

Archbishop James Duhig



Sir James Duhig (1871-1965), Catholic archbishop, was born on 2 September 1871 at Killila near Broadford, Limerick, Ireland, youngest son and one of seven children of John Duhig, cottier and rural tradesman, and his wife Margaret, née Barry. On John Duhig's early death the family moved to Middlesbrough, Yorkshire, England, where the elder sons worked in the iron-foundries. When a depression sent the family temporarily back to Ireland, they were evicted from their holding. They joined the continuing Irish migration, the eldest son going to Chicago, United States of America, and the rest of the family to Brisbane. James arrived with his mother and two other children on 8 April 1885 aboard the *Mackara*, the three older children having preceded them to establish a home. The youngest child Ellen (1874-1960) subsequently entered the Good Samaritan Order. Duhig's nephew [James Vincent](#) became a prominent pathologist. James was educated in village schools in Limerick and a Catholic school at Middlesbrough. In Brisbane he attended the Irish Christian Brothers' College of St Joseph's, Gregory Terrace. He did clerical work for a city firm and engaged in youth and catechetical work for his home parish of Woolloowin. In this latter he caught the attention of the archbishop of Brisbane, Robert Dunne, who sent him back to Gregory Terrace to complete his secondary studies and to perfect his Latin. In 1891 he enrolled in the Irish College, Rome, and studied for the priesthood at the Urban University of Propaganda Fide. There he cultivated a love of art and literature and developed his own lucid and eloquent eighteenth-century prose style. He also caught a notion of the official Church's role in society that went back to the exuberant counter-reform. Ordained priest on 19 September 1896, he returned to Brisbane next year with a vision beyond the colonial horizon.

Duhig worked as curate in the industrial town of Ipswich, with special responsibility for country districts around it. Circumstances forced on him early experience of administration and building, which became his characteristic, absorbing passion. Success brought him to Brisbane as administrator of St Stephen's Cathedral in March 1905 and in December to the see of Rockhampton, where he was consecrated by his former mentor in Rome, [Michael Kelly](#), now archbishop of Sydney. On 26 February 1912 he was back in Brisbane as titular archbishop of Amida and coadjutor to

Dunne, whom he succeeded as archbishop in 1917.

The archdiocese of Rockhampton covered 360,000 sq. miles (932,396 km²), that of Brisbane 200,000 (517,998 km²); Duhig travelled constantly, being one of the earliest passengers of Qantas and other nascent airlines in the north-west. His driving energy and lively community interests brought him an intimate knowledge of the religious and socio-economic problems of all but the far north of Queensland. Continuing to interpret his role as one of service to the community, he saw his unusually wide acquaintance with the State as giving him the opportunity to act as a guiding voice in its proper development. Concerned with the spread of justice to all, he was heard for decades on such topics as urban development, artistic opportunity, land settlement and higher education. His socially conservative pastoral letters stressed the need to maintain the sanctity of the home; he blamed the cinema for lack of cohesion in family life and for the 'perversion of the young'. A volume of his selected public addresses was published in 1934. His autobiography, *Crowded years* (Sydney), full of anecdotes about his journeys in the outback, followed in 1947.

His pastoral practice differed from that of his predecessor and of the [Moran](#) hierarchy of Australia. Duhig believed in small units, based on closeness of contact between clergy and people and easy access to church, school and charitable institutions. This meant creating many new parishes (he opened his fiftieth in 1955) and the introduction of many new religious communities. Previously two religious orders, the Irish Christian Brothers and the Sisters of Mercy, monopolized the schools and institutions of Queensland. Without discouraging their further expansion, he introduced twenty more orders of brothers and sisters. He also attracted fifteen orders of priests, many of them in the first ten years of his long episcopate.

This all gave scope for Duhig's absorbing interest in the acquisition of properties and in building. The physical structure of Brisbane, with its multitude of steep hills, allowed him to create a highly visible Church and offer the city an architectural gift of, and stimulus to, style. In fifty years he added over 400 major buildings (religious, educational and charitable institutions, and hospitals) to his diocese and spent £3 million. Since in 1929 much of the rural area was cut off in the new diocese of Toowoomba, most of this was in Brisbane.

The apex of the design was to have been a new Cathedral of the Holy Name in the Valley sector of the city, which Duhig, with many others, saw as the proper heart of a new and grander Brisbane. The cathedral was planned as the largest to be built anywhere in the world since the seventeenth century. It was a work not only of ecclesiastical purpose but of civic pride and State development; for Duhig proposed to pay for it with dividends from his investments in Roma oil-wells. The spectacular foundation ceremony, in the presence of a papal legate in 1928, was followed by a more spectacular collapse in the Depression. The oil-wells and the cathedral were both casualties. A court action was brought by the Sydney architect Jack Francis Hennessy against Duhig in 1949 for non-

payment of fees for the cathedral plans and specifications; Hennessy was awarded £25,750.

