



Aquinas Memorial Lecture 1979

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JAMES QUINN: MONARCH OF ALL HE SURVEYED

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Dr. Boland was born in Brisbane in 1929. He was educated at Mary Immaculate Convent, Ipswich Road, Annerley, conducted by the Sisters of St. Joseph, and subsequently at St. Laurence's College, South Brisbane, and Nudgee College, both conducted by the Christian Brothers.

After studying for the priesthood at Pius XII Regional Seminary, Banyo, Brisbane, he was ordained priest in 1953. He continued his studies at the Gregorian University in Rome from 1956 until 1960 and in the latter year received the degree of Doctorate in Ecclesiastical History. His doctoral thesis dealt with the Queensland Immigration Society, which was set up by Bishop Quinn.

Dr. Boland has been on the lecturing staff at Pius XII Regional Seminary from 1960 and has lectured also at the University of Queensland (part-time) and the Yarra Theological Union (1977). He was Rector of Pius XII Regional Seminary in 1978.

Author of "Quiet Women" (1974), a history of The Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and a consideration of their founder, the unique Father Julian Tenison Woods, he is engaged presently in writing a biography of the Most Rev. Sir James Duhig, Archbishop of Brisbane from 1917 until his death in 1965.



BISHOP JAMES QUINN
(1819-1881)

An Irishman, trained in Rome, Bishop of Brisbane for many years, a handsome man in his prime, with a reputation for culture in a rough community, covering a territory that included all Queensland, a man of properties with his own auctioneer, a man of peace in the midst of prejudice, friend to an Anglican bishop, guest of Governors, host to Cabinet and the Bench, idolising and loved by children ... If I asked who that was, the automatic answer would be: "James Duhig", but it is a description of a man who died when James Duhig was only ten years of age, and his widowed mother was planning to bring him to Brisbane. Duhig was a bishop in Queensland within twenty-four years of James Quinn's death, in Brisbane within thirty, and between them they covered almost all of the first century of the Church in the Colony and State. Yet they were not alike in character. Quinn is still something of an enigma. He was revered and execrated, admired as an astute leader, reviled as an autocrat, who destroyed much of his own achievement. He died in 1881. Across the past century he still challenges – dares – us to discover who and what he was.

He would be wryly amused that we are not sure of the exact date of his birth, but it was in 1819, at Rathbawn, a townland near Naas, fourteen miles from Dublin. His family was both Catholic and, in the Irish term, "comfortable". Their property was sizeable, about one hundred acres. The Quinns were almost gentry, better off than some of the authentic Anglo-Irish variety, though not free to enjoy the opportunities open to the Ascendancy. Here we have the first significant fact that made James Quinn ideally suited to be the first bishop in a new colony in the mid- to latter-nineteenth century British Empire. He was born into an Ireland which was settling down uneasily from the "98". Penal Laws were sliding into the shadows from which they came. Then a significant phenomenon appeared on the Irish horizon. The rising Catholic middle class, which had seen few defections under the threat of penalty, found the half-opened doors of social and economic opportunity a more potent solvent of faith. Jobs were still largely for "the boys". The temptation to join "the boys" was strong. The problem the Church faced, more acutely in the materialistic colonies than in Ireland itself, was how to help the Irish to share the opportunities without losing the Faith. The Irish for the first time had the opportunity to be socially mobile, upward moving. Quinn knew the allurements from his family situation. He gave twenty years to coping with it in Queensland.

His family was of a different kind of Establishment from that of the Anglo-Irish imitation squirearchy. James Quinn was a Churchman in a very Irish sense of the word. He was born of a Churchman family. They had ecclesiastical expectations. His mother's brother, Father Doyle, was a well-known figure, especially in Catholic education, the road James Quinn entered on the way to assured preferment. Two of his brothers became priests. The younger, Matthew, became Bishop of Bathurst and Andrew, the elder, became a senior priest of Dublin, which all three of them probably considered more distinguished than the See of either Brisbane or Bathurst. A cousin was James Murray, Bishop of Maitland, nephew of Archbishop Murray of Dublin. They all seem to have been connected with the future Cardinal Moran and so with the "Irish Pope" of the nineteenth century-Paul Cardinal Cullen. Certainly, James Quinn treated him like an uncle, honorary or of the blood. There was a hovering of hats, red and crimson.

