

Catholic Seminaries in Australia: 1835-2023

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Part 4: St Patrick's College Manly and Growth Period

St Patrick's College, Manly

On 19 November 1885, Day 6 of the First Australasian Plenary Council, Archbishop Patrick Moran laid the foundation stone for his new Sydney archdiocesan seminary, St Patrick's College, at Manly. It was to serve 'exclusively for the Education of Aspirants to the ecclesiastical State' and 'in after years as a centre for higher Philosophical and Theological studies for all the dioceses of Australia'.



Image: St Patrick's College, Manly. Foundation Stone laid 19 November 1885. Opened January 1889.

In the first intake in January 1889, there were insufficient 'major' seminarians for the 80 places available, so applicants as young as 13 years were admitted for preparatory classes. The staff consisted of 8 priests, some with considerable teaching experience in Ireland and Rome, and 2 lay teachers.

The curriculum was based on Scholastic philosophy and theology and the 'more wholesome doctrine as contained in the works of Thomas Aquinas' which Pope Leo XIII had restored in 1879.

Initially, the screening of applicants was lax, resulting in a high dropout rate. Of the first group of 76 seminarians, almost all were from middle-class Catholic families and had attended Catholic schools. Many were of Irish descent whose parents were 'respectable', 'pious', 'decent' or 'good' practical Catholics. Though no bishop recruited seminarians from Ireland for Manly, some Irish students made their own way.

Money, especially the lack of it, was a major consideration in the recruitment and formation of Australian priests. Many bishops, even the generous ones, took a hard-nosed approach,

and Manly was not open to poor Catholics unless a non-family friend assisted. Moran's policy was that 'no student in arrears is to be advanced to Orders' and some students were forced to leave because of their parents' financial difficulties. If there was a serious barrier to vocations before 1906 it was the failure of the bishops to make special provision for the education expenses of seminarians, especially those who were financially disadvantaged. It was an overly cautious and conservative approach.

The Manly formation program lasted 6-10 years, with the main emphasis on daily religious and devotional life. The bishops wanted the seminary staff to produce priests who were pious, docile ('obedient') and ecclesiastically minded.

The regime was strict and ordered. The daily timetable accounted for every minute of the waking day and silence was to be strictly observed at the prescribed times, especially during the 'great silence' from night prayers until after breakfast. The only breaks from the routine of study and silence were on major feast days and Thursdays when there were no classes and students were permitted to go on walks outside the seminary precincts. However, when outside, students were forbidden to talk to 'externs', stray from the group, buy anything, or receive anything from externs. They were also forbidden to speak to seminary employees, male or female, although it was many years before females were employed by the college. The only visitors permitted were 'immediate relatives' at the appointed times and in the public reception rooms.

The seminary year was divided into two semesters, with a week's holiday in mid-winter and a two-month summer break when students could return home. On holidays they were expected to maintain their normal practice of prayer and spiritual exercises.

The seminary professors were all well-educated Irish and Australian-born priests. Occasional lay teachers were the exception. Spiritual directors were usually chosen for their piety and holiness. Staff and students did not fraternize but maintained a mutual respect.

The curriculum closely resembled that of the Propaganda Urban University in Rome, though initially Manly did not confer degrees. The teaching method was scholastic, and the humanities courses included Latin, Greek, French, Italian, English Composition, Grammar, Elocution, Geography, English and Roman History, Algebra and Geometry. Dogmatic Theology was based on the *Summa Theologica* of St Thomas Aquinas, and Moral Theology covered 'human acts', conscience, law, sins, the virtues, the Decalogue, contracts, the obligation of vocation (especially marriage), the sacraments, and ecclesiastical censures. Most of the moral teaching was focused on questions affecting individuals, rather than issues affecting society.

Source of seminarians

The Manly seminary had an instant appeal to the Australian and New Zealand bishops who wanted a quality priestly formation for their local-born candidates. Soon, seminarians were arriving from the dioceses of Auckland, Dunedin, Christchurch, Melbourne, Adelaide, Port Augusta, Brisbane, Ballarat, Geraldton, New Norcia, Sandhurst, and Wilcannia-Forbes, as well as Sydney.

In the period 1889-1895 a quarter of all the students were under 16 years of age on entering, and half aged 16-19 years. The ordination rates for these two groups were 65 per cent and 71 per cent respectively. For students aged 20 years and over on entering, the ordination rate was 40 per cent.

Within three years, St Charles Seminary in Bathurst was unable to compete with Manly and closed permanently in 1891.

