Mrs. Conolly left the streets for the care of the sisters, and Mrs. Green, again drunk and homeless, re-entered the refuge. In the following month, Mrs. Guster, a former resident of Mitcham, arrived homeless, suffering alcoholism and recently divorced. Mrs. Brady arrived from the jail in September in an invalid condition and the sisters also received Mrs. Gumpus later that month.

The Report on Attendance at Religious Instruction and General Conduct for the late 1870s and the early 1880s records the names of other married women who sought refuge with the sisters in Adelaide. The daily records of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan show that married women often required the care of the sisters in both the House of the Good Shepherd and Saint Magdalen’s Retreat in New South Wales. An entry in the Tempe/Arncliffe Register from 1889 stated that Rose McDonald

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545 Letter from Mr. P.M. Stallard, - Reverend J. B. Laughton, 25 January 1849.
546 1870s, (Diary), Refuge, Fullarton, pp. 1-3.
547 Report on Attendance at Religious Instruction, 1879-1883, passim.
“returned to her husband quite reformed”\textsuperscript{548} and that the sisters advised another penitent “to return to her husband and children” in 1907.\textsuperscript{549} The admissions register from the Mount Magdala refuge also noted when the husbands of the penitents were “in the country shearing” or “whereabouts not known”.\textsuperscript{550} In 1910 Sister Mary Dominic recorded in the \textit{Tempe Laundry Day Book} that:

\begin{quote}
Women addicted to drink come to us voluntarily for protection against themselves. Husbands bring their wives to us for the same reason .... Husbands bring their wives who have been drinking & after 4 or 5 weeks they leave full of good intentions & sometimes keep right for years & sometimes return voluntarily when they feel their weakness coming on them.\textsuperscript{551}
\end{quote}

These comments were typical of those that appeared in all the admissions registers throughout the period and are frequent enough to establish that married women were a definite feature of the refuges. The reformers rarely commented on the status of the women’s marriages but the records do indicate that whether death, separation, alcoholism, violence or impoverishment was to blame, married women were not immune to the need for shelter from the Church. The reformers, however, did not read their own records in this way and their assumption that a husband would solve the economic and associated moral hardships of women survived. This allowed the reformers to avoid giving serious attention to possibilities of employment for women and ensured that the prospects of penitents continued to be bound to low-paid and insecure jobs.

\textsuperscript{548}\textit{Tempe/Arncliffe Register}, 25 August 1888. The sisters added the notation about „Rose”s” departure to the original record of her admission, in January 1889.
\textsuperscript{549}\textit{Ibid.}, 1907.
\textsuperscript{550}\textit{Inmates Book}, Mount Magdala Refuge, Admissions Register, 1903-1936, \textit{passim}.
\textsuperscript{551}\textit{Tempe Laundry Day Book}, pp. 76-77.
The actions of the Catholic reformers were at odds not only with external, practical realities but also with their own goals. They accepted without question the domestic ideology that prevailed at the time. All the work and publicity surrounding the refuges from the turn of the century until 1914 was ostensibly aimed at helping the penitent women to learn and to accept the values of the ideology and to lead the lifestyle it prescribed. At no time did the reformers suggest that they sought less than the full participation of the penitent women in the lifestyle. They taught that the past of the women could be expunged and that with hard work and the right attitude penitents could assume the same social and familial position as any other woman. They educated the public that this was the official view of the Catholic Church and that any member of the community with faith in Catholic teachings, a social conscience and human compassion would do likewise. The reformers had only one set of ideals for feminine behaviour, and although they stated the opposite, their actions demonstrated that penitent women were less worthy of the status and less entitled to the rewards of “true womanhood” than other women. The reformers compromised on their notion of appropriate feminine behaviour to satisfy the economic demands of the laundries and their customers. The work required of the penitent women in the refuges demanded strength and exertion that were opposite to the behaviour the ideal extolled. Kingston quoted the 1910 report of the *Royal Commission on Female and Juvenile Labour in Factories and Shops* that noted: “Lifting of the clothes out when wet appeared to involve a strain altogether beyond what
is safe for a woman to undergo hour after hour, in factory conditions. In the majority of steam laundries men are employed at this work.”

