

# CAPUCHINS OR JESUITS

by Anthony Cappello

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The details of Italian religious life prior to 1921 in Melbourne are unclear. There were no Italian-born clergy in Melbourne, nor were there any masses specifically for the Italian community, so that their level of attendance at Mass is uncertain for this period.

Some insight into the nature of the religious situation for Italians in Australia may be gained from a report of a two months' visit by Fr Mambrini to the Italian settlement on the Herbert River in Queensland. There he documented the distressing situation concerning religious participation by the Italians.

The problem according to Mambrini revolved around a lack of sympathy between the

Italians and the Anglo-Celtic clergy.<sup>1</sup> Factors such as the dislike of money collections (which did not occur in Italy where goods such as clothing and food were donated instead); contact with Protestantism (largely absent in Italy), and a lack of education, all contributed to building a wall between the parish priest and the Italians. Mambrini's report concluded that, as a remedy, Italian priests of a religious order should be brought out from Italy for their care.<sup>2</sup> This solution was adopted in Melbourne by Archbishop Daniel Mannix, who persuaded the Jesuit order in Italy in 1920 to send out a newly ordained young Neapolitan Jesuit called Vincenzo DeFrancesco to work with the Italian community.



*Fr DeFrancesco celebrates the wedding of Anne Rodriguez to Rosario Lombardo in Melbourne in 1932, shortly before his departure from Australia.*

DeFrancesco arrived in Melbourne on 23 October 1920. He found a community of migrants who spoke little or no English, were not well educated, had no social welfare agency and were very much isolated from the larger community. At first, DeFrancesco's arrival was not well received by Melbourne's Italian community, who were quite resentful that a priest had been sent to remind them of 'those obligations... that they had neglected'.<sup>3</sup> However, despite his early difficulties, the Italian community soon realised that DeFrancesco was an asset.

By 1922 DeFrancesco realised that the task of caring for the Italians was going to be extremely difficult. He estimated that the Italian community numbered approximately three hundred to four hundred families.<sup>4</sup> Not only had he to care for them, he also had parish duties at St Ignatius, Richmond, such as being in charge of Bona Mors, the Apostelship of Prayer society and the altar boys' sodality.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless DeFrancesco was to have a large impact on the Italian community through his pastoral care and his cultural and social programs. His service to the Italian community and his ability to work with consular officials earned him in 1933, together with S. Pellegrini and D. Boffa, the award of Knighthood of the Italian Crown.<sup>6</sup> However, in 1934 DeFrancesco was recalled to Naples to take up the office of Provincial of the Jesuits. At his farewell, organised by Frank Virgona, Archbishop Mannix praised DeFrancesco as one who knew every Italian family in Melbourne.<sup>7</sup>

After four years and numerous requests from Archbishop Daniel Mannix, a forty year old Friulan Jesuit, Ugo Modotti was commissioned to be chaplain of the Italian community in Melbourne. For the previous ten years Modotti had been vice-principal of St Aloysius College in Mangalore, India. It was Cardinal Pacelli, later to become Pope Pius XII, who as Secretary of State asked the Superior General of the Jesuits to appoint a priest for Melbourne.<sup>8</sup> Modotti, it seems, was chosen because of his fluency in English.

To celebrate Modotti's arrival in 1938 a meeting was held at St. Ignatius hall in

Richmond. Amongst the gathering were the Italian consul, Ernesto Arrighi, James H. Scullin MHR, the Bishop of Hiroshima, Japan, Dr Ross and Archbishop Mannix.

## Venice, India, Australia

### Brilliant Jesuit Comes Among Us

Come to Australia to devote his services to his Order and to his fellow-Italians, Rev. Hugh Modotti, S.J., ~~PROV.~~, has been for a number of years in India. His experiences in that great country are of a most interesting kind for Australian readers.

