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## **Father Ciril Božič's role in the Slovene religious centre in Australia for the preservation of Slovene emigrants' citizenship in a changing world**

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### **Abstract**

*Intense emigration of Slovenes to Australia, especially Victoria State, started after WWII and reached a climax in the 1970s. Despite the fact that Slovenians in Australia are the fourth largest non-European Slovene emigrant community they needed to be organized in cultural and social life in a particular way. The article discusses one of the major and first organizations concerned with Slovene emigration -The religious centre of the Holy Brothers Cyril and Method in Kew, Melbourne - which was (and still is) a shelter for many of the emigrants. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of the Franciscan priest Ciril Božič, and aims relating to social and educational roles in the preservation of the Slovene Heritage and integration into Australian everyday life. Based on several historical, sociological and political views, the paper shows the institution of Slovene Religious Centre as well as the development and importance of the Father's role. The paper is also informed by quantitative data based on 225 survey questionnaires, and qualitative data from 70 global interviews.*

**Key words:** *identity management, emigration, Slovene emigrant community, Franciscan priest*

### **Introduction**

Social mobility of the Slovenian population, a phenomenon which was intensively present during the booming 20th century, became a fixture of the Slovenian nation especially after the WW II. As such, migration is understood as a specific social and economic process and a category which, for specific processes, forms and functions are separated from the processes of colonization. Talking about migration of Slovenians in Australia, based on empirical data obtained directly from the field, we note that in the history of Slovenian migration processes of Slovenians in Australia took place due to different causes:

- political (as renegades, dissidents, asylum seekers, disagreeing with the political, ideological and cultural and economic conditions and / or amendments, asylum seekers and others.), which were the most common;
- economic (as job search, new sources of income, career paths, etc..)
- philosophical (membership of a particular religion, political party or movement, search for "peace", etc..), and
- personal ( marriage), et al.

The first significant wave of Slovenian migrants arrived in Australia during the period 1946 to 1951. Many refer to this wave of migrants as immigrants due to the reason for their political displacement after World War II. Some were in conflict with the new political regime, many were, on ideological grounds, "Persons displaced." The second, and by far the greatest wave of migrants from Slovenia, arrived between the years 1951-1960. This migration was predominantly economically motivated due to the economic reality of poor post-war Slovenia within the Yugoslavian federal state. Nevertheless, there were still a significant number of migrants in this period who were motivated by their opposition to the existing socialist regime. And the 1960's a strong wave of immigration was falling rather sharply, with very few Slovenian migrants registering after 1975 (Fr. Valerijan Jenko, 12.3.2010.).

Many times the decision of the individual and/or social groups to emigrate to Australia helped generate more and different social factors. And, although modern migration of Slovenes to Australia or its federal states usually referred to as temporary, but that does not also mean that the Slovenian migrants do not become permanent migrants, too. Slovenian temporary migrants in Australia of course differ from permanent. While living in Australian society, where they took part in several complex processes of social interaction, in for them new social and cultural environment, while they still maintain contact with their social environment or indigenous society, to which they were planning to return. Also the modern information technology allow to them more than their predecessors. Temporary migrants in the Australian immigrant society are involving in the processes of accommodation, the initial stage of adaptation, and acculturation; depending on the intended period of staying and (especially) the cause of the arrival in Australian society. However, we note that working processes are highly associated with problems of adaptation, and (often) with inadequate organization (Alfred Brežnik, Honorary Consul of the Republic of Slovenia, Sydney, March 17<sup>th</sup> 2010.).

In general, the processes (of different) migration to the precarious situation in the labour market in the indigenous Slovenian society, realized the mass participation of the workforce, looking for new sources of income and professional career, but also a sense of security and freedom.

Sociological and historical researches (Birsa, 1994; Čebulj Sajko, 2001; Koderman, 2007, etc..) dealing with migration issues of Slovenian life and the life and work of people in the (global) Australian society, have dealt with issues of historical and sociological causes for departure from the Slovenian society and were focused on economic problems of the Slovenian migrants in the new, immigrant (Australian) society. Insufficient attention was paid to the problem of adaptation to new environments, (not) voluntary adoption of new, often enforced cultural, moral and other values and problems that were experienced by migrant populations. Either because of changes in the value system and with problems in accustoming into a new social environment, either because of aggressive assimilation processes upon parents and their offspring, and obstacles in their wanting to maintain their indigenous and national identity.

