

Second Australian Plenary Council, 17 November-1 December 1895

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This is the fifth in the series of articles looking at the particular (provincial and plenary) councils of the Catholic Church held in Australia between 1844 and 1937. It examines the 1895 2nd Australian Plenary Council.

Between 1886 and 1895, eight particular councils were convened in English-speaking mission territories under the jurisdiction of the Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide ('Propaganda'): 3 provincial councils in both Canada and the US, and 1 plenary council in both Scotland and Australia.

Developments and demographic data for 1895

In 1887, following the 1885 1st Australasian Plenary Council, the Holy See established 2 new Australian ecclesiastical provinces (Brisbane and Adelaide), 3 new dioceses (Grafton, Wilcannia, and Port Augusta), 2 new vicariates apostolic (Kimberley and Queensland for Aborigines), and renamed the Vicariate Apostolic of Queensland as Cooktown. In 1888 it renamed the Diocese of Port Victoria (NT) as Victoria and Palmerston, and elevated Hobart to an archdiocese. In 1895, Australia had 5 archdioceses, 13 dioceses, 3 vicariates apostolic and 1 abbacy *nullius*, organized within 4 ecclesiastical provinces (Table 1).

In the decade up to 1895 there had also been significant growth. Catholics increased from 540,000 to 695,351, constituting 20 per cent of the total European population, districts (not 'parishes') increased from 259 to 361, priests from 512 to 747 (including 178 religious), religious sisters from 1612 to 2836, religious brothers from 212 to 351, Catholic schools (primary and secondary) from 622 to 897, and students in Catholic schools from some 65,000 to 83,891. More than 1080 churches had been constructed - an average of 3 per district -and, on average, 1 priest ministered to 931 Catholics (1 to 1054 in 1885).

Council convocation and preparation

Following the 1885 Council, Cardinal Moran convened assemblies of all the Australian bishops in 1888 and 1890 and, on instructions from the Holy See in 1890, annual meetings of the metropolitan archbishops. After consulting them in 1894, Moran sought approval to convene a second Australasian plenary council and, in January 1895, received it from Pope Leo XIII, who also appointed Moran to preside as apostolic delegate. However, to Moran's chagrin, Propaganda instructed him not to invite the New Zealand bishops, as the Holy See had determined that the Church in New Zealand was to be separate from the Church in Australia.

Moran wrote to all the Australian prelates and provincials of male clerical religious congregations, and all those required to attend by law or custom, and called them to assemble at St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, on 17 November 1895 for the 2nd Australian

Plenary Council. He also invited each bishop to appoint a personal theologian for expert advice, and to have one priest from his diocese, elected by the priests of the diocese, to represent them at the Council.

Table 1: Provinces of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide: demographic and ecclesiastical data, 1895