(By "The Advocate's" Special Representative)

From the Advocate, 1st September 1938

With 90% of Italians not attending mass,<sup>9</sup> the first task Modotti undertook was to publish a religious periodical called *L'Angelo della Famiglia*. It was to be a purely religious publication and Modotti stated this in his first editorial.<sup>10</sup> It received the blessing of Archbishop Mannix thus making the periodical part of the Australian National Secretariat of Catholic Action.<sup>11</sup>

In the period prior to Italy's entry into World War II (September 1938 to May 1940), Modotti carried out the wishes of Archbishop Mannix. His work was purely religious. Mannix and Modotti were good friends and it was Mannix who had more influence on Modotti than any other person in Australia. Modotti was artistic and intellectual and his skill was not restricted to the Italian community. He led Ignatian retreats for non-Italian groups, such as the Professional Men's Sodality,<sup>12</sup> and presented lectures on Dante's Divine Comedy with lantern slides which included horrific illustrations of hell from William Blake.<sup>13</sup>

## Opera Religiosa Italiana

### "CASA del SACERDOTE"

ITALIANI D'AUSTRALIA!

#### LEGGETE - MEDITATE - CONTRIBUITE

Questo e' un appello che io vi lancia, o connazionali, ed e' l'appello della fede, e deve penetrarvi nel cuore, a stimolare quei sentimenti religiosi e sacri che furono creditati da voi con la vita.

Noi siamo oggi raccolti nella massa compatta e calda di tutta la comunita' italiana d'Australia, per il raggiungimento di uno scopo che e' necessario alla nostra vita di cristiani, e che e' importante per la conservazione spirituale di questa nostra Colonia lontana.

Early in 1940, Modotti proposed a plan called 'Opera Religiosa Italiana'.<sup>14</sup> The plan was to have several Jesuit priests imported from Italy to work in a house for the welfare of the Italian Catholic immigrants in Melbourne.<sup>15</sup> A committee, comprising some well-known Italians, including B. A. Santamaria, G. Santamaria, G. Vaccari, S. DeMarco and Dr G. Santoro, was formed to oversee the plan.

On 18 May 1940, the plan was discussed at a meeting at St. George's Hall in Carlton. Gualtiero Vaccari at this meeting assured those making donations that if Fr Modotti was unsuccessful in purchasing a house or even in finding priests, then funds over £1 would be refunded.<sup>16</sup> After the first night a total of £550 was collected with outstanding contributions by G. Vaccari, S. DeMarco, G. Santamaria and F. Virgona who donated £100 pounds each.<sup>17</sup>

Late in 1944 the plan was revived with the purchase of 182 Power Street, Hawthorn. The plan was to be carried out by Fr

Modotti under the direct influence of Archbishop Mannix. Mannix and Modotti's plan had only one obstacle, namely the Apostolic Delegate, John Panico who was later appointed Cardinal.

According to B.A. Santamaria, Panico's 'real objective [in Australia] was to end the influence of Mannix and his closest associates'.<sup>18</sup> Arthur Calwell, Minister for Immigration during 1943 to 1946, recalls that Panico and Mannix 'harboured a long-standing animosity towards each other'.<sup>19</sup> This led to Panico's role in ensuring that Norman Gilroy, Archbishop of Sydney, who was far younger and less experienced, be made Cardinal rather than Mannix. Calwell in fact issued a press statement on the 24 of December 1945, arguing that the honour should have gone to the Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr. Mannix. Calwell also stated that the appointment was due to 'a representative [Panico] whose limited ability and equally limited knowledge of Australia...