The thirty-five years of episcopate left to Duhig after the cathedral failure were given to energetic but less innovative leadership in church and state. Education was always a principal concern. Committed to the separate education of all Catholic children, he provided for a primary school, run by nuns, in each parish. Intent on the social mobility of Irish Catholics, he encouraged parents to give their children secondary education and he fostered thirty new high schools for this purpose. An early advocate and benefactor of the University of Queensland, he provided two university colleges at St Lucia. Before his death in 1965 it was already evident that in the post-war expansion it was not possible to maintain the total alternative system, and government assistance had begun; but his achievement was probably the most complete embodiment of the century-old Catholic policy on education.

His stance within the Church was not deeply theological. An eloquent preacher, he lauded and encouraged, rather than expounded, a traditional faith. Yet his basic attitudes proved to be compatible with the renewal of the Church at the Second Vatican Council. He took no active part in the council, but he had always been open to lay activity, and he was tolerant and—perhaps uncritically—encouraging to all initiative. In his earliest years he had belonged to the Catholic Literary and Debating Society and he then founded the Catholic Young Men's Society, in which many future leaders in church and state in Queensland were stimulated to develop their talents. This gave way in the 1930s and 1940s to the varied forms of Catholic Action, which flourished in Queensland only slightly less than in Victoria. Like [Daniel Mannix](#), he preceded and outlasted the highly centralized and clericalized style of Church administration which came into full development at the end of World War I with the publication of the Code of Canon Law. He did not favour the style and saw it reversed by the Second Vatican Council.

Duhig differed from Mannix in his view of how Church leadership should be exercised in the community. In contentious times he advocated reconciliation and friendly relations with other Christian Churches. He fostered ecumenism for common-sense reasons long before it was popular on theological grounds. Never a great wit like Mannix, he saw early that such sharpness left wounds that entrenched rather than removed animosity. As well, he believed that the Churches had the duty to show harmony to the community, another instinctive assumption of an attitude that became characteristic of conciliar theology.

Duhig was politically neutral in party strife. Firmly opposed to socialism in its more dogmatic forms, he spoke against the Labor policy in the controversy over the [Chifley](#) bank nationalization in 1947. During the 1951 referendum on the banning of the Communist Party he openly advocated a 'yes' vote. Yet he was not a party man. His politics, like his prose, were eighteenth century. He followed persons with flair and ideals like his own—in later

years, [\(Sir\) Robert Menzies](#), another of the Queen's men; but earlier, Labor men like [Ned Hanlon](#). In the 1957 Labor split he remained aloof, occupying a position mid-way between those of Mannix and Cardinal [\(Sir\) Norman Gilroy](#).

His Irish attitudes were markedly different from those of Mannix. His Ireland was the subject of the British Crown, if not of the parliament of Westminster. During the crises of the Easter rising in Dublin and the Australian conscription referenda of World War I, he strove to maintain both an Irish and a British attitude. He condemned the rebellion, while bitterly denouncing the repression. Neither event interfered with his commitment to recruitment of forces for the war. From 16 May 1914 he was a senior army chaplain in Queensland. In Dublin during the Irish Civil War in 1922 he strongly condemned de Valera's refusal to accept the treaty—significantly, in the company of the Anglo-Irish Bernard Shaw, Sir John Lavery and Oliver St John Gogarty. Appointed C.M.G. in 1954, he willingly became, in 1959, the first Roman Catholic archbishop in Australia to accept a knighthood (K.C.M.G.). Moreover, Duhig's experience was more continental than that of Mannix. During the 1930s and 1940s he was the champion of Italian migration, and he provided for the religious care and assimilation into the community of the great post-war migrant flood.

Duhig's kindness and gentleness, his fondness for children, and his compassion, were well known. Prelates from all over Australia joined in the Brisbane celebrations of his silver jubilee in 1930, his golden jubilee as a priest in 1946, and his episcopal golden jubilee in 1955. His several trips to Europe and America culminated in his leading the Australian pilgrimage to Rome in 1950. President of the Brisbane branch of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia in 1926-38, he was awarded the Thomson Foundation gold medal in 1941. He was a member of the Senate of the University of Queensland in 1917-65 and received honorary doctorates of laws from the universities of Queensland (1947) and Ottawa (1947), and from the National University of Ireland (1955). He was also a substantial art patron and the walls of his home at New Farm were covered with paintings. He died there on 10 April 1965 and was buried in the vault of St Stephen's Cathedral. Most of his estate, valued for probate at £8052, was left to the Church. Of many portraits, one by [Alexander Colquhoun](#) hangs at the University of Queensland and another by William Dargie is held at the Pius XII Seminary, Banyo, Brisbane.

When he was nominated to Rockhampton in 1905 by Pius X, Duhig was the youngest Roman Catholic bishop in the world. When he died, under Paul VI, he had been the longest in office—just a few months short of sixty years. To have led his Church for so long, and been a leader in his State, made him one of the shaping influences on his community.

Source:

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/duhig-sir-james-6034>