### **Some characteristics of Slovenian permanent emigrants in Australia**

Permanent emigrants from Slovenia are established in Australia (almost) all its states. Most of them live in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, but also found in other states (Tasmania, South Australia, and Western Australia). Intensive economic migration processes pulled them from the underdeveloped domestic agrarian areas in the Australian environment, to industrial and urbanized centres as well as to other less developed rural areas.

They, and generations of their offspring born abroad, are considered as the most permanent emigrants: where Slovenians live in tight communities they try to maintain their native culture, to resist the (unnecessary) assimilation, and to maintain ties with their homeland and are permanently seeking connections with the immigrant Australian society. Whereas, the Australian community has sought permanent emigrant accommodation and to facilitate the processes of adaptation. Although it is true that they pay attention to their (mostly economic) emigrants in providing them with the associated rights, assisting them in their cultural and recreational activities, enabling the organization of supplementary education, providing them information for quickly and efficiently as possible socialization into new society; it is also true, that with the heightened legal standards for permanent residence, including the right to citizenship, they are seeking to optimize their integration into the global Australian society. However, it is not possible to ignore many conflicts and problems of discrimination and segregation phenomena, which are accompanied by permanent migrants, because of their minority status, resulting from the phenomena of ethnic stratification in Australian (global) society.

#### **The role of Religious Slovenian Centre of St. Brothers Cyril and method in Qew, Melbourne**

Therefore it is first generation of Slovenian immigrants who arrived in Australia immediately after World War II, have been accommodated in prepared collection centres (e.g. Bonegillia, heated at Maitland, Hostels in Sydney, Bunnerong, Cabra etc.), where they stayed in barracks that were poorly equipped, because "... circumstances in the camps were severe: the rooms, there were no tables, no chairs, a space barely enough to place one large and one smaller bed .... Accommodations were intolerable; especially the metal shacks were without ceiling insulation. They were extremely hot during the day and very cold at night (Father Claudius, 07.06.1951). Therefore, the people spent their saved modest money as down payments for the purchase of (mostly old) houses to facilitate the daily problems and to overcome the previous situation of separate families living together. Special government agencies helped them to find jobs and better housing. The migrants had to sign a special two-year contract under which the federal government authorities not only limited the scope of employment (in subtropical climate chopping sugar cane, building roads, in open mining of bauxite, iron ore, the iron, etc.), but also a commitment to obedience with a "Certificate of Registration", issued by the Department of Immigration.

Most Slovenians settled in the state of Victoria, on the long distances, still felt the need to socialize and help each other, on which Slovenian Roman Catholic Church was aware,

and has been actively coped with the problem of Slovenian emigrant population in the early 50<sup>th</sup> of the last century already. Therefore in 1951 Bishop Rožman from USA sent two Slovenian Franciscan Priests to Sydney, NSW, not only to serve the Slovenian Community for religious, but also for social and cultural purposes. Fathers Beno Korbič and Klavdij Okorn began the long tradition of Franciscan service in Australia. When they returned to USA in 1953, Father Rudolf and the diocesan priest Dr. Mikula continued their work. A steady stream of Slovenian Priests continued to come to Australia, be from USA first be from Slovenia. In 1966 the Slovenian Priests were joined by nuns of the Order of the Immaculate Conception, who were very active until 1991. However, the work done by both, priests and the nuns has varied, changing according to the nature of the (local) Slovenian Community and of themselves (Gelt, Ferfolja, 2001).

The Slovenian immigrants were ruled by powerful sense of isolation from its new and foreign environment, an additional obstacle to the gradual assimilation and socialization to the environment was also the lack of knowledge of the English language, which in turn led to even more intensive interconnections between Slovenes (Birska, 1994.139). That is why the arrival of Franciscan priests was of great importance. Not only for the spiritual care, but also because of incentives and assistance in organizing societies and the first newspapers in the Slovenian language: *Thoughts* (monthly from 1952), *Slovenian Chronicle* (1954), *Vestnik* (1955) and others.