The Catholic reformers stressed that family values were the foundation of society. As the refuge was the training ground for future life, particularly family life, they made much of the familial relations existing within the homes. The Advocate reported in 1869 on the Abbotsford refuge:

It is manifest from the countenances and deportment of the girls in the presence of the mother and sisters of the convent, that those names have something more than a titular meaning, and that the relations subsisting between the superioress, the community and the inmates, are impressed with a maternal and sisterly character.

The literature of the refuges routinely referred to the penitent women as the “children” of the sisters and the clergy. The Practical Rules instructed the Sisters of the Good Shepherd to be guided by “maternal devotedness” when dealing with their “children”. The same sentiments were evident in Western Australia. In 1904 a sister of the Magdalen Home told a visitor: “we are all mothers to them and they are all children to us.” Modern commentators do not interpret this tendency as a simple desire to provide the penitents with supportive relationships. They argue that the reformers were engaging the recognised social control strategy of infantilisation. This strategy involved treating the women as children to draw them into a dependent status that would be reinforced when the women were released.

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552 Kingston, p. 67.
553 Advocate, 13 March 1869, p. 7.
554 Practical Rules, p. 63.
555 John O’Brien, p. 50.
into the care of an employer or their own parents.\textsuperscript{556} It was the case in Australia that the reformers in all the refuges referred to the penitents as children and denied them most adult responsibilities. Their language and behaviour reveal genuine affection for some of the penitent women but also suggest a paternalist approach that encouraged the dependence and submission of the women.

The familial relations in the refuges were not, however, a substitute for existing family relations. Evidence suggests that the ties between penitent women and their own families were not always severed during the time the women spent in the refuges. The \textit{Minute Book} of the Adelaide refuge indicates that the relationships between penitents and their families deserved special respect. It recorded in 1883 that unlike all other social meetings, visits with immediate family did not have to be supervised.\textsuperscript{557}

The \textit{Southern Cross} also reflected on the success of the Catholic Female Refuge by reporting in 1910 that many “girls are saved and restored to their families”.\textsuperscript{558} These assertions were supported by the descriptive literature of the refuges which indicate that women left the homes for the care of fathers, mothers, husbands, uncles, nieces, daughters, granddaughters, grandmothers and step mothers. Comments such as “Annie Ryan ... went home to mother”\textsuperscript{559} and “Maude”, “went to Ireland to her Mother who sent money to pay her passage” are typical of such

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\textsuperscript{556}Mahood, “Magdalen’s Friend”, p. 55; Rafter, p. 299.
\textsuperscript{557}The Refuge, Norwood, \textit{Minute Book}, 5 December 1883.
\textsuperscript{558}Southern Cross, 6 April 1910, p. 343.
\textsuperscript{559}Report on the Attendance, June 1880.
comments. However, the records provide a sense that the maintenance of family ties occurred in spite of the behaviour and attitudes of the reformers rather than because of them. Despite the terminology of family life evident in discussions of the refuges and the future of penitent women, the reformers were not really supportive of the family ties of the women they sheltered.

Nicole Rafter argues in her discussion of the Western House of Refuge in Albion, New York, that disruption of inmates’ ties with their families was another strategy used by reformers to distance penitents from their past and encourage them to identify with the institution. Disruption of family ties was particularly effective when dealing with women because female roles were bound to family life. This sociological analysis is also compatible with the experience in Australia. Communication between penitents and their families was not encouraged. „Delia” wrote to her parents from Mount Saint Canice in a positive tone informing them: “I will be able to write to you every month except Lent”. Many of the comments about penitents being discharged into the care of members of their families have a grudging tone. The wording is frequently “taken by her Sister” or “taken by her Grandmother”.