James was born to the episcopal purple. He was a career cleric, in no necessarily pejorative sense. He drew notions of service and skills in administration from the air of home. Some people do not develop their talents except at the top. Quinn was one of them and the Irish family cohesiveness –nepotism – gave him his chance. For this reason it is a measure of his sincerity of vocation that he accepted the unknown, almost nonexistent, See of Brisbane in 1859. He was destined from birth for an Irish See, the apex of the ecclesiastical world in his circle. As Matthew surprised them all by going off to India as a missionary, so James seemed to turn his back on the ripe fruits that fell to Patrick Moran in Kilkenny. True, one of his class-mates in Rome, Croke, returned from the Antipodes, Auckland, to be the Lion of Cashel and Moran hoped to make the ultimate round trip, Kilkenny-Sydney-Dublin. However, Quinn, who had the talent, never showed any interest in a return. He visited Ireland only once in the twenty years of his episcopate. He belonged to the Irish Diaspora, but he did not see himself as an exile. This was his new home. The waters of the Brisbane were muddy – isn't the Liffey? – but they were not for him the Waters of Babylon. He sang his songs in no alien land. It was where the Lord sent him. He began a tradition that marks Queensland perhaps more than other States of Australia – the Church is Irish in origin, but comfortably native in air.

In the jargon of his horsy Kildare neighbours, Quinn was a "thruster". At the age of seventeen years he was taken by his uncle, Father Doyle, to Rome. It does not hurt to be introduced by one of the Circle. The Rector of the Irish College was "Uncle" Paul Cullen. The Vice-Rector was Tobias Kirby, who was still in the College when James Duhig arrived over half a century later. Quinn was a more than usually capable student, taking Doctoral degrees in Philosophy and Theology, then staying on to complete a further doctorate, probably J.U.D. His thesis defence for this was interrupted by the Republican occupation of Rome. In all he spent twelve years in Rome, acquiring that sense of standing out from local contexts in colonial affairs that marked him off from the provincial British.

Back in Dublin he was the young man to watch. He was the brilliant young Dr. Quinn. When an unusual occasion called for judgment and diplomacy and the ability to deal with the unscheduled, he was called on. He accompanied the Sisters of Mercy in the hurried preparations for the unheard-of mission to the Crimea and on their Continental studies to prepare them to found the first great Mater Misericordiae Hospital.

Best known of his achievements was as a person to be reckoned with in the ill-fated and ill-conceived Newman University in Dublin. Newman recognized his talent. Cullen recognized his dangerous thrusting force in a delicate enterprise. Neither could keep him from reaching the centre of the stage. He also showed for the first time an ability to take conservative stands in a radical manner. Thanks to Father Doyle's initiative, and money, Quinn found himself in charge of a complex of schools, one of which became a College of Newman's University, St. Lawrence O'Toole's, named for a mediaeval Archbishop of Dublin, and the source of the name of St. Laurence's Christian Brothers' College in South Brisbane. At one stage Quinn seemed set to be named Vice-Rector of the University to Newman. His single-minded pursuit of his own plans threatened to unseat him altogether, when, on 24 May 1859, out of the blue, James Alipius Goold, Bishop of Melbourne, arrived in Harcourt Street, his home, with the news that for a month he had been nominated Bishop of Brisbane. Quinn was always assured that God was on his side. Perhaps, this is the source of that unruffled look on his face in all his pictures. At his consecration in the University Church in Stephen's Green, the occasional preacher, Bishop Moriarty of Kerry,

quoted a maxim of Quinn's: "When a person undertakes a work for God's sake, there is no need for concern about the issue of his labours". Quinn always had this sublime assurance. At times, people thought he took too much for granted that what he did was necessarily God's work.

