

Catholic Seminaries in Australia 1835-2023

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Part 6: A national or local seminaries?

At the Manly Jubilee Celebrations in July 1914, the Australian-born former Manly professor, Monsignor Terence McGuire, strongly criticised the Irish bishops for continuing to prioritize the sourcing of priests from overseas and claimed it was damaging an Australian priesthood. He called on the Catholic youth of Australia to do for Australia what the Irish had done for Europe, urged the bishops to rely on Australian priests, and called for an Australian 'national' seminary and 'Catholic University of United Australia'. Both, he said, were possible at St Patrick's College, Manly.

Four days later, the Manly *alumni* unanimously decided to form the Manly Union with the aim of 'the Nationalization of Manly College and its complete development into the great ecclesiastical University of the Commonwealth'. If the bishops were prepared to approve the Union and its aim, the priests would pledge their active and financial support and cooperation.

Quality formation for local candidates for priesthood

In November 1919, Pius X's successor, Benedict XV [Image # 1 – Pope Benedict XV], published the significant Apostolic Letter *Maximum illud* promoting missionary activity. His key emphasis was quality education and formation for local and indigenous candidates for the priesthood: 'not a rudimentary and slipshod preparation, the bare minimum for ordination, but a complete and finished education, excellent in all its phases, the same kind of education that a European candidate would receive'. Benedict insisted that indigenous priests know 'far better than anyone else the kind of argument their people will listen to and have easy access to places where a foreign priest would not be tolerated'. They are 'not to be trained merely to perform the humbler duties of the ministry, acting as the assistants of foreign priests, but taking up God's work as equals, so that in the future they will be able to enter upon the spiritual leadership of their people'. He claimed that 'If the foundations

of a local clergy have been well laid and the roots sunk, there is no reason to fear that that church cannot withstand a blow’.

Benedict was most concerned that in the mission territories (of which Australia was one) the seminary system had been ‘feeble and faulty’ and had produced local priests of inferior quality and not worthy of becoming bishops. He was ordering the Propaganda Congregation ‘to apply remedies adapted to the various regions of the world, see to the founding of seminaries for both individual regions and groups of dioceses, and ensure that the existing seminaries were adequately administered’.

Rome resolves the national seminary debate

In 1913 the proposal by Archbishop Daniel Mannix for the nationalisation of the Manly seminary had been supported by a majority of the Australian bishops. However, it had not been resolved, due to the concerns of some senior Sydney priests about control of the assets and was deferred until the Great War had concluded.

When peace returned in 1918 the proposal was put back on the agenda and in 1921 the debate resumed. But the metropolitan archbishops, particularly Mannix and Kelly [Image # 2 – Archbishop Michael Kelly], could not agree and the Sydney senior priests still refused to budge on the control of the diocesan assets and revenues. The Manly Union had also become militant. With no possible way forward, the matter was passed to Rome for a decision.

In the meantime, discipline at Manly was tightened for the bishops had not only renewed their pleas to the seminary authorities to deliver ‘well equipped’ and ‘good’ men but were also urging them to weed out the ‘non-conformists’, the ‘delicate’, the ‘oddity’, the ‘crank’, the ‘potential drunk’ and the ‘lazy and indifferent’. To improve the standard of seminary teaching, some talented students were sent to Propaganda College in Rome for higher studies. The Australian bishops had earlier rejected the Holy See’s offer of a building in Rome to establish an Australian College (seminary) there.

Rome’s decision on the nationalisation proposal arrived in October 1922, with Propaganda strongly advising the Australian bishops that ‘instead of concentrating their efforts on a united central national seminary at Manly’, they should ‘make provision for the establishment, as soon as possible, of Provincial and Diocesan Seminaries’.

The bishops accepted the Holy See's decision, even though it meant turning back on their earlier positions and allowing provincialism to prevail over nationalism.

Within 8 weeks of Rome's decision, Archbishop Mannix had purchased the Chirnside Mansion at Werribee [Image # 3 – Chirnside Mansion, Werribee] and announced that a new 'regional' seminary, Corpus Christi College, with Jesuit staff, would open in early 1923 and would serve the four Victorian dioceses – Melbourne, Ballarat, Sandhurst, and Sale – and the Hobart Archdiocese.

During the 1920s more priests had arrived from Ireland than were ordained from Manly, and some Irish bishops were still preferring Irish to Australian-born priests. However, during the 1930s, across most dioceses, priests from the Irish seminaries began to decrease significantly because Propaganda was pushing hard for more locally born priests.

Apostolic Delegates to Australia

For 27 years Cardinal Moran had functioned as the Holy See's *de facto* Apostolic Delegate for Australia and New Zealand. After his death in 1911, Pius X established the first official Apostolic Delegation of Australasia in 1914 with Archbishop Bonaventura Cerretti as the first Delegate. His successor in 1917, Archbishop Cattaneo, made his principal objective to replace the laws made by the previous Provincial and Plenary Councils of Australia (and New Zealand) with the new 1917 *Code of Canon Law* ensuring that all the new laws for seminaries would take effect in Australia and New Zealand.