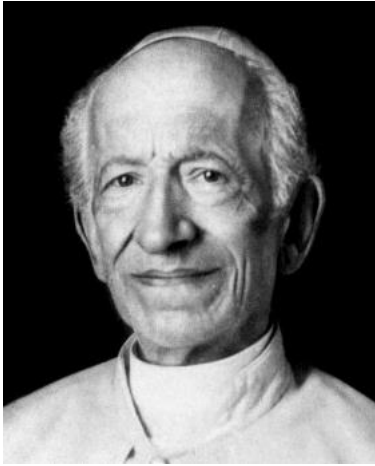
Though many of the dioceses were desperate for priests, some Irish bishops still preferred Irish to Australian priests and actively recruited in Ireland. For a time, Moran himself continued to send some of his students to Propaganda College and the Irish College in Rome and to source Irish priests from All Hallows. However, he eventually decided that Manly should take precedence and that priests from Ireland be selected exclusively on their academic qualifications. Around this time there was growing dissatisfaction with the quality of some priests formed at All Hallows and other Irish seminaries.

Moran insisted on absolute control over all staff appointments, did not consult or seek professors from his fellow bishops, and maintained total authority over every aspect of the formation program. He refused to provide other bishops with students at the seminary with any detailed reports on their academic or general performance, leaving them ignorant of their progress. Some complained, but to no avail. Moran's attitude was that Manly was his 'diocesan' seminary, as president he was not accountable to any other bishop, and they would have to defer to him. He never welcomed any collaboration from his fellow bishops on seminary matters and flatly rejected joint Episcopal governance of Manly when suggestions were made. Moreover, he reserved to himself alone the right to ordain all Manly candidates to the priesthood, irrespective of which diocese they belonged to. If a bishop wanted to ordain his own seminarian, or ordain him early, he would have to approach Moran as president. Less than a quarter of the students were ordained by their own bishop, just another way that Moran dominated his Episcopal colleagues. When, at the end of the century, several bishops with seminarians at Manly became unhappy with the product and lost confidence in the institution, Moran ignored the malaise. This led some bishops to send an increasing number of their seminarians to Rome (7 in 1903).

Pope Leo XIII - Encyclical *Ad extremas*

In 1893 Pope Leo XIII (Image: Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903)) published his Encyclical Letter *Ad extremas* which called for the development of a 'native clergy' and formation of 'indigenous' priests in the mission territories - including Australia, New Zealand, USA, and Canada - through the establishment of local seminaries which were to be financed by the European churches.

Leo acknowledged that 'a foreign clergy has difficulty in winning the hearts of the people [and] the work of a native clergy would be far more fruitful [as] they know the nature and customs of their people [and] know when to speak and when to keep silent'. Moreover,



missionaries from abroad were far from adequate to serve the existing Christian communities and there was always the hazard of critical conditions arising which might lead to the expulsion of foreign priests.

Just days before the 2nd Plenary Council of Australia was to convene in Sydney on 17 November 1895, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart sought the approval of (now) Cardinal Moran to establish a new seminary at the Sydney suburb of Kensington for the training of Indigenous men from New Guinea and the Pacific Islands as catechists and priests.

As it was not intended to rival Manly, the *de facto* 'national seminary', Moran, who had long dreamt of spreading Christianity throughout Asia, immediately gave his approval and on the closing day of the Council, laid the foundation stone. The seminary opened in December 1897 and by the following April had 12 novices in residence.



Image: Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Scholasticate, Kensington NSW. Opened December 1897

Second Plenary Council of Australia

At the Second Plenary Council in November 1895, the 23 Australian bishops in attendance said little about seminaries generally and made no mention of the 1862 proposal to establish an Australian College (seminary) in Rome.

By the end of 1900 five seminaries were functioning in Australia: Moran's Sydney diocesan seminary, St Patrick's College at Manly, (opened 1889); the Jesuit novitiate at Greenwich, NSW (opened 1884 in Richmond VIC, moved to Kew VIC in 1886, then to Greenwich in 1890); the Redemptorist novitiate at Mayfield NSW (opened 1888); the Passionist scholasticate at Glen Osmond SA (opened 1896); and the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart scholasticate at Kensington NSW (opened 1897). The Passionist novitiate which had opened in Goulburn NSW in 1890, had closed in 1896.

At the close of 1900, 41 candidates had completed their formation at Manly and been ordained to the priesthood: 36 for Australian dioceses, 4 for New Zealand dioceses, and 1 for the New Norcia Benedictines. The Passionists had formed 10 new priests, including 6 Australian-born; the Redemptorists had formed 1 Australian-born priest and admitted 2 Irish-born ordained priests to their novitiate; and the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart had formed just 1 Australian-born priest.

When the new century commenced on 1 January 1901 some 2050 priests had arrived in Australia from churches outside Australia, including 1,377 (67%) from Ireland, of which 450 were from All Hallows Seminary in Dublin. In 1901, of all 816 priests in active ministry in Australia – 621 diocesan and 195 religious - 87 per cent were Irish.