

Catholic Seminaries in Australia: 1835-2023

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Part 3: The Vaughan and Moran Seminary Visions

The Vaughan Vision

Well before he closed St Mary's *Lyndhurst* Benedictine seminary in 1877, Archbishop Bede Vaughan OSB (Image: Archbishop Bede Vaughan OSB. Source: National Portrait Gallery) had prepared a plan to form a 'native clergy' at St John's College at the University of Sydney. He had already set up theological schools and conferences at St John's for the on-going training of his priests and in 1876 had written of looking 'hopefully towards a future successful seminary'. But when he sought to have St John's function as a seminary, the University Statutes would not permit it.



In 1878, when the Jesuits arrived in Sydney and began building their new St Ignatius College at Riverview, he arranged for the education of 'some ecclesiastical students' at the school. But nothing eventuated.

Subsequently, Vaughan developed his grand vision for the 'training of Australian ecclesiastics'. It was to be 'one great, central, and influential university for all ecclesiastical students in Australia' led by 'men of mark and character' allowing the Church to 'spring forward with invigorated life'. Vaughan was convinced that isolated diocesan seminaries could not accomplish this vision, and that their best service would be to act as 'feeders' to the central university, like Maynooth in Ireland and Ushaw in England.

'Nothing' he said, 'can take the place of numbers to ensure discipline and create an *esprit de corps*'.

As the foundation for his vision, Vaughan established a comprehensive Australian Catholic education system with a network of Catholic parish primary schools, staffed by religious sisters and brothers, and multiple Catholic secondary colleges to prepare young people for university and his central ecclesiastical university.

Vaughan planned to build his 'great, central ecclesiastical university' on the prime 60-acre site at Manly which Abbot Gregory OSB had obtained in 1859 and which the Deed of Approval specified exclusively for educational purposes.



(Image: Maynooth National Seminary and University, Ireland)

Whether he could have persuaded his fellow bishops to embrace his vision was not to be known, for he died suddenly in England in 1883.

The Moran Vision

Vaughan's successor as Archbishop of Sydney was Patrick Francis Moran, appointed in 1884.



(Image: Cardinal Patrick Francis Moran, Archbishop of Sydney (1884-1911)). He was the Irish-born nephew of Cardinal Paul Cullen, Archbishop of Dublin (1852-1878),

Moran had been educated in Rome, had served as Cullen's secretary, and had witnessed Cullen refashion the Church in Ireland to the Roman mould. Cullen had established the new Tridentine seminary of Holy Cross in Dublin and ruled over it with total control.

Before arriving in Sydney Moran had personal experience with three seminaries: the Irish College in Rome as a student and Vice-Rector; Holy Cross in Dublin, as a professor; and St Kieran's in Kilkenny, as bishop of the diocese. Like Cullen, Moran believed that to achieve ecclesial goals a bishop must have full control over every aspect of Catholic life in his diocese and over all its members – priests, religious and laity. In Sydney, he intended to do that and more.

In the United States, the three Baltimore Plenary Councils had made key decisions on seminaries: the 1852 Council called for a major seminary in every province; the 1866 Council called for preparatory and 'greater' (major) seminaries in dioceses; and the 1884 Council called for a 'principal' seminary or university under the management of the episcopate. As the Roman authorities, particularly the Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide ('Propaganda'), saw the Australian and US Missions as similar, the decisions of the Baltimore Councils would almost certainly have been encouraged for Australia.

Before arriving at Sydney, Moran had made two key decisions: to convene a plenary council for Australasia, and to establish a Sydney diocesan seminary with a national reach. He

consulted none of his Episcopal colleagues on his seminary decision but intended to use the plenary council to obtain their endorsement. Like Vaughan, he planned to build his seminary at Manly, intending it to be 'the finest Institution in the Australias [sic]'.

First Australasian Plenary Council, Sydney, 1885

When Moran convened the First Australasian Plenary Council in Sydney in 1885, the Catholic Church in Australia had 2 ecclesiastical provinces - Sydney and Melbourne - with 14 dioceses (3 new dioceses had been erected since 1869: Ballarat and Sandhurst in 1874 and Rockhampton in 1882), 1 vicariate apostolic (VA of Queensland erected in 1877), and the *Abbay Nullius* of New Norcia. As the Church in New Zealand had no established hierarchy, Propaganda instructed Moran, as Metropolitan Bishop, to call all the NZ bishops to attend the Council.

Under Moran's influence, the 18 Australian and NZ bishops in attendance agreed that while it was 'highly desirable that each diocese have its own Major Seminary, given that the state of the Provinces and Dioceses did not permit this as yet [and] the Metropolitan [Archbishop] of Sydney has proposed to erect a Major Seminary worthy of the Australian Church and in keeping with the demands of Propaganda, every effort should be made to ensure this seminary flourishes, [and] all bishops [including those in New Zealand] who do not have their own seminaries are most urgently exhorted to send their ecclesiastical students to this new seminary' (Decree 64).

The Council also legislated that it be a Tridentine seminary operating according to the rules set down by Propaganda, with a 2-year philosophy and a 4-year theology course including scripture, canon law and church history. It was to have the best professors, sound textbooks, and lectures in Latin.