Eventually, their economic situation improved. Because of their conscientious and quality work and a modest life in 60's they started selling old houses in the less prestigious areas, and moved into new, either from rural areas to larger urban centres or in more prestigious neighbourhoods. This also gave them the opportunity to associate with their compatriots more often, the exercise of religious and cultural needs and personal gatherings. »Slovenians always liked to get together socially. In their new homeland this was more important than ever, because of difficulties with the new language, customs, culture and many other factors“(Valerijan Jenko, 8.2. 2010.) Father Klavdij Okorn (1912-1979) the Catholic Migration Office approved in 1952 to celebrate the Sunday mass in the Slovenian language in the church St.Carthage (Okorn, 1952.7), then in 1956 following by the arrival of Father Bernard Ambrožič (1892-1973) in Melbourne began regular worship, but it was suspended Father Pivka's disease.

### **Cyril Božič's immanent role in social and religious life of Australian Slovenes in Victoria**

The decisive change in social and confessional life has meant the arrival of Bazilij Valentin (1924-1997) in Padua Hall in Melbourne in September 1956 as the founder of the establishment of Slovenian religious centre, whose global primary goal has always been religious activity, which was extended to the cultural, social and cultural area. With its pastoral, educational, cultural and economic performance, which lasted 41 years, he marked the social and religious life of Australian Slovenes, not only in Victoria but across the fifth continent. But, however, he found an excellent successor in Ciril Božič.

Father Ciril Božič was born on December 5th, 1953 in Stopčiče, Delenjska Region. He was ordained on June 28th 1981. As Franciscan priest on mission for Slovene

immigrants he arrived in Sydney on September 11th 1982, and remained until April 23rd 1992 (Gelt & Ferfolja,2001,238), when he returned to Slovenia. He was on duty in Ljubljana and Brezje, leading the Slovenian place of pilgrimage Helping Mother (Marija pomagaj). From his staying at home he took advantage in educating himself, as he finished MA studies on Theological Faculty, University of Ljubljana. In studying for it he considered not only Australian Slovenes but particularly Fr.Božič came to Sydney to help Fr. Valerijan with his work at St. Rafael's. He immediately occupied himself with Slovenian radio programs and organised a number of art exhibitions all over Australia. His sense for beauty and his appreciation of art have expressed themselves in his articles and studies as well as in everyday connections with Slovenes. Slovenians in Perth and Western Australia were under his regular care, and as he liked to visited Slovenians in the most distant and isolated places, he travelled all over Australia meeting them and conducting mass. He edited Rafael, the quarterly messenger of the Slovenians in Merryland's Church. In 1984 he organised the Holy Year Mission in Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne (Fr.V.Jenko, March 10'th 2010, Sydney).

In September 2001 because of Fr. Ogorevc's leaving for Lemont, he took over the running of the Slovene religious centre of the holy brothers Ciril and Method in Melbourne. He threw himself into discussion with Slovenian immigrants from the outset. He arranged the editorial board of editing "Misli" and set out to organise Baraga House, overseeing its renovation (S.Bogovič, March 19th 2010). As renovating it was no mean feat, it required the work and dedication of all his vital energy. The building, a former correctional home, was with the help of Slovenian immigrants, remodelled in a hostel for the needs of Slovenian immigrants, who are not informed and uninitiated, but not ignorant, of the new society, often due to ignorance of the language and are subject to exploitation of various marginalized groups that bruised them already in the port of Melbourne. A special place for social gatherings and sports activities was created, too and for the purposes of the cultural life of Slovenes the library, and for health and social needs of the Slovenians in welfare and obtaining information and managing the bureaucratic needs the Information Office.

He soon proved himself not only as a most efficient delegator and one who expects complete attention and work enthusiasm, but also, and primary, as educator in preservation of Slovenian heritage among Australian Slovenes (I.Lapuh, March 22th 2010). The plan was also including (in underground) a multi-purpose hall for the gathering of Slovenes. The idea and the plans had been met with much acclaim by Slovenes living over there and who have established a dedicated fund to collect the necessary funds in "Baraga House Memorial Fund" and made most of the works voluntarily. In the home immigrants could rest until they found a suitable employment and an accommodation, where they were residing. With him active presence it became a permanent place for worship in the Slovenian language and for Australian Slovenes meetings. Today the home still fulfils its original mission; the residence also offers a number of Slovenians who visit the fifth continent. Celebrations and ceremonies, including ongoing bilingual, are developed under the (still ongoing) tradition of the Slovenian community, attended by more than 1000 Slovenians and their descendants, who are actively involved in them.