*La 'Casa del Sacerdote' at 182 Power Street, Hawthorn.*

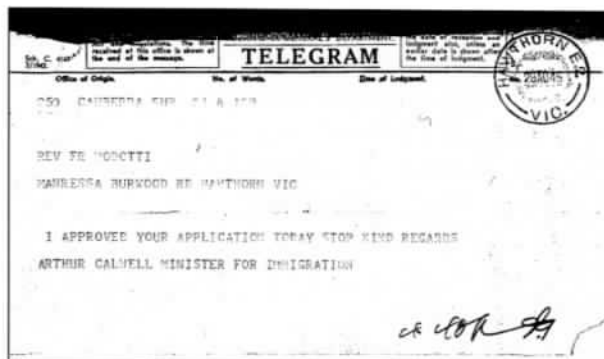
has ill-fitted him to influence the destinies of the Australian church<sup>20</sup> and that Panico would be best sent home. The church authorities in Rome believed that this statement was inspired by Modotti and in 1946 Pope Pius XII sought an explanation from Modotti.<sup>21</sup>

It is interesting to note that this Roman policy of decentralisation dates back to the early 19th Century. The first Australian Catholic prelate, Bede Polding, who was himself an Englishman, wrote to Rome saying that 'to bring out all Irish Bishops would insult the Australian Church... for the good of religion and the unity of all peoples it would be an advantage if some bishops were of different origins'.<sup>22</sup> On this occasion, Rome intervened by appointing Italian prelates to Australia: Bishop Cani in 1875 and Bishop Torreggiani in 1879.

Prior to Calwell's statement, Panico had attended a bishops' meeting in Adelaide on 29 September 1944, where Modotti, a close ally of Mannix, proposed the idea of an Italian house of priests. Modotti had been in Adelaide for the previous four weeks working closely with the Archbishop of Adelaide, Mons. Beovich, on an Italian mission. All the bishops agreed except for Panico, who argued that it 'encroached on his jurisdiction and reflected on his efficiency'.<sup>23</sup>

The real reason for his objection was the mere fact that the idea was proposed by Mannix and Modotti. His refusal coincided chronologically with another significant circumstance: the Capuchins were invited to start work amongst the Italians, thanks to the 'enthusiasm and encouragement of His Excellency John Panico'.<sup>24</sup> In 1944 'he [Panico] had approached the Archbishop of Brisbane, Sir James Duhig, and had suggested to him to ask the Capuchins to send some Italian priests'.<sup>25</sup> Instead of having Mannix and Modotti running Jesuits, Panico made alternative arrangements by inviting the Capuchins.

Meanwhile, in Melbourne, the Jesuits were trying to get Modotti organised and plans were made to send him overseas for the sole purpose of fetching Italian priests. On 16 October, 1944, Mannix called in Fr



*Fr Modotti was granted Australian citizenship a few months before his departure from Australia.*

Meagher, Provincial of the Jesuits in Australia, and informed him that the time had come to find three or four Jesuit fathers from Italy needed to work with Modotti and the Italian community.<sup>26</sup> Mannix also wrote to Dr Evatt, Attorney General, asking permission for Modotti to travel to Rome for this purpose of finding priests.<sup>27</sup>

Fr Meagher, however, began to find some opposition in the Apostolic Delegate, who according to Meagher, 'completely misunderstands Modotti',<sup>28</sup> and who would actually have been 'pleased'<sup>29</sup> if the plan failed to find priests. With Panico demonstrating animosity towards Mannix, and with J.C.



*Fr Ugo Modotti at the Camaldoli Monastery in 1953.*



The cell at the 'Eremo' of Camaldoli in Italy where Fr Modotti spent many months in total isolation.

McFarlane, Deputy Director of Security, Victoria, highly suspicious of Modotti, it was conceivable the two would unite to stop Modotti becoming settled in Australia.

Late in 1944, McFarlane informed W.B. Simpson, Director General of Security, that Panico was 'critical of Fr Modotti's activities and would assuredly veto Modotti's impending departure'.<sup>30</sup> When the authorities learned of Modotti's desire to be naturalised, McFarlane once again intervened, arguing that 'he [Modotti] is not loyal to the British Empire, nor is he, in my judgement a fit person to receive the benefits and privileges of British citizenship'.<sup>31</sup> McFarlane's problem was Fr Tim McCarthy, Chaplain General, who according to McFarlane would 'uphold Fr Modotti and would get him out of trouble'.<sup>32</sup>

Panico did eventually meet W.B. Simpson in December 1945. It is not sure what was discussed at the meeting, only that Modotti was the subject.<sup>33</sup> One can only guess that this discussion concerned a veto on Modotti's departure. Panico could also have

informed Simpson on Modotti's position within the Vatican. Before Modotti left Australia, he cleverly placed the house, 182 Power St Hawthorn, in the hands of Giuseppe Romanin, and his family. The Romanins like Modotti were Friuliani and Modotti trusted them. The house was blessed and named 'Villa Gonzaga', only to be changed by the Capuchins in 1949 to 'Riva Torto'.