There were some consequences of this phase of Quinn's career. When he arrived in the Colony and found all public figures engaged in controversy about education and systems of education, he was one of the few who had the experience to know what he was talking about. This was true of him among many of his episcopal colleagues as well. Also, he was accustomed to dealing with the "big guns" in broader fields. He was not overawed by Queensland's amateur politicians. Thirdly, he tended to rule his Church like a Headmaster coping with a particularly unruly school. He was just forty years old when appointed. He had never been a Parish Priest, hardly a Curate. From his earliest years, he had the entree to the places of power in the Church. He was ill-prepared for the rough democracy of the Frontier Society.

He reached his diocese on 10 May 1861. He brought most of the personnel with him. He travelled with five priests – one Italian, three French, one Irish – and six Irish Sisters of Mercy, under that truly valiant woman, Mother Vincent Whitty. He found two resident priests, one in Brisbane and one in Ipswich. They both belonged to the parent diocese of Sydney, where one returned and where Quinn wished the other. He was starting from practically nothing. As he proceeded to old St. Stephen's, the size of the work sacristy of the average Irish parish church, Quinn asked, whether amusedly or bemusedly, probably both, "Where is the city of Brisbane?" He could have been forgiven. One sight that met his eyes was a bullock team bogged in Queen Street.

It may have been a shock to the rising academic, the "White Hope" of the Archdiocese of Dublin, but he wasted little time in lamentation. Archbishop Polding had described Brisbane as the poorest diocese in Australia, but the one with the most promise for religion. Quinn set out immediately to find out the facts – the best or the worst, but the facts. Then he could bring his great administrative powers to bear on them. That was where he excelled.

Bishop Quinn became a travelling man. He followed the tradition established by Australia's first Bishop, Polding, and got out into the remotest country. Within two months of arriving, after nearly six months at sea and wide travelling in Europe before he sailed, he covered over a thousand miles on horseback around the Downs and the Brisbane and Burnett districts. He became a horseman, if not the complete bushman. He did three more great tours of his vast diocese, reaching the goldfields behind Cooktown. He gave up the carriage for a horse and dog and many nights sleeping on the ground in the bush. He knew how his people lived and how to bring religion to them. He began a tradition that was Queensland's special achievement. He determined that the most remote areas should have access to the Gospel. His friendship with the Sisters of Mercy and the Irish Christian Brothers made it possible to plan for Catholic education open to all, but the vision was first in his mind. He travelled a long way from Harcourt Street and he never looked back.

He always thought of the whole Colony. From the start he saw it as a province in embryo. In 1860 the total population of the colony was 28,056, of whom 7,000 were Roman Catholic, almost all Irish. The percentage of the total population was still a reminder of the days only a decade before when Roman Catholics in New South Wales were almost one in three, to the alarm of John Dunmore Lang. In 1886, the first census after Quinn's death, the population was 322,853, of whom 77,000 were Roman Catholic. The proportion had declined, though not through the Bishop's neglect. He saw all this development over the whole area and he knew much more was to come. Especially after the discovery of gold in Gympie, which was followed by a rash of fields in many areas, he knew that the pattern of the fifties in New South Wales and Victoria would be followed. The first rushes would be followed by pastoral settlement and closer agricultural occupation over wide areas. Instead of looking to cut off more and more parishes, he thought in terms of dioceses. When he did not have resources for one diocese, he was planning, buying land and locating institutions and schools for three more dioceses – Maryborough, Rockhampton and Townsville. He was regarded as visionary, impractical and extravagant. His own priests were among his critics. Those he persuaded to staff his parishes and institutions were daunted by the present, and the future seemed an unnecessary burden to carry. When he thought of a province, he was constantly impeded by those who thought of a parish and, at times, the "parish pump". On the move, living

for the future, he was frequently impatient of the present and those who were still solving the problems of the present – for example, the paying off of the capital loan of £6000 and exorbitant interest on Dr. Fullerton's house which became All Hallows. It led him further into autocratic ways. He bulldozed his way through custom and law, civil and canon, to ensure he got his way in major enterprises, when people were close to crippled by present difficulties. He was sure his plan was God's will. He was not given to doubts on that score. The will may have been divine, but at times it was scarcely human.