Eventually, the first generation of Slovenian immigrants who have been the leaders in the development of organized social life of the Slovenian community, altered. Their children were initially more, but later becoming less intensively involved in the life of the Slovenian community. Even for jobs, often very distant from the place of residence, but they felt the problem in supplying their weakened, ill and elderly parents. Therefore the initiative of Father Basil, who attended from the Melbourne diocese a nearby building Carnsworth, which previously served as the Presbyterian home for the elderly, was more than welcome. Later on it was renamed in "Slomšek's home".

### **Slovenian sisters of immaculate order in helping Australian Slovenes in Victoria**

The work with the elderly in 1966, when Slomšek's home also acquired a license and registration of the State health department, he attracted for work some Slovenian nuns of, which first arrived on April 4th 1966. The possibility of elderly and often ill to stay in nearly authentic and from native society known value system of the original environment, relieved the generation of relatives and enabled the elderly to round off their lives in strange surrounding peacefully.

The nuns were at work with the elderly in the home, visiting patients in their homes and took over as Slovenian kindergarten "*Slomšek Child Minding Centre*" and the Slovenian school. In accordance with the law, the sisters could care and supply up to eight children, two-and three-years old and in the age group of three to five years, regardless of nationality. They attended hospitality to the needs of the priests, the Hostel residents, and the many guests. They did much in sewing and support of the Slovenian community and sewing costumes for performances, National costumes, Christening clothes and clothes for the Altar, they organized Church Choir, led the folkloric group Rosemary etc. (Gelt, Ferfolja, 2001, 350). The mission of the nuns ended in 1992, partly because of their own personnel problems, partly due to declining interest by Slovenian parents for such activities. Slomšek's home building was returned to the Melbourne diocese.

But the need to work with older people remained, as the migrant population inexorably altered, their descendants have lived in the grip of the daily requirements of Australian post-modern reality. Father Basilij was restless and after long (even legal) complications failed to obtain the consent and authorization to construct the "*Mother Romana Home*", which was dedicated to the application of the presence of local ecclesiastical and civil political authority on June 2nd 1992.

In mid-70s of the 20th century, the religious centre of the Slovenian Society organized the St. Ema's society, first led by the order of The Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate. Their activities included the activities with which they wanted to maintain the Slovenes, members of other ethnic entities, the present values of the indigenous society, characteristics of Slovenian cuisine, Slovenian customs and habits. In particular, members of this League are still preparing snacks for the various events, celebrations, these family dinner (once a month) (Silva Bogovič, 19/03/2010).

They also, always took an active role in functioning in the Slomšek's School, which has recently been established in 1960 with the purpose of teaching the (Slovene) mother

tongue, the transmission of the contents of Slovenian culture and preparation of exhibitions at ethnographic themes, the annual mother's and father's day celebration.

The lessons in Slovene were initially held once a month (after Sunday Mass), from 1961 onwards, twice a month. That the educational school work was on high level and quality was also recognized by the decision of the Ministry of Education, State of Victoria, who in 1976 introduced in secondary schools the opportunity of Slovenian language as a school subject, which could be selected by the prescribed number of students instead of a second foreign language. (Lucija Srnec, 22.3. 2010).

Even Valentin (1976, 245) states that the next school year was already implemented with Slovenian language teaching in secondary schools on Melbourne University Middle School, in Maribyrnong and in Box Hill. The great contentment of students and their parents in the 90s enabled the introduction of the Slovenian language as an optional secondary school course in the country. From the statistics it is clear that this option could only be decided after 10 students per generation. However, it is gratifying that the teaching of mother tongue in Slomšek's school is still ongoing, for all generations. With its educative work in the Slovenian Society of Victoria are satisfied all the active associations, which are supporting its work financially (Peter Mandelj, Chairperson of the Slovenian Welfare & Information Office Inc., June, 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010).