Modotti, on the other hand, never returned to Australia and ended working on Vatican Radio before joining a contemplative order in Rome. He died in 1971 in California.

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Mambrini, Fr 'Report of a Two Months visit to the Italian settlement on the Herbert River'. *Migrants or Mates*, ed. Cresciani, G. Sydney, 1988, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Santamaria, B.A., *Against the Tide*, Melbourne, 1981 p 93 DeFrancesco, V. to R.P. Provincial, 2nd July 1923

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p 94

<sup>5</sup> Profile of Fr Vincenzo DeFrancesco. Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne. The Bona Mors society was a devotional group that met and prayed for a good death.

<sup>6</sup> *Advocate*, 29 March 1928, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> *Advocate*, June 21st 1934, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Modotti, Ugo, Statement, 15 April 1943, Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne

<sup>9</sup> Modotti, Ugo, to Provincial, 31 December 1945. Jesuit Provincial Archives, Melbourne

<sup>10</sup> *L'Angelo della Famiglia*, January 1939, p. 1

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 2

<sup>12</sup> *Advocate*, 6 April 1939, p. 25

<sup>13</sup> Gobbo, James, Italians in Victoria and the Second World War: An Address given on behalf of the Italian Historical Society, COASIT Melbourne, 19 May, 1988

<sup>14</sup> Modotti U., *Church Flyer, St. Ignatius, Richmond*, May 1940, Jesuit Archives, Melbourne

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Italo-Australian, 25 May 1940

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Santamaria, B.A., *Daniel Mannix: A Biography*, Melbourne 1984, p. 182

<sup>19</sup> Calwell A.A., *Be Just and Fear Not*, Hawthorn, 1973, p. 131

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. pp 128-129

<sup>22</sup> de Boynes Fr. R.P.N. (Superior General of the Jesuits, worldwide) to Calwell A.A. 22 October 1946, Calwell papers, ACT, copy provided to the author by M.E. Calwell.

<sup>23</sup> O'Farrell, P., *The Catholic Church and Community: An Australian History*, Sydney 1985, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Boland T.P., James Duhig, St Lucia, 1985, pp. 305-306.

<sup>25</sup> 'Celebrating 50 Years of Capuchin Presence in Australia: 1945-1995', Sandal Prints (September 1995), p.1.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Meagher, SJ, to R. P N. de Boynes, 27 October 1944, Australian Archives, ACT, Series A367/1, Item C62490.

<sup>28</sup> Meagher, SJ, to Rev. Dugre, SJ, 22 January 1945, A.A. ACT, Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> J.C. McFarlane, Deputy Director of Security, Vic., to WB Simpson, Director General of Security, 11 December 1945, A.A. ACT, Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> J.C., McFarlane to W.B. Simpson, 11 August 1945, A.A. ACT., Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> J.C., McFarlane to WB Simpson, 11 December 1944, A.A. ACT, Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> W.B., Simpson to Apostolic Delegate, Dr Giovanni Panico, 11 April, 1945. A.A. ACT, Ibid.

*Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam*

UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE  
**ARCHBISHOP'S ITALIAN COMMITTEE**  
in the presence of  
His Grace the Archbishop  
Most Reverend D. MANNIX, D.D., LL.D.  
and  
The Hon. A. A. CALWELL, M.H.R.  
MINISTER FOR INFORMATION AND IMMIGRATION

. . .