In 1859, in response to the invitation of Pope Pius IX, the US bishops had established the North American College (seminary) in Rome. At the 1885 Council many of the Irish bishops wanted some of their seminarians to receive a Roman education, so the Council expressed a desire for an Australian National College (seminary) in Rome where select students could be sent to study. They assured Pope Leo XIII and Propaganda that the Manly seminary would not interfere with this proposal, but simply act as a 'feeder'. However, the Council did not take a vote to proceed.

Moran's vision for the Australian priesthood was candidates who were born in Australia of preferably Irish parentage, largely Australian trained, but with a Roman gloss.

However, until the Manly seminary opened, the Catholic Church in Australia had only one diocesan major seminary in operation – the Tridentine St Charles Borromeo Seminary in Bathurst, which had been forming candidates for the priesthood since 1875.

The Tridentine seminary

When the Council of Trent opened in 1545 a critical problem it had to confront was the appalling state of the secular clergy ministering in parishes. Their intellectual, pastoral, and

spiritual formation was haphazard and minimal, most were secretly married or living with concubines, and the vast majority were ignorant and infected with heresy.

To remedy this scandal, Trent legislated the establishment of training schools or 'seminaries' in every diocese (Canon 18) and placed full responsibility on the diocesan bishop to establish them. These seminaries, based on a model pioneered in England in 1555, were to prepare young boys, especially poor boys, for the secular priesthood. To some extent they were an update of the medieval cathedral school which initiated students into the practical operations of church life and provided moral protection.

Trent did not specify any length of training or level of proficiency, nor insist that every candidate attend the seminary. But boys admitted to the seminary had to be at least 11-12 years old, able to read and write, and be of good character. Trent wanted the seminaries to prepare very young male virginal candidates for a celibate clerical life with the highest standards of moral and ecclesiastical discipline.

Though primarily for poor boys, others were not to be excluded, provided they paid their own expenses. The academic program was to include grammar, singing, church accounting, scripture, church documents, homilies, liturgy, and administration of the sacraments, particularly confession. Trent wanted not only an educated clergy, but an upright and moral one. Though Trent had set a low academic bar, bishops could set their own standards which rose gradually, not due exclusively to the seminaries, but to the general improvement of schooling across Europe.

Archbishop Charles Borromeo (Image: Cardinal Charles Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan (1564-1584). Canonised in 1610. Source: Portrait by Giovanni Ambrogio Figino) established the first Tridentine seminary in Milan in 1564 and instigated rules called *Institutiones ad universum Seminarium regimen pertinentes*, which became the prototype for the Tridentine model in Italy, Europe, and the mission territories.



In 1565 Pope Pius IV founded the Tridentine Roman Seminary and in 1588 Pope Sixtus V placed all diocesan seminaries under the jurisdiction of the Sacred Congregation for Roman Universities and Pope Clement VII did the same for religious seminaries in 1603. Both popes wanted closer conformity to the Tridentine model under strict control of the Holy See.

In France, where the bishops had meagre success with establishing diocesan seminaries between 1625 and 1670, three secular priests - Vincent de Paul, John Eudes, and Jean-Jacques Olier - had founded religious congregations - Vincentians, Eudists, Sulpicians - with Tridentine seminaries which separated 'major' seminarians (studying philosophy and theology) from 'minor' seminarians (studying the classics) and permitted the seminarians to study at universities located nearby. All their religious, moral, and spiritual formation, however, had to take place in the seminary. Before the close of the 17th century multiple Tridentine seminaries staffed by these new congregations had opened across France.

In Ireland, following the Council of Trent (1545-1563), Catholic bishops could not establish Tridentine seminaries due to the Penal Laws. For over 200 years Irish men wanting to become priests had to study at Irish seminaries located in Rome, Spain, the Spanish Netherlands, Portugal, Hungary, and France. These produced hundreds of well-educated secular and religious priests who returned to Ireland to maintain the Catholic tradition. However, with the suppression of the Jesuits in 1773 – who staffed most of the continental seminaries – and the French Revolution in 1789, almost all the Irish seminaries in Europe were closed.

At around the same time the Penal Laws in Ireland were lifted, and three Tridentine seminaries – St Kieran's, Kilkenny, St Patrick's, Carlow, and St Patrick's National Seminary in Maynooth - were established in 1782, 1793 and 1795, allowing the Catholic Church in Ireland to once again form its own clergy at home.

More seminaries followed: St John's, Waterford (1807), St Peter's, Wexford (1811), All Hallows, Dublin (1842), St Patrick's, Thurles (1842, and Holy Cross, Dublin (1861). But All Hallows was different. It prepared priests specifically to serve the Irish diaspora in English-speaking countries outside Ireland, and by 1882 some 250 of its ordinands were ministering in Australia and New Zealand. The various Irish seminaries produced the bulk of the priests who volunteered to minister in the Australian Mission in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and by 1900 All Hallows had supplied 574 priests to the Australian Mission and St Patrick's Carlow over 300 priests.