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Papal policy towards conflict in the Australian Catholic missions : the relationship between John Bede Polding, O.S.B., archbishop of Sydney, and the Sacred Congregation, De Propaganda Fide, 1842-1874

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Description

The centralizing trend in the government of the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century ensured that the deeply-divided Catholics of colonial Australia turned to Rome for a verdict on their many disagreements. At the centre of much of this conflict were the English Benedictine monk, the Archbishop of Sydney, John Bede Polding, and his ambitious scheme for a distinctively Australian, socially integrated Catholicism unified by a monastic administrative framework and elevated by monastic...[\[Show more\]](#) spiritual culture. This scheme collided with certain realities of Catholic life in the Australian colonies: rapid growth, a correspondingly urgent need for basic, flexible pastoral structures and a pronounced, increasingly self-conscious Irish complexion. If Polding's vision were to be implemented, the approval of the arm of the papal bureaucracy responsible for the mission territories, the Sacred Congregation de Propaganda Fide, was vital. Polding came closest to this goal in 1842 when the Congregation accepted his proposals for a general reorganization of the Australian Church, including making St. Mary's cathedral, Sydney, a monastic cathedral. At this stage Polding enjoyed considerable prestige at Rome because of his pioneering work. However, his doctrinaire pursuit of the total monastery-centred approach after his return to Australia generated continual friction. He alienated non-Benedictine religious orders and had to face rebellion among his own monks and fierce opposition to his policies from elements of the clergy and laity, often fired by a sense of Irish grievance. As the Sydney Benedictine establishment disintegrated through insufficient recruiting, defections, squabbling and scandal and as complaints and alternative suggestions for the development of the Australian Church mounted up in the Propaganda Congregation, Roman officials became increasingly sceptical about Polding's plans. Apart from occasional minor successes, all of the official decisions made by the Congregation about Australian affairs in the 1850s and 1860s went against Polding's recommendations. Most significantly, Rome rejected his submission that the Archdiocese of Sydney be committed permanently to Benedictine rule and assigned the new bishoprics carved out of the Archdiocese from 1859 onwards to assertive, independent Irishmen totally opposed to Polding's vision of the Australian Church and who, relying on the supreme influence at Rome of their mentor, Cardinal Cullen of Dublin, were able to prevail repeatedly over Polding in competition for Roman favour. At the personal level, the difficulties that Polding encountered in his dealings with Rome were magnified by his strained relationship with Pope Pius IX and the head of the Propaganda Congregation, Cardinal Barnabé. Frustrated by continual, painful disappointments and upset by often unfair and rough Propaganda judgements, Polding steadily lost confidence in the Roman system and had become utterly embittered by the late 1860s. Unexpectedly, by the time of his retirement in 1874 Polding won a notable final victory at Rome by securing the successor of his choice, his fellow English Benedictine, Roger Bede Vaughan. Motivated by an appreciation of the now septuagenarian Polding's pressing need for assistance and worried about domination of the Australian episcopate by the militant Cullenite Irish, Roman policy shifted towards a new balance.

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Church. St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, (1842 - 1909) Australia's first Canonised saint, founder of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart. Mary Gonzaga Barry (1834-1915) Loreto Sister, Mother Superior, educationist. John Brady (circa 1800 – 1871) Bishop of Perth. John Brosnan (1919 - 2003) Priest, prison chaplain. John Cani (1836-1898) Bishop of Rockhampton. Joseph Laurence Ciantar (1893-1967) Salesian priest. Edward Bede Clancy AC (1923 – 2014) Cardinal, Archbishop of Sydney. Thomas Joseph Carr (1839-1917) Archbishop of Melbourne. Eugene James Cuskelly MSC (1924 - 1999) Auxiliary Father John Nestor and Tony Abbott both attended the Sydney's St Patrick's Seminary in the 1980s when Mr Abbott was planning on becoming a priest. Father Nester "was a priest in the Wollongong diocese in NSW when he was charged with the indecent assault of a 15-year-old altar boy in 1991." "Father Nester was convicted in Wollongong Local Court on February 18, 1997, and sentenced to 16 months in jail, with the magistrate describing the case as a "gross breach of trust". What can be said for a fact that since George Pell's conviction a high-profile paedophile support ring has outed itself in the Australian media and some parts of Australian politics and it needs to be investigated. Please use the Twitter, Facebook and email etc. buttons below and help promote this post. Catholic Archbishop, John Bede Polding, was particularly astute in his perception of the failure of the missions: '...In great part, the want of success must be attributed to the bad feeling and want of confidence, naturally caused by the mode in which possession has been taken of their country - occupation by force, accompanied by murders, ill-treatment, ravishment of their women, in a word, to the conviction on their minds that the white man has come for his own advantage And lastly, 7. and 8. The Protectorate has failed, and the native police have failed. The Roman Catholic and Lutheran missions at Moreton Bay are recently abandoned.' (pg.127). Despite their flawed approach, Harris credits the early missionaries for their adamant belief in the essential humanity of Aboriginal people. 2. The young John Bede Polding, fresh from his consecration in 1834 as Bishop of Hiero-Caesaraea and Vicar Apostolic of New Holland. Courtesy: Good Samaritan Archives, Sydney. The ultramontane movement reached its zenith when the Vatican Council in 1870 voted for the dogmas of papal infallibility and universal jurisdiction. Courtesy: Istituto della Storia del Risorgimento Italiano, Rome. Chapter Two Fig. Paul Cullen, Archbishop of Dublin, later a cardinal, strongly influenced Roman thinking about the Australian missions in the 1850s and 1860s. Courtesy: History Multitext Project, University College, Cork. Cardinal Barnabò endeavours to explain to Polding why Gregory was recalled to England. Courtesy: Sydney Archdiocesan Archives. John Bede Polding, first Roman Catholic bishop in Australia (from 1835), where eight years later he became the first archbishop of Sydney. Polding joined the Benedictine order in 1811 and was ordained priest in 1819. Consecrated a bishop, he arrived at Sydney in 1835. There he divided his territory. Thank you for your feedback. Our editors will review what you've submitted and determine whether to revise the article. Join Britannica's Publishing Partner Program and our community of experts to gain a global audience for your work! Share.

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