**MUSICAL  
ENTERTAINMENT  
AND  
PRESENTATION**

*A Tribute  
from the Italian Community to  
Rev. H. MODOTTI, S.J.  
in Recognition of His Magnificent Work*

. . .

**Cathedral Hall**  
Brunswick Street, Fitzroy

**Sunday, 9th December, 1945**  
at 7.45 p.m.

*The Society holds copies of Fr DeFrancesco's published letters relating to his pastoral work in Australia from 1921 to 1930. The Society also holds a comprehensive collection of photos, documents and ephemera relating to Fr Modotti's activities in Victoria, together with his original sketchbook.*

# TO HONOUR A NOTED BOTANIST

by Ruth Dwyer

*Ruth Dwyer is a free-lance researcher. She has contributed to a number of publications, notably A History of Hawthorn, the suburb in which she lives. The areas of research generally undertaken include work on the non-British in nineteenth century Victoria, and the documentation of silver, jewellery, furniture and dwellings of that period. She is at present contributing to a number of publications including the 'von Mueller Project'. She also has a particular interest in agricultural and viticultural research using early Victorian records, including material pertaining to the various sections of the Land Acts of the 1860s.*

Paolo Dattari was one of the original members of The Field Naturalists Club of Victoria, formed in June 1880, the objective being to collect, document and name the flora and fauna of Australia. Many members undertook field trips collecting specimens. Over the months Dattari exhibited a number of specimens, including the King Stag Beetle, at the meetings which followed the establishment of the club. Another member of the Field Naturalists' Club was the august Baron Ferdinand von Mueller, at that time the Government Botanist of Victoria. Between 1857 and 1873 the German-born von Mueller was also the Director of Melbourne's magnificent Royal Botanic Garden in South Yarra. On 10 October 1896, Baron von Mueller departed this earth. The centenary of his passing has been celebrated by many events held in Melbourne, and elsewhere in the world during the past year, 1996. The following article celebrates the relationship which developed between Dattari and von Mueller. It has been reprinted, with kind permission, from the special commemorative issue of *The Victorian Naturalist*, Volume 113(4) August 1996.

Baron Ferdinand von Mueller was honoured in many ways, with noble titles, decorations and through certain living species being named after him. Most of these were botanical, but there were also fossils and insects. One of the more spectacular is the King Stag Beetle, *Phalacrognathus muelleri*. On 14 June 1886, The Field Naturalists Club of Victoria held their monthly meetings, as usual, at the Royal Society's hall. A paper was read by Mr Paolo Dattari titled

'Notes on the new Australian beetle' which outlined the history of 'this splendid insect'.<sup>1</sup> In distributing the paper, illustrated with enlarged coloured drawings, Dattari expressed an opinion that the specimens exhibited would probably be found to be more than one species. Lithographic plates of the beetle were also distributed. It was found to be a new genus, and was named *Phalacrognathus muelleri* in honour of his friend and mentor, the Government Botanist, Baron Sir Ferdinand Jakob Heinrich von Mueller. A copy of the paper, with coloured plate, was presented to the library of The Field Naturalists Club.<sup>2</sup> It cannot now be found. However another copy is held by the Museum of Victoria.

Paolo Dattari, a cultured Italian gentleman, had emigrated from London in 1877 as an unassisted passenger aboard the *Somersetshire*.<sup>3</sup> Dattari, born c1850 in Leghorn near Florence, the son of Luigi Dattari, gentleman, and Enrichetta, formerly Maneschit, was an architect by profession.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately no buildings in Victoria can be attributed to him, but there is evidence of his involvement in associated disciplines. He contributed two pen-and-ink drawings to the Adelaide Exhibition of 1881, one being an allegory for *Punch*, the other a frontispiece for a scientific publication. Both were well designed and delicately executed.<sup>5</sup> The handsome and costly gold and silver presentation casket of 1880 for Captain Standish, Chief Commissioner of Police in Victoria, was one of Dattari's manufacture<sup>6</sup> and showed a distinct Italianate influence. Dattari also applied for the registration of at least two patents in Victoria,