

FaithAustralia **local books on faith and theology**

MacGinley, M.R. *Ancient Tradition - New World: Dominican Sisters in Eastern Australia 1867-1958*. Strathfield: St Pauls 2009. 318 pages with Index, Bibliography and photos. ISBN 9781921472299.

This book in turn informs, delights and raises admiration in the reader. In part it is the author's skill in making what could be fairly pedestrian fare come alive and remain pertinent, while giving well researched broad historical coverage. Yet this simply makes more germane the material itself. After an opening chapter devoted to the Irish background of the sisters, Rosa MacGinley takes us to Maitland as the starting point of the Dominican sisters in Eastern Australia. There are expansions and new foundations, controversies about canonical status and identity, developments in education, and then changes in pre-Vatican II religious life. Anyone from Maitland and the Hunter will be especially interested given the centrality in the story of this founding location.

A range of characters are found coming through the pages: the familiar Julian Tennyson Woods, most notably a range of strong women leaders with vision and courage, and bishops and lay donors aplenty. I found most fascinating the movement into education for the deaf, with the sisters determined to be well prepared and professionally accomplished so as to provide the best possible learning environment for this then neglected group. Theirs was work on an international standard, with the assurance that only the best was appropriate for the disadvantaged. On a second note, the final chapters setting out reforms and reorganization in the communities showed a deep appreciation by the Vatican of the need for reform of religious life a decade or so before the Second Vatican Council. This is in keeping with things Dominican, as the sisters show a good mix of keeping tradition, seeking the highest standards, and adapting and developing in new directions.

The author, writing out of the Golding Center for Research in Women's History, Theology and Spirituality (ACU Brisbane), offers us further evidence of the vitality and initiative that characterized women's contributions to the life of the church.

Gerard Moore

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