Colony	Total Population	Catholic Population	Diocese/Abbacy/Vicariate Apostolic	Year Est.	Districts (not parishes)	Priests (Dioc./Relig.)	Relig. Sisters	Religious Brothers	Catholic Schools (Prim. & Sec.) ¹	Catholic Students
			Province of Sydney	1842						
NSW	1,255,503	147,300 30,000 37,000 21,323 27,000 16,500 <u>16,000</u> 295,123	Sydney (AD) Maitland (D) Goulburn (D) Armidale (D) Bathurst (D) Grafton (D) Wilcannia (D)	1842 1847 1862 1862 1865 1887 1887	65 17 18 15 17 12 <u>11</u> 155	111/61 36/7 33/7 17/3 28/5 14/- <u>15/-</u> 254/83	777 158 176 83 200 58 <u>106</u> 1,558	149 7 7 5 11 0 <u>0</u> 179	147/59 33/16 39/9 14/9 43/17 11/8 <u>14/10</u> 301/128	20,407 3,416 3,551 2,010 3,572 1,080 <u>2,301</u> 36,337
			Prov. of Melbourne	1874						
VIC	1,185,676	143,949 35,000 25,000 <u>11,300</u> 215,249	Melbourne (AD) Ballarat (D) Sandhurst (D) Sale (D)	1847 1874 1874 1887	44 25 17 <u>7</u> 93	84/34 46/6 29/8 <u>12/-</u> 171/48	459 95 87 <u>12</u> 653	49 5 6 <u>-</u> 60	109/36 52/10 31/16 <u>8/2</u> 200/64	18,243 6,000 4,500 <u>570</u> 29,313
TAS	154,895	25,800	Hobart (AD)	1842	18	26/-	59	-	24/4	2,200
			Prov. of Brisbane	1887						
QLD	443,064	60,000 25,000 3,500 n/a 89,000	Brisbane (AD) Rockhampton (D) Cooktown (VA) QLD for Aborigines (VA)	1859 1882 1887 1887	31 10 7 <u>-</u> 48	44/- 15/1 -/11 <u>-</u> 59/12	186 60 13 <u>-</u> 259	25 n/a ² <u>-</u> 25	41/18 11/6 2/1 <u>-/-</u> 54/25	6,713 2,175 235 <u>-</u> 9,123
			Prov. of Adelaide	1887						
SA	351,968	35,762 <u>11,156</u> 46,918	Adelaide (AD) Port Augusta (D)	1842 1887	24 <u>9</u> 33	32/10 <u>9/6</u> 41/16	207 <u>31</u> 238	18 <u>4</u> 22	30/15 <u>14/2</u> 44/17	3,785 <u>1,013</u> 4,798
WA	100,515	23,000 n/a n/a	Perth (D) New Norcia (AN) Kimberley (VA)	1845 1867 1887	14 Abbacy Mission <u>14</u>	18/4 -/6 <u>-/5</u> 18/15	69 <u>-</u> 69	4 48 <u>7</u> 59	19/9 2/- <u>n/a²</u> 21/9	2,000 100 <u>n/a</u> 2,100
NT	n/a	261	Victoria & Palmerston (D)	1847	n/a	-/4	-	6	1/-	20
Australia TOTAL	3,491,621³	695,351 (= 20% of total pop'n)	4 Provinces 18 Dioceses 3 Vicariates Apost. 1 Abbacy Nullius		361	569/178 Total: 747	2,836	351	645/252 Total: 897	83,891

Sources: ABS. Cat. No. 3105.0.65.001; Australasian Catholic Directory for 1896 (data is for 1895). Note: 1. Secondary schools include colleges for boys, boarding schools for girls, and superior day schools. 2. No return was submitted. 3. This is European population only. Aboriginal people were not counted in the Census. 5. The 1896 Directory listed only 7 of the 18 dioceses with 'diocesan consultors'.

Opening of Council

When those called to the Council gathered on 16 November 1895, there were 23 prelates present: 5 archbishops - Moran (Sydney), Carr (Melbourne), Murphy (Hobart), O'Reilly (Adelaide), and Dunne (Brisbane); 15 bishops – Murray (Maitland), Lanigan (Goulburn), Torreggiani (Armidale), Byrne (Bathurst), Dunne (Wilcannia), Doyle (Grafton), Higgins (Sydney auxiliary), Gallagher (Goulburn coadjutor), Moore (Ballarat), Corbett (Sale), Reville (Sandhurst auxiliary), Delaney (Hobart coadjutor), Gibney (Perth), Cani (Rockhampton) and Hutchinson (Cooktown); 1 abbot/bishop – Salvado (New Norcia) ; and 2 apostolic

administrators (neither bishops) – James Maher (Port Augusta) and Anton Streele SJ (Victoria and Palmerston). Bishop Crane of Sandhurst was absent due to ill health and Ambrose Janny, superior (not a bishop) of the Trappist Mission at Beagle Bay (WA), was in France. Nineteen of the prelates had attended the 1885 Council. Also present were 35 diocesan priests and 14 religious priests: 2 Jesuits, 2 Marists, 2 Redemptorists, 2 Vincentians, and one Benedictine, Carmelite, Franciscan, Missionary of the Sacred Heart, and Passionist. All the priests were classed as ‘theologians’ with 14 having participated in the 1885 Council. All 72 Council participants were exclusively clerics: 23 with a deliberative vote, and 49 with a consultative vote.