His mind always worked on the grand scale. He saw the size of his diocese and planned a population to fill it. The colonial authorities were thinking along the same lines. One of the first Acts of the new Parliament was the Alienation of Crown Lands Act, which linked the sale and occupation of vast tracts of pastoral and agricultural land with subsidized migration. The principal scheme was to pay to any person providing the passage for himself or any other person a Land Order for up to thirty-two acres. This was theoretically redeemable for £1 per acre. James Quinn immediately saw the possibilities of this scheme. He could fill up the vast empty spaces in his diocese – and in the pews he intended to rent; he could contribute to the relief of distress in Ireland, and, he claimed, he could assist the colonial authorities to obtain a good class of citizen. In this latter claim he was sincere, though many doubted it. Many private and public migration schemes had commenced in the colonies, only to founder on the question of how to keep them going. Only Quinn and Caroline Chisholm seemed to solve the problem of continuity. It was a combination of government facilities; common interest, stimulated by immigrants already established; and the generosity of those concerned for relief for distress in the United Kingdom, usually for religious motives.

He set up in Ireland and Queensland the Queensland Immigration Society. In Ireland a wild Irish rover, Father Patrick Dunne of Tullamore, was his first agent followed by his own brother Matthew and his ultimate successor in Brisbane, Robert Dunne. At a distance of 10,000 miles his success as an immigration agent was sufficient to disturb the more bureaucratically minded Colonial Secretary, R. G. W. Herbert. In less than two years Quinn had 4,000 Irishmen walking down the gangplank in South Brisbane. Population 30,000: Irish R.C. intake 2,000 per year – no

government could have stood it, and Herbert put a stop to it. He was not going to have Queensland turned into what the anti-Quinn *Queensland Times* in Ipswich called "Quinnland". Herbert's methods of cutting off the results of his own inept legislation showed a touch of autocracy worthy of Quinn himself. He did little to quell the journalistic muckraking to which Quinn was subjected. The Bishop displayed that diplomatic skill and ecumenical flair in meeting the criticisms which marked him off as a performer on the public stage with few challengers in Queensland society and no peers. He persuaded a Committee of Protestant Members of Parliament, headed by the Anglican Bishop, to investigate the complaints of maladministration and fraud. What most people knew, but could not comment on, was that they were all his friends. The enigmatic smile showed just a little more satisfaction. Especially, since the indiscretions of the constitutionally indiscreet Patrick Dunne and, in my estimate, the inefficiency of the constitutionally inefficient Matthew Quinn, lent more than a shadow of substance to some of the charges.

Quinn believed, as Moran believed later, in the processes of British parliamentary and public life as the vehicle of justice and liberation for the Irish Roman Catholic. The opportunities denied to Irish Catholics by historic tragedies were open to them in the colonies. For this reason he was reluctant to see the aggressiveness and illegality of the Land League introduced into Queensland. He could, and did, revere the memory of the Liberator, Daniel O'Connell, who won Catholic emancipation by intelligent adherence to British legal and parliamentary process. It was in a fit of Hibernian fervour at the O'Connell centenary celebrations in 1875 that he added "O' " to his name and caused confusion by signing himself – when he remembered – O'Quinn. He staked his all on due process and lost every time.

His principal failure was in the field of education. When the Grammar Schools Act was passed, its loose drafting allowed anyone able to deposit £1,000 to draw a subsidy of £2,000 and the continuing assistance of the colonial government. One of the first to put up his £1,000 was James Quinn, but in the trend towards secular education it was not likely that the Queensland Government would subsidize a Catholic Grammar School ahead of others, if at all. Regulations were amended to exclude him.

He put more effort, throwing his reputation into the ring, into the public campaign on secular education. In three phases – in 1864-65, in defence of the denominational schools under the Board of Education, in the 1873 election which was fought on the issue of Free, Secular and Compulsory Education; and in the years between 1875, when the Bill was passed, and 1880, when it came into full effect – he campaigned publicly for governmental support for Catholic schools. In the first instance he displayed his skill in the stage management of monster public meetings. Again he put the Anglican Bishop, Tufnell, up to draw the fire. Tufnell alienated many of his own Church, finishing up being forced to use Quinn's newspaper to put his views. The Governor was furious with him and suggested he might be happier as Rector in an English village.