The Catholic Church invested the relationship between mother and child with great social importance. As discussed in chapter 4, the bond

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560 Tempe/Arncliffe Register, 1887 - 1918, passim; Inmates Book, Mount Magdala Refuge, 1903-1936, passim; 1870s, (Diary), Refuge, Fullarton, passim.
561 Rafter, p. 299.
562 Baxter, p. 39.
563 Pitt Street, Register, November - December 1883.
between them secured the fulfilment of the mother, the stable future of the child, the foundation of the family and, in turn, the foundation of social life. Their treatment of the bond between penitent women and their babies did not reflect these ideals. The reformers did not act to preserve the bond between them but rather accepted that the separation of unmarried mothers and their babies was inevitable and proper. The *Report* for the Holy Cross Retreat for September 1892 recorded that a maternity home was built on the grounds of the refuge to complement its work. The report stated that “the infants are kept until they can with safety be separated from their mothers, who then get situations and contribute to the support of their children.”

The *Southern Cross* reported in a matter-of-fact manner in 1897 that in the Adelaide refuge the “Sisters train the inmates for domestic service, and when suitable situations are found for them, their children are placed under the care of foster-mothers.” Later that year while commending the broadminded and ecumenical approach of the refuge, the paper reported that when an unfortunate woman of Protestant beliefs seeks refuge for herself and child, the latter is placed with a Protestant foster mother at the earliest opportunity. A similar plan is of course followed in the case of Catholic children.

The commitment to separate mother and child was not always evident in refuges of other denominations. The 1871 Report of the Charities Commission involved an investigation of Foundling Hospitals. A witness associated with a Protestant refuge in South Yarra, Victoria, opposed such

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565 Southern Cross, 30 July 1897, p. 363.
566 *ibid.*, 26 November 1897, p. 590.
homes because they encouraged sin and allowed young women to evade their responsibilities. The witness argued that “it is better to keep the mother and child together”. The Anglican House of Mercy in Adelaide made explicit in 1903 that an aim of the institution was to “find some way of livelihood for the girls (after a residence of at least a year) in which it is not necessary for mother and child to be separated.”

The level of control the sisters could exert over the women was always limited in practice and some women refused to be separated from their babies. The Report on Attendance at Religious Instruction and General Conduct for the Catholic Female Refuge recorded that from the middle of 1883 until September of the following year Mary Ryan, Mary O’Reilly, Mary Nash and Agnes Turner each “went to a situation with her child”. However, the further comment in May 1883 that Mary Nash was “confined in Sept, went to situation with baby for one day”, hints at the difficulties for a young woman attempting that path. The reformers enjoyed some success in separating mother and child even when the child was not born during the period of the mother’s stay with the sisters. Eva Mulligan entered the Abbotsford refuge in September 1902 with her four and a half year-old daughter, Mary Ursula. Eva left in February and left Mary Ursula with the sisters until she found suitable accommodation for them both. After securing accommodation, Eva tried unsuccessfully to reclaim or to see her daughter. The Protestant clergy and the secular

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567 Daily Telegraph, April 1891.
568 House of Mercy, Walkerville, p. 3.
569 Report on the Attendance, August 1882 - June 1883.
courts became involved and found that the sisters had discharged Mary Ursula to her grandmother and uncle, who had placed her with her father, who took her to New Zealand. The sisters were cleared of blame in the courts and maintained that they believed Eva’s mother was acting on behalf of her daughter. At the time of the report Eva had not regained communication with or access to her daughter. Some secular newspapers speculated at the time that Eva’s conversion to Protestantism affected the behaviour of the sisters. Penitents from the refuge in Tasmania had similar experiences in 1912. Mrs. Parsons entered Mount Saint Canice refuge with her children after she was deserted. When she applied for their return a year later, she was “informed that her application for the care of her children cannot be entertained owing to her assertion that she is married to Mr. R being proved incorrect.” The Annals from Tasmania also record: “In the case of Elizabeth, her mother was refused access “as on her own admission she has had another child by another man since her husband left her”.”