Image: Assembled bishops of Australia at the 1895 2nd Australian Plenary Council. Photo taken in the Aula Maxima of St Patrick's College, Manly, NSW. Source: MDHC Photo Collection, published in *Footprints*, Vol. 2, No. 4, p. 9 (October 1974)

At the prelates' meeting on 16 November, Moran announced that the Council procedures would be the same as those of the 1885 Plenary, and that Bishops Murray and Delaney would act as Council promoter and secretary. Bishops Murray, Lanigan, and Byrne were elected to the Bishops 'Primary' Committee, joining Moran (chair), the other 4 archbishops, and Delaney. This committee assigned all other Council members to one of four committees dealing with Faith, Discipline, Sacraments, and Education. After some discussion, the majority of bishops, with Moran, determined that Abbot Salvado, Vicar Apostolic Hutchinson, the auxiliary bishops, and the two priest apostolic administrators, would have a 'deliberative' vote.

Three public sessions in St Mary's Cathedral, with Pontifical Mass, were scheduled, and all other meetings - general (prelates and priests), private (prelates only) and committee - were to take place at St Patrick's College, Manly.

The Council opened with great solemnity on Sunday 17 November, with Cardinal Moran presiding. Bishop Gallagher gave the opening address, stating that the Council's aims were "to maintain the revealed truth, to condemn heresy, to uphold the uniformity and sanctity of discipline, to relieve the poor and battle for the oppressed, to advance the cause of science and knowledge, and to elevate mankind." They were somewhat different from Moran's: "to strengthen discipline, increase virtue, honour the faith, defend the Church, and glorify God".

Council agenda

In 1895, since the 1885 Council decrees were *de facto* canon law for Australia, the prelates agreed that they should remain the basis for all future legislation, but that new decrees could be added as necessary.

The first of these were contained in two new chapters on the further education of priests (4 decrees), and 'parish' missions (10 decrees) to be held every 5 years.

More decrees on the sacraments also emerged: Protestants could not be baptismal sponsors; divorce to be denounced: the separation of married spouses to require church judicial permission; clandestine marriages forbidden; marriage bans to apply to persons of other jurisdictions; the rubrics for Mass, chant and ceremonials to be uniform; regular confession to be promoted, especially for children; reserved sins were listed; and the Forty Hours Eucharistic devotion introduced.

Many of the new decrees related to the life and discipline of priests: the Union of Priests to be established in every diocese; priests to be very careful around women, particularly in the choice of housekeeper; where several priests lived together, one to be always on duty; financial reports to be mandatory; priests not to speak publicly about any person; church buildings not to be altered or debts incurred without the bishop's permission; the faithful to be notified of holy days, days of fast and abstinence, and indulgences; only Roman and Baltimore (US) rituals permitted; registers of baptism, confirmation, marriage, and the *status animarum* to be kept updated; only the *Maynooth Catechism* to be used; Requiem Mass to be recommended for funerals, but flowers (an abuse) discouraged; Catholic burial to be refused to those requesting cremation or attending a funeral in Masonic regalia; Catholic societies to be promoted, together with the Rosary; and young people warned about the dangers of certain dances. Also discussed were the *concursum* (test of fitness for parochial office), the rights of 'rectors' (parish priests), and priest's assignment when their diocese was divided. Dispensation from reciting the Divine Office when travelling was referred to the Holy See.

