

## Bishop James Quinn



James Quinn (1819-1881), Roman Catholic bishop, was born on 17 March 1819 at Rathbane, County Kildare, Ireland, son of Matthew Quinn, farmer, and his wife Mary, née Doyle. Educated at Kelly's School in Dublin, he was entered at the Irish College in Rome by his uncle, Fr John Doyle, and graduated in 1845 with a gold medal from Pope Gregory XVI. After ordination on 15 August 1846 he worked in a parish at Blackrock near Dublin, coping with a cholera epidemic. From 14 June 1850 he was president of St Laurence O'Toole Seminary. As confessor and director of the Sisters of Mercy he visited France in 1854 to investigate continental nursing practices, helped to organize the Mater Misericordiae Hospital, Dublin, and arranged to recruit nursing nuns for the Crimean war.

On 14 April 1859 Quinn was appointed bishop of Queensland. After visiting Europe to recruit clergy and nuns he sailed in the *Donald Mackay* and reached Brisbane on 12 March 1861. He found an enormous diocese, weak in personnel, physical resources and financially in debt. His first attempt to resolve the financial problem by demanding control of educational funds collected in Ipswich parish precipitated a long unedifying quarrel with the pioneer Fr McGinty and influential parishioners like [Patrick O'Sullivan](#), a quarrel which set the tone for his episcopate.

With help from [Mother Mary Vincent Whitty](#) of the order of Mercy he made rapid progress in establishing a Catholic education system, but in alliance with the Anglican [Bishop Tufnell](#) sought without success in 1863-64 to divert the tendency towards secularism in education. Quinn's purchase of the *North Australian* at Ipswich as a propaganda organ in the campaign alienated both friends and enemies, particularly when he stubbornly denied any share in the paper, and increased his financial problems. In 1862, impressed by the possibilities of immigration legislation, Quinn founded his Queensland Immigration Society which brought out ten ships with about 6000 migrants, mainly Irish. The Hibernian flood immediately aroused sectarian hostility, fanned by an unguarded remark of the bishop that the

colony might yet be called 'Quinn's land'; in 1864 the society was dissolved.

Quinn's conception of his episcopal position was exemplified in a statement during the quarrel with McGinty: 'I am a sacred person ... anyone attacking my character commits a most gross and sacrilegious act'. Fired by this ideal, he sought to regulate even the smallest details of his diocese and made countless enemies in the process. He tampered with the internal rule of the Sisters of Mercy and in March 1865 replaced the popular Mother Mary as head of the order by a sycophant who called him 'Pater Noster'. In 1867 six priests withdrew from the diocese and complained to Rome. Despite Quinn's objections, they were permitted to move to the United States.

In 1869 Quinn left for the Vatican Council at Rome. He was elected to two minor commissions of the council, neither of which ever met, and saw something of the Italian attack on Rome. During the council recess he visited Ireland but his efforts to recruit priests for his diocese were foiled by wide circulation of his authoritarian reputation and he had to be content with Italians.

On his return to Brisbane in May 1872 Quinn, suffering from rheumatism, faced new problems. His Italian recruits, already at loggerheads with his administrator, [Dr Cani](#), had complained to Rome. Unlike Mother Mary Vincent Whitty, [Mother Mary MacKillop](#), of the order of St Joseph, refused to submit to Quinn's demand for rigid episcopal control of the order and in 1875 her withdrawal of the order from Queensland aroused violent public controversy both within and without the church. In 1877 another group of dissident priests compiled and circulated a *Syllabus Accusationum* of twenty-one charges against Quinn which included nepotism, intemperance and undue accumulation of land. The syllabus and a counter-petition, the signatures to which were allegedly inspired by pressure from Quinn, were referred by Rome to [Archbishop Vaughan](#) for report. Between 1878 and 1880, Vaughan laboured mightily to find the truth through a personal mission by [Sir John O'Shanassy](#) in 1878 and what was virtually a system of espionage through prominent clerics and laymen. Before the matter was resolved, Quinn fell ill on the way to Hobart and died at Brisbane on 18 August 1881. In a fervour of Irish nationalism after the Daniel O'Connell centenary of 1875, he had taken to calling himself O'Quinn; his death was registered in that form.

Quinn's piety, zeal and energy had never been in doubt, but in his almost monarchical idea of the episcopal office he frequently lost sight of some of the fundamental principles of Christianity. Curiously, he was not bigoted and was often censured by other members of his church for undue familiarity with Protestants. He may have been guilty of nepotism but charges of intemperance and an enormous personal fortune were probably groundless. His will left all his possessions to the church.

Source:

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/quinn-james-4425>