The reformers made occasional attempts to justify the separation on the grounds that it would benefit the child and to suggest that that was sufficient to ensure the satisfaction of the mother. An editorial in the Southern Cross in 1902 provided the following romantic scenario on the outcome of the practice of separating mother and baby:

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570 Herald, 10 July 1903; 24 July 1903.
571 Baxter, p. 39.
572 Ibid., p. 39.
The poor erring girl, sometimes little more than a child, who comes to their gate with a baby in her arms, bowed under the weight of her appalling misfortune, is received, kept until her child can do without her, and so saved, perhaps, from damning her soul forever .... I make bold to say that at least half the rescued mothers who leave that home, and feel that there their babies are cared for tenderly, go and sin no more.\textsuperscript{573}

However, most of the time the reformers did not attempt to maintain that both mother and child were sure to benefit from the separation. They did not deny that the unmarried mothers had the maternal feelings that they believed were natural for women, or that they had the potential to be good mothers. Archbishop O’Reily reported to the Children’s Council in 1912 that the “great majority of the young mothers at the Refuge show themselves mothers toward their offspring in truth and deed.”\textsuperscript{574} A visitor to the Catholic Female Refuge reported on meeting a long-term resident of the refuge who was still suffering, in 1921, from the effect of being separated from her son. The sisters had already explained to the visitor how they had handed the woman’s son to the state authorities some years earlier. The \textit{Southern Cross} published an honest account of the conversation with „Annie” that took place while she continued with her work in the pressing room:

“Three more years,” said the girl in a lifeless tone. “I cannot see him till he is 15. He was seven when I saw him last ... If it had been a girl,” she said at last, voicing what seemed to have been an old thought, “I could have taken a situation and kept her with me, but boys are too much trouble - nobody wants a boy”.\textsuperscript{575}

Even more interestingly, the reformers did not pretend that separation from his or her natural mother would guarantee a happy life.

\textsuperscript{573}Southern Cross, 7 January 1902, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{574}Refuge and Reformatory, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{575}Southern Cross, 22 July 1921, p. 582.
for the baby. The sisters were in an ideal position to know this was not the case. By the time the Catholic Female Refuge moved to the large property at Fullarton in 1901, Sister Annette Henschke had been in charge of the institution for twenty-six years. She was excited that the new premises would accommodate the babies for a longer period, and they would not have to be boarded out so quickly. It had been her experience that in “the generality of cases the children are placed with unsuitable people.” She was sure that without the extra attention “the little helpless children, who, through no fault of their own, would otherwise be doomed to a darkened neglected existence.”

In 1911 Archbishop O’Reily reported that the children of penitent women did not necessarily go to foster families or adoptive parents at all. He advised that if the penitent women stayed in the refuges, their children were provided for until they reached three years of age and were then “drafted” to the Larg’s Bay Orphanage. The reformers admitted that in practical terms there was little reason to separate the mothers and babies, and nothing in their philosophy recommended it. While the reformers argued that the single mothers among the penitent women should be judged only according to their ability to raise their children, they were, in fact, treated differently to married mothers in principle.

The concept of social change is nebulous and while the reformers advocated it they never defined what they meant by it. The type of social change recommended by Reverend O’Mahony involved restructuring

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576 Ibid., 8 June 1900, p. 366.
social institutions and this was way beyond the intentions and even beyond the conceptions of the reformers. Their perspective of social change involved changing attitudes and behaviours to improve society and they believed that the improvements to society would include a reduction in the number of women eligible for the refuges. However, the attitudes of the reformers promoted a narrow arena for acceptable female behaviour and supported the restricted participation of women in economic and social life. These restrictions made it difficult for women, especially penitent women, to forge a socially acceptable role or earn an independent livelihood. The reformers were not in a position to engage in classic class oppression but they did draw on some of its methods. Their actions sat as comfortably within the context of adversarial class relations as within the context of the social justice they professed. They treated the penitent women differently than they would have treated other women and the penitents were placed in a unique position. They did not have the protection and prestige that domestic ideology promised to women yet they did not have the freedom and autonomy that the absence of the ideology could offer. The reformers proved themselves reformers in the very narrowest sense.
CONCLUSION

The purpose of any thesis is to uncover evidence and use it to support an argument. This approach can reveal much about an issue or subject and has served well the topic of the Australian Catholic refuges. It has allowed the construction of the argument that the Catholic reformers established refuges for penitent women out of the clear and apparent evidence that they needed shelter, training and support. Over the decades from 1848 to 1914 the disillusion caused by working with prostitutes and the desire to respond to outside religious and social changes brought rapid and dramatic changes to the operation of the refuges. The reformers developed an interest in the reputation of the penitents they received and discharged from their institutions, and a concern for the way that the penitents reflected on the refuges and contributed to society. The research placed these changes in the context of traditional and evolving Catholic attitudes toward women, sex and sin and within the Australian social environment. It compared the Catholic attitudes to those of Anglican and Protestant reformers in Australia, Britain and America. The thesis also examined how different belief systems and social experiences account for the different attitudes toward penitent women and the variations in the development of refuges for them.