Priests with alcohol problems received significant attention, as alcoholism and excessive drinking was a major problem for many priests, especially those living in the outback with isolation and loneliness. The Council recommended the promotion of temperance societies in all seminaries (mainly Irish) sending priests to Australia, that a religious congregation be asked to establish a permanent rehabilitation house for alcoholic priests, and that each diocese establish a special fund to help treat these priests (Decrees 71-72).

Decrees were also added on Catholic education: parish priests were not to close a school without the bishop's permission; every diocese was to have a priest examiner of schools; parents who sent their children to non-Catholic schools were not to be refused absolution publicly; the US schoolbooks of Benziger Bros were commended; and the *pro rata* claim for a share of taxpayer funds was reaffirmed. There was also much discussion on teacher training.

On governance, there were discussions on having vicars general in every diocese (no decision), how to enforce plenary council decrees (no decision), and how to select new bishops for dioceses with less than 10 diocesan consultors and irremovable rectors (decided that all rectors and administrators who had served for 7 years could propose candidates). The bishops also decided to appoint an 'agent' to represent them in Rome and selected Dr Michael Verdon, the former rector of the Manly seminary. His brief was to seek a reduction in the number of Holy Days, and to promote the canonisation of Blessed Peter Chanel as proto-martyr of Oceania. The bishops also wanted guidance on their faculties to mitigate the obligations of fasting and abstinence.

For religious sisters, new legislation insisted they make a will before profession and observe the *clausura*.

Seminaries

Six years before the Council, Sydney's diocesan seminary, St Patrick's College, had opened at Manly for the "exclusive education of aspirants to the ecclesiastical state". It accepted candidates from "all the dioceses of Australia" (*Prospectus*), and was the sole functioning seminary in Australia. Able to accommodate 80 students, it had an experienced teaching staff (8 priests and 2 laymen) under the presidency of Dr Michael Verdon, a former president of Clonliffe seminary in Dublin and vice-rector of the Irish College in Rome. By 1895 it had admitted 90 students and already seen four of its 76 Australian-born candidates ordained.

The Council now supported and launched a new seminary in Kensington (NSW) to prepare missionary priests for overseas ministry in PNG and the Pacific Islands. It had been proposed by the French Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, who had arrived in Sydney in 1885 to establish a supply base for their missions in New Britain (PNG). It would not compete with the Manly seminary.



Image: Early group of Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) at their Kensington NSW monastery. The MSC Australian province was established in 1905. Source: www.misacor.org.au

The Council made no mention of the 1885 proposal to establish an Australian College at Rome, and softened the requirement to have a minor seminary.

New dioceses and selection of bishops

The Council agreed on the need for more dioceses and proposed two new ones for WA (Geraldton and Coolgardie), two for Queensland (Townsville and Maranoa or Warwick), two for Victoria (Benalla and Warrnambool), and one for Sydney. Also recommended were some boundary adjustments between the Diocese of Palmerston and Victoria (NT) and the Queensland dioceses - to bring them into conformity with the civil border - and the transfer of the Diocese of Grafton to Lismore.

When proposing the new dioceses, the bishops ignored Decree 25 of the 1885 Council, which required the metropolitan archbishop to convoke all consultors of the diocese from which the new diocese was to be formed, and selected the *terna* themselves. For the selection of the first bishop of Sale in 1887, however, the priests had voted.

Evangelization of the Aboriginal peoples

The 1885 Council 's decrees and recommendations to promote and support the evangelization of the Australian Aborigines, especially in Queensland and Western Australia, had resulted in the Holy See establishing two new vicariates apostolic in 1887: Kimberly (WA) and Queensland for the Aborigines. However, despite Moran's constant reminders and Propaganda's encouragement, most of the bishops, with notable exceptions, took their missionary responsibility lightly, preferring to concentrate on the pastoral care of their largely Irish congregations and to leave the evangelization of the Aborigines to individual dedicated priests and bishops, or any religious congregation prepared to take on this

difficult ministry. After 10 years, the special annual collection the 1885 Council had set up for Aboriginal missions had raised just £795.