In 1873, Quinn staked his reputation on getting Arthur Macalister elected to defend the denominational schools. He used well the electoral processes. Macalister was elected and seconded the Bill for Free, Secular and Compulsory Education. In the years between 1875 and 1880 he continued to put up paper Cabinets and engage in kitchen cabals in the hope that the 1875 Act would be reversed. He alienated much of his own support by pushing to the limit his ability to compromise with the principle of secular education. We must not allow the ambiguity of that term to blind us to the actual situation. Few people meant then, by "secular", "anti-religious" or even "non-religious". They did mean a kind of "Common Christianity" or general religiosity that was not regarded as sufficient by Quinn or any other Church leader. Quinn believed that he could conform to the outward forms of this "secular" education, while transforming its substance and, at the same time, not alienate either Government or public, until a more favourable time came along.

In this he clashed above all with Mother Mary McKillop, saintly foundress of the Sisters of St Joseph. They were already in total confrontation on episcopal authority over religious orders engaged in apostolic activity in the diocese. The disputes were as old as religious orders and bishops. Before the uniform clarifications of the Code of Canon Law in 1917, differences were more frequent and more divisive, since both sides seemed to be right. The situation was rendered more complex by the proliferation of nineteenth century orders that were purely diocesan, in which the place of the bishop was more definite. Bishops naturally tended to prefer the latter, like the Sisters of Mercy.

Even with these Quinn exerted an authority in purely internal matters that went well beyond the limits of one who claimed to be a canonist. When challenged on matters of educational policy by a religious superior who controlled schools in his diocese and, in his view, put his delicate compromises in jeopardy, he brooked no opposition. Despite the seeming collapse of his schools, he insisted on letting the Sisters of St. Joseph go rather than accept another authority. He was working for God. God could decide whether or not Mother Mary was, but she would not do it in "Quinn'sland".

His schools did not collapse. He did not long survive the secularization. In that time he was preparing a report for Rome on the state of his diocese. The figures for schools, and for religious and lay teachers, were a vindication of many of his policies of finance, foundations and public co-operation. He had struggled like a Titan with a new land in formation. The effort had consumed a constitution never anywhere near so strong as his will. He was tragically unaware of how many more were worn out in his battles.

His last years were marred by constant, bitter strife within the Catholic community. Discontented clergy and educated laity, dissatisfied with an authoritarian regime which had suppressed effectively any signs of Lay Trusteeship of an earlier generation, attacked him in Church meetings, in the daily Press and in an extraordinary charge sheet, called the "Syllabus of Accusations", which was sent eventually to Rome. A virulent mixture of well-founded criticism, lack of vision and mean-minded scandal, it added a touch of bitterness to a life that disappointments from outside could not cloud.

In fact, outside his own communion, his stature grew with the years. He was one of the few figures who had endured from the beginning. He had fought in all the campaigns and won respect in every one of them. When he died, the *Rockhampton Bulletin* referred to the battles long ago when his views "were held with a dignity and a power that commanded respect where they could not produce conviction".

He died on 18 August 1881. It is said that the Premier wept. Celebrations of a Royal Visit were muted and the Queensland community mourned. It would be an exaggeration to call it grief, but there was a general and genuine regret. He was one of the first and one of the finest Queenslanders. He was a Churchman in an age that still appreciated the breed.

One of his priests wrote a tribute: "... he was very handsome. Regular features ... grace and ease of movement; a tall and stately figure, great and varied animation of manner; ready, pliant conversational powers ... calm, dauntless courage, quick perception and rapid decision." Another had called him earlier: "a scandal, a deceiver and a swindler". Archbishop Vaughan called him: "... a bully, revengeful, tyrannical and unjust". An Australian historian said of him: "... his temporal interest destroyed his spiritual leadership". The Queensland papers did not recognize any of these caricatures. Their language was not the usual rhetoric of panegyric. A number of words occur again and again – "disinterested", "liberal", "kindly", "tolerant", "large-souled", "cultured".

Quinn might have been most pleased with the *Brisbane Courier*, frequently his critic. After some remarkable tributes, the editor suggested: "... he was essentially an Irish priest".