However, important details do not necessarily fit the constraints of a thesis and much on its topic has to remain unstated. This thesis is, by necessity, structured around features of the Australian Catholic refuges for which there is concrete evidence, which means aspects of the refuges other than the lives of the penitent women who found shelter there. Life stories can
provide genuine support for an argument or even form the foundation of a thesis but fragments of life stories cannot. The glimpses of the lives of the penitent women are so sparse and so rare that they constitute neither a story nor evidence so feature in this work only to support arguments on the issues related to the refuges. Yet the fragments of the lives of the women deserve mention even when they do not shed light on broader issues.

In 1896 the Advocate published a poem written by Mr. A. J. Taylor to remember a woman named „Christina”, who had spent a little over two years in the Mount Saint Canice refuge. She was a member of one of the sodalities and had arranged with the sisters to receive the Badge of Our Lady and then leave the refuge on 16 July 1896. Instead she died on 5 July. She won her measure of fame by becoming the first penitent woman to die at Mount Saint Canice. The Advocate does not provide any indication of how Taylor heard of „Christina’s” death, but the tone of his tribute suggests that he did not know her personally. His poem was simply titled „Christina”:

So run the letters writ in simple type
Upon a little cross that tells no tale
But this - How one, a Magdalen, found peace
In yonder Home; and having faith in God,
Passed on to where the weary are at rest.
Some taint of blood - some misplaced trust, perchance,
Led her from innocence to sin: God knows!
What matters now? The cold world’s cruel scorn
Can harm her not
“Christina!” Who was she?
God Knows! Let that suffice - for God is Love.

The poem conjures the image of the archetypal late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century penitent woman. While it does evoke some of

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578 *Annals, Convent of the Good Shepherd, Hobart*, Death of a Penitent, 5 July 1896.
579 *Advocate*, 8 August 1896, p. 10.
the sadness and solitude that any woman who lived and died in those circumstances would have experienced, it tells nothing of the life or character of „Christina“.

The only detail of her life that the sisters were willing or able to record was unknown to „Christina“ or to Taylor. „Christina’s“ daughter, „Antonette“, also resided in the Tasmanian refuge while her mother was still alive and in the care of the sisters. She died there at the age of twenty, six years after the death of her mother. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd recorded in the *Annals* in 1902 that „Antonette“ had been taken to Saint Joseph’s orphanage at the age of two and entered the refuge directly from there “friendless and homeless” never having known anything of her mother or any other members of her family. According to the sisters, „Antonette’s“ death resulted from “a drop of blood from the heart going to the brain.”

„Christina“ and „Antonette“ were not the only women who were unknowingly sheltered by the sisters at the same time as another member of their family. The sisters at Abbotsford recorded in 1909 the situation of Mrs. O’Farrell, a long term resident of the refuge whom they called “dear old Grannie”. Mrs. O’Farrell’s grand daughter, „Maggie“, was a member of the Saint Joseph’s Class for girls in danger of falling into sin. Mrs. O’Farrell received monthly visits from her daughter, „Maggie’s“ mother, but neither woman knew that the sisters were also sheltering „Maggie“ on the same property. The sisters later blamed the separation and confusion on the dispersion of the family through industrial schools. In any event, the sisters apparently did not know and the family certainly did not know of the

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580 *Annals, Convent of the Good Shepherd, Hobart*, Death of One of the Children, 13 April 1902.
connection until „Maggie”, by then aged nineteen and “desperately seeking her family”, discovered the relationship. The sisters did not record how she found that Mrs. O’Farrell was her grandmother. The family reunion was shortlived as „Maggie” was desperate to find her family because she was dying. She died knowing only the balanced but austere institutional regime of the Saint Joseph’s Class of the Magdalen Home at Abbotsford. The schedule for the young women in the time that „Maggie” was resident was as follows:

6.00  rise, dress, make beds  
6.30  morning prayer  
6.45  breakfast  
7.15  mass  
8.00  talking whilst doing work  
8.30  silence, work continued  
9.00  reading  
10.00  grammar/ geography/ dictation  
10.30  writing  
11.00  arithmetic  
11.30  sing canticle, sewing  
12.00  dinner  
12.30  recreation  
1.30  singing canticle, silence, sewing  
2.00  lecture  
2.30  study  
3.00  sewing and other work  
3.30  talking whilst doing work  
4.00  religious instruction, catechism  
4.30  household work  
5.45  rosary  
6.00  supper  
6.30  recreation  
8.00  night prayers, retire to bed in silence. The details of the lives of „Maggie”, „Christina”, „Antonette” and Mrs. O’Farrell are rich in comparison to those of most of the other penitent

\(^{582}\) *Advocate*, 13 March 1869, p. 7.
women. The lives of most of the women who lived and died in the refuges are recorded in one or two sentences. The scant details contribute little to the work of the historian but are of interest to any compassionate or curious reader. The records of Abbotsford indicate that „Marie“ was more fortunate than „Maggie“, „Christina“, „Antonette“ or Mrs. O’Farrell. When she died in the refuge at the age of eighteen in 1914, she was surrounded by her three sisters who were also penitents in the care of the sisters.  

Unfortunately, the records do not provide any indication of what led four young sisters into the care of the religious sisters. The consistent recording of deaths of young women stands out even in records from a period when life expectancy was low and premature mortality was not unusual, and in a place where the residents were frequently weakened and vulnerable to illness. The sisters did not express surprise or regret when young women died. The Good Shepherd sisters recorded in a routine manner that in 1892 “Annie Walsh, or Frances Borgia was only 19 years old when called to the eternal Land after spending 4 years at Abbotsford”584. They used the same style when in 1910 „Hannah“, “one of our dear sheep passed to her eternal reward after spending seven years in our class .... RIP. She was aged 23 years.”585 The sisters in Tasmania did not add any reflection or comment to the 1912 record that “our dear child „Clare” aged 17 years died a holy and happy death: She was not long in our grand class, but was a favourite with her companions, for her

583 Annals, Convent of the Good Shepherd, Hobart, 21 September 1914.
584 Annals Abbotsford, 1862 - 1914 (2) Abb. III. (1) f. Register of Deaths of Penitents, April 1892.
585 Annals, Convent of the Good Shepherd, Hobart, Death of a Penitent, 29 January 1910.
gentleness, and kindness.” 586 A simple statement of fact sufficed the following year in Mount Saint Canice when another „Hannah” “died of consumption aged 16 after 5 years in the home and 6 months illness”. 587

The details of the older women in the refuges are sparse but striking, and are notable enough to raise questions about the background of the women and the social world they inhabited. The Sisters of the Good Samaritan recalled that Sarah Caswell, „Patience”; first entered the House of the Good Shepherd on 15 December 1890 when she was aged twenty. She left and went to friends some years later but returned to the refuge in 1895 and remained with the sisters until 1925, when she died at the age of fifty-nine. The *Tempe/Arncliffe Register* recorded that she “suffered from heart trouble but worked up to about a month before her death. Had a very happy and good death R.I.P.” 588 „Rebecca” was sixty-seven when she entered the Abbotsford refuge and she lived there for fourteen years until her death in 1896. 589 „Thais” was also a mature woman when she and a friend arrived at the refuge in 1894. The sisters recorded that she stayed most of a year when “one morning on her way to Mass was suddenly seized by her death stroke, she was carried to the Infirmary, the Priest came & anointed her & prayers for repose of her soul were asked for at the Mass at which she had set out to assist.” 590 The records do not suggest what led the women to the refuges at this advanced stage in their lives. If the sisters were curious at all they were

588 *Tempe/Arncliffe Register*, 1890, 1895. The note on her death was added to the original entry in 1925.  
satisfied to answer that God’s grace brought the women to them. It might be that in most cases the simple answer was the absence of other options after retirement from prostitution or another lifestyle that did not involve a stable income or a stable partner. Even when this was true, the records do not reveal how a woman felt living under the moral, religious and industrial regime of the refuges after a life time in contravention of sexual, social and vocational standards.