This period was also marked by the culmination of thirty years of effort by Slovenian immigrant community in organizing and carrying out the necessary facilities and related activities in pursuit of educational, cultural, religious and religious centres St. Brothers Cyril and Methodius in Kew, Melbourne, as well as the abundance of community itself. Achievements of the settled goals and efforts are incorporated in the implementation of centre's role as the core of Slovenian population in Victoria, which is the case today.

### **Thoughts are infallible in religious, social, cultural life of Australian Slovenes**

Thoughts (Misli), whose target was the members of "Slovenec", first Slovene organisation in the New South Wels area, first published in Sydney, is religious and cultural publication, written in Slovenian language, first issued on January 25th 1952. It was edited by the Slovenian Franciscan Priests (Bernard Ambrožič in Sydney, Bazilij Valentin, Metod Ogorevc, Ciril Božič, Marija Anžič in Melbourne) as monthly review from its beginnings in 1952 until 1972 in Sydney and forward relocated to Melbourne. The global review's goals were "to help in Australia living Slovenes, to practice empathy in the new living situation, habits and customs of the new country and growing homeland (Čuješ, J., Misli, 1961, April). The review become the "most read material" within the Slovene ethnic community, even the most article's authors had no journalistic qualifications or public experience. As researched the review provides still today the rare attempt collecting the data of residence of the Slovenes, national mobility, Birth, Marriages and other important data of Slovenian Australians across the federal state.

### **Conclusion**

But, however, labour migration into and within Australia slowed down till the beginning of the present century. Different than economic problems of the Slovene State, inflexible unemployment, poverty and raising social inequality turned the situation and the transition from migration ties settlement in the present century.

Although Australian Slovenes, living in Victoria State, rather dispersed. The particular active role in communication between them, acted the "Slovenian religious centre St. Brothers Cyril and Methodius" in Melbourne. The centre undertook the role of net-connector on several social fields of immigration's life. With no doubt, the greatest success was in passing well and not creating more barriers among Slovenes. An important role plays also the worldwide web, through which the Centre informs stakeholders about their activities. In the sometime it is also an important information centre for communication with the global Australian society.

Its roles are definitely over-achieved targets by the Franciscan mission, which was always actively interfered in the life of Slovenian immigrants in Victoria and beyond. Thus, on the cultural and social fields as well as on educative. The results of the centre are visible in the efforts in preserving the identity of the Slovenian immigrant communities in Australian society, which has not always been in favour of maintaining the process, let alone nurture the next generation in the values, traditions and cultural particularities of their emigrant ancestors. Notwithstanding, the global source of religious objectives of the Centre have observed that the "players" of the Centre, some of which stand out, in particular Fathers Basilij Valentin and Ciril Božič, with their staffs far exceeded its mission.

To them all the tender and warmest thanks, not only for their motivational role, but (mostly) for promoting the conservation of Slovenian values, customs and traditions. Their functioning in many areas of Australian Slovene' lives have not allowed the Slovenian community to be drowning in mainstream and global Australian society.

Last, but not least: today, the centre is of a powerful factor in the lives of Australian Slovenes in Victoria and beyond. And, finally, in 1990 it has been also the focus and central initiative and stimulus, together with other Slovene associations in Victoria, in helping and supporting the development of democratic processes and democracy in the homeland Slovenia. By providing regular information to their countrymen, in co-organization with Victoria's Committee, the National Council of Victoria under the Slovenian World Congress, Australian Slovenian Conference, the gathering political support in the process of international recognition, co-organizing peaceful demonstrations in supporting the separation aspirations of Slovenia from Yugoslavia in front of the provincial Parliament in Melbourne, a meeting with Bob Hawke (President of the Australian Government) and others made an invaluable contribution to the Australian government as this as the first non-European country recognized the Republic of Slovenia on January 16'th 1992, as an independent and sovereign state (Valentin, 1991 Valentin, 1992; Klemenčič, 2005Božič, 2010).

Our study, in which we conducted more than 300 individual interviews with Australian Slovenes, in March and April 2010 however, showed that the young generation of descendants born in Australia are becoming increasingly aware of one memory

behaviour and knowledge of the characteristics and peculiarity society from which their ancestors came. To this end, the role of Slovenian religious centre St. Brothers Cyril and Methodius will remain again very topical.

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