Trappist Mission at Beagle Bay

During the 1880s, European pastoralists stole huge tracts of land from the Aboriginal peoples in the Kimberley, and Asian pearlers were exploiting the rich pearl-shell beds off the coast. The pearlers, while sheltering in the lay-up season, were also associating closely with the Aborigines and bringing much immorality. In 1886 the WA *Aborigines Protection Act* extended protection to mixed descendents and the 1889 WA *Constitution Act* required 1 per cent of the colony's income (or minimum £5000) to be spent on Aboriginal people.

Following the 1887 failure of Fr Duncan McNabb's mission in the Kimberley, Propaganda and Bishop Gibney of Perth succeeded in persuading a French Trappist monastery to establish a new mission among the Aborigines in the Kimberly on two large Aboriginal land reserves which the WA government had set aside on the Dampier Peninsula. Frs Ambrose Janny and Alphonse Tachon arrived in Perth in 1890, and by 1895 a Trappist community of 18 had established a mission at Beagle Bay. It was funded mainly by Propaganda and the Trappists in France (70%), by the WA government (20%), and donations (10%). Gibney, the driving force for the evangelization of the Kimberley Aborigines, persuaded the 1895 Council to entrust the Kimberley vicariate to the Trappists, but that they were hesitant to assume that responsibility.

Queensland Vicariate for Aborigines

After 18 years, the never-formerly-erected Vicariate Apostolic of Queensland for Aborigines had achieved little. It had no bishop and was without priests. Some Italian missionaries had worked there for a short time in 1884, but had failed and handed the vicariate to the Irish Augustinians. But as they were not interested in exclusive evangelization of the Aborigines, the 1885 Council had called for the vicariate to be entrusted to a congregation totally dedicated to the Aborigines, and nominated the Spanish Augustinians in the Philippines, But neither they nor any other congregation were prepared to take it on. The 1895 Council now delegated Moran to see if he could persuade the Jesuits or Marists to accept the Queensland vicariate with its exclusive Aboriginal focus.

Jesuit Mission in Northern Territory

When the Bishop of [Port] Victoria, Salvado, resigned in 1888, the Jesuit missionary priest, Anton Strele, was appointed Apostolic Administrator of the renamed Diocese of Victoria and Palmerson, where the Jesuits had two missions with 15 missionaries. A third mission, Sacred Heart at Serpentine Lagoon, was added in 1889, but by late 1890 Strele's health had broken and the mission was in financial crisis. In 1891 the three missions were amalgamated at New Uniya, but by 1892 the mission was bankrupt, the residents starving, and the missionaries desperate. Strele left Darwin, prepared a report on the mission, and presented it at the 1895 Council. He explained the strategic factors leading to the mission's establishment, and sought to have it continued.

Conclusion of the Council and Apostolic approval

The Council concluded on 1 December 1895 with a joint Pastoral Letter denouncing secularism, the inordinate desire for wealth, and the weakening of family ties, and advocated a closer following of Christ, good family life with prayer and temperance, Catholic education, and no mixed marriages.

The Council's *Acta et Decreta*, with 344 decrees, were forwarded to the Holy See and formally considered by the Propaganda cardinals on 14 and 20 December 1897. With only minor amendments, the cardinals recommended their approval. They did not, however, support the proposals for seven new dioceses, and recommended to Pope Leo XIII that only the Diocese of Geraldton be erected, with the Australian-born William Bernard Kelly as first bishop. Rather than suppress the Vicariate Apostolic of Kimberley, they recommended it be attached to the Geraldton diocese 'for the time being' until the Trappists had made their position clear. They also approved the new borders for the Queensland and NT dioceses.

Pope Leo XIII confirmed the decrees of the Council on 11 January 1898, and the official *recognitio* (approval) was confirmed on 22 January 1898, 26 months after the Council had closed. The published legislation had 20 appendices attached, including various Roman decrees, schedules, forms, prayers and rubrics.

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