The records of the sisters do at least account for the daily lives of the women who were resident with them for decades. However, again, they do not reveal anything of the feelings of the women. The sisters reflected with unqualified contentment when „Teresa of Dolours” died in 1899. They took comfort and pleasure from the fact that she became a model penitent and “her memory will ever be fruitful in Sacred Heart Class R.I.P.” 591 They did not question that a twenty-year stay in the refuge and an early death after meeting a single “trouble” in youth was a satisfactory life. „Teresa” must have.

The refuges were a product of their time and were shaped by social changes and attitudes. This thesis ends at the beginning of World War I because the social and economic changes the war brought mark a break from the conditions that created and nurtured the refuges. Social and legal changes were occurring before 1914 and they intensified in the period during and immediately following the war. The changes undermined the foundation and necessity for the refuges in the form they had existed for

591 Ibid., 30 November 1899.
more than half a century. The decline in legitimate births and fear of underpopulation eroded some of the stigma attached to illegitimacy. In 1912 the Federal Government introduced a five-pound “Baby Bonus”. Despite the objections of many outspoken critics, the payment was made to all married and single women who gave birth to a live baby. The payment helped single women to independently finance their confinement. More importantly, it extended to them some of the status conferred on married mothers and provided them with some recognition that they were entitled to raise their own child. Further changes occurred in state welfare legislation through the Child Welfare Acts of 1923 and 1929 that made long-term financial support available for single women with children.  

The refuges did not close in response to social or legislative changes as there was still a need to support unmarried mothers and other penitent women. However, the sisters gradually changed the focus of their work to respond to changing needs. The Sisters of the Good Samaritan began employing laundry workers around the time of World War II to allow the young women to expand their education and social activities. They later offered short-term accommodation to boys and girls in crisis and ran educational and recreational day programs for youth in the community at the Tempe property. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Abbotsford have sold much of their property to Monash and Latrobe Universities. The original buildings still remain and there is an archive and a nursing home for retired sisters and former penitents on the original site. The Daughters of

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Charity took over the work of the refuge in Adelaide in the 1960s, allowing the Josephites to concentrate on education. Much of the original Fullarton property has been sold but a residential centre for single mothers staffed by lay professionals still operates on the property. 594 The Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Tasmania gradually replaced their work with penitent women with services for people with intellectual disabilities. The sisters donated their property to the Church and the buildings now house the Archbishop of Tasmania and an archival collection. The laundry of the Magdalen Home in Western Australia served as a day workshop for people with intellectual disabilities until 1984. In 1985 the premises were converted into a Catholic education centre. 595 The Sisters of Mercy maintained the commercial steam laundry in Wooloowin, Queensland, but also replaced the penitent women with people with intellectual disabilities. They retain the property and it operates as the Mercy Centre, which houses their archives and serves as an administrative centre.

The nature and amount of work undertaken by the sisters working in the refuges was not compatible with detailed record keeping and any topic without detailed records presents a problem for the historian. The support of the Catholic papers and clergy means that an abundance of information exists on the general histories of the refuges. These records provide rich detail on the aims and philosophies of the reformers and the operation of the refuges. The amount and value of these prescriptive sources is such that

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594 Southern Cross, 10 August 1962, p. 4.
595 John O’Brien, pp. 50-53. The details on the recent histories of the refuges in Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania were told to me by the sisters during my research trips.
selecting material for inclusion was as difficult as dealing with the absence of descriptive sources. Ultimately, the limitations of the sources offer only a partial explanation for why the important questions about life for the women in the refuges and after their time in the refuges remain unanswered. The most interesting questions involve value judgments and emotions that will always be open to interpretation. The study of the Australian Catholic refuges would benefit from engagement with these questions in any form but I stand by my decision not to consider the question of whether life for the penitent women improved or deteriorated by living in the refuges. Such a stand is regrettable but proper in the context of the available evidence.
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