Pius XI and seminary shortcomings

In 1935 when Pius XI [Image # 4 – Pope Pius XI] learnt that many priests were 'falling away' he published his Encyclical Letter *Ad Catholici sacerdotii* in which he addressed some serious shortcomings in the seminary system and pointed to the failures of some bishops to properly investigate candidates before ordaining them. He insisted that all candidates must receive 'a superior training' and the bishop 'is to make the seminary the chief object of his care, choose his best priests for its staff, employ scholastic teaching methods, establish regional seminaries with other bishops if he cannot establish his own, carefully select and only approve suitable candidates, and discourage without hesitation,

delay, human consideration or false mercy, and at an early stage any candidate who is unsuitable’.

Pius made it clear that it is the bishop who has the principal responsibility for deciding who he will ordain to sacred orders and should only proceed if he is ‘morally certain’ of canonical fitness; ‘otherwise he sins grievously himself, places himself in danger of sharing in the sins of others and exposes the Church to much grief and the faithful to much scandal’. A bishop ‘should never be motivated to ordain out of fear of a shortage of priests’ and religious superiors have the same responsibility.

New Australian Seminaries, 1900-1937

In the period 1900 to 1937 there was an explosion of new seminary openings: 4 apostolic schools and juniorates (for boys as young as 12 years), 8 novitiates, 9 scholasticates and houses of study, 1 minor seminary, and 3 major seminaries. These were in addition to the six already functioning: 3 Jesuit, Passionist and Redemptorist novitiates, 2 Passionist and MSC scholasticates, and the Sydney seminary at Manly.

New seminaries opened between 1900 and 1937

Diocese/Congregation	Seminary Type	Year Opened	Location
Benedictines	Juniorate Novitiate Scholasticate	1904 1904 1904	New Norcia, WA New Norcia, WA New Norcia, WA
Missionaries of Sacred Heart	Scholasticate Apostolic School Novitiate	1905 1912 1917	Douglas Park, NSW Douglas Park, NSW Douglas Park, NSW
Redemptorists	Novitiate Juniorate House of Studies	1908 1910 1924	Ballarat, VIC Ballarat, VIC Pennant Hills, NSW
Sydney Archdiocese	Minor Seminary	1909	Springwood, NSW
Vincentians	Novitiate Scholasticate	1922 1922	Eastwood, NSW Eastwood, NSW
Victorian & Tasmanian Dioceses	Regional Major Seminary	1923	Werribee, VIC

Salesians	Scholasticate	1925	Sunbury, VIC
Columbans	Major Seminary	1926	Essendon, VIC
Carmelites	Novitiate House of Studies	1928 1930	Albert Park, VIC Kew, VIC
Missionaries of Most Holy Eucharist	Major Seminary	1928	Ashgrove, QLD
Franciscans	Juniorate Novitiate Scholasticate	1930 1936 1936	Waverley, NSW Mayfields, NSW Box Hill, VIC
Blessed Sacrament Fathers	Novitiate	1931	Melbourne, VIC
Jesuits	Novitiate Scholasticate	1934 1934	Watsonia, VIC Watsonia, VIC
Passionists	Juniorate	1937	St Ives, NSW

1937 Fourth Plenary Council of Australia and New Zealand

The Australian and New Zealand bishops had delayed holding another plenary council for years. But when they met in plenary session in Melbourne in 1922, Apostolic Delegate Cattaneo proposed another plenary council to bring the decrees of the previous plenary councils into line with the new *Code of Canon Law*. The bishops agreed and the council was set for 1925. However, it was deferred until 1932 and again until Archbishop Kelly was finally granted approval by the Holy See to convene it at Sydney in 1937. Apostolic Delegate Bernardini drew up the initial agenda and his successor, Archbishop Panico, revised it with the advice of the Propaganda Congregation.

The Fourth Plenary Council of Australia and New Zealand met in Sydney from 4-12 September 1937 with Apostolic Delegate Panico presiding. With little discussion or debate the 33 Australian and New Zealand bishops present approved all 685 draft decrees with just three amendments. They were fully aware of the background and that the outcome had been predetermined. All seminaries in Australia and New Zealand would henceforth be governed by the *1917 Code of Canon Law*.

Image # 1 – Pope Benedict XV



Image: Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922)

Image # 2 – Archbishop Michael Kelly



Image: Archbishop Michael Kelly (Co-adjutor Archbishop of Sydney 1901-1911; Archbishop of Sydney 1911-1940)

Image # 3 – Chirnside Mansion, Werribee, Victoria



Image: Chirnside Mansion, Werribee, Victoria. Opened as Corpus Christi College Regional Seminary on 3 March 1923

Image # 4 – *Pope Pius XI*



Image: Pope Pius XI (1922-1939)

