

***Address at the Launch of
Bishop Matthew Quinn and the Development of Catholic Education in NSW 1865-1885
by Dr Anne Wenhem, Head of College, St Stanislaus College***

I would like to begin today by thanking Bishop Michael for the invitation to speak – it’s an enormous privilege to have been able to have an advance read and to be able to reflect on this new publication. On a number of informal chats with Bishop Michael his love of history comes to the fore so I’m not surprised that he found and realised the significance of Br Brian Sweeney’s unpublished Thesis.

This Thesis was submitted in partial requirement for the honours degree of Master of Arts in Education. I’m not sure what else Br Sweeney would have had to undertake as his scholarship, research and writing is meticulous.

I cite his References:

- Manuscript Material – 11 sources including Cathedral Archives (Bathurst, Brisbane, Goulburn, Sydney) and the Archives of the Sisters of Mercy Bathurst and the Sisters of St Joseph Perthville
- Printed Material – official and semi-official documents – 10
- Books and pamphlets – 41
- Articles – 11
- Newspapers – 4 including copies of the *Freemans Journal* (Sydney) from 1865 – 1885
- Unpublished Theses and Papers – 3

Through this publication Bishop Quinn’s vision, his work and his legacy on behalf of Catholic education has been brought to life.

In Br Sweeney’s words...

(Bishop Quinn was)...Loved by his own and respected by others, experienced in education, and dedicated to religion, Quinn was the man to establish a system of education. In a sense Matthew Quinn was the right man for the moment.

On my first reading, I was struck by how much about the man himself, whose Episcopal Motto was Mergimur Nunquam – “We never go under” came through.

On my second read, I circled the adjectives...

- Bishop’s Quinn’s personal qualities
 - Courteous
 - Charitable
 - Determined
 - Dedicated
 - Energetic

- Enthusiastic
- Genial
- Gentle
- Kind hearted
- Moderate
- Modest
- Patient
- Pious
- Prudent
- Sincere
- Tactful
- Zealous

As well, he was described as:

- Firm and uncompromising on matters of Catholic education
- Intensely dedicated to the progress and advancement of the Catholic religion
- Possessing faith in his own judgement
- A leader who Inspired confidence
- Possessing a firm conviction of the correctness of his policies and decisions

One observation I made was the amount of travel that Bishop Quinn undertook. We must remember that in 1866 the Diocese encompassed also what is now the Diocese of Wilcannia Forbes and so stretched from the Blue Mountains to the borders of South Australia and Queensland

His powers of endurance in the face of physical hardship must have been extraordinary given travel was on horseback/coach. His first trip was to Bourke during which he broke his arm – that didn't stop him!

His arrival in Bathurst was at a time of enormous challenge to Catholic education in the Diocese

- 1866 *Public Schools Act* – this was contentious and there were serious implications for Catholic school autonomy and identity (nb Bishop Michael introduction to the book). This was to become law on January 1st 1867 and it moved to give greater control of the state over all schools... in the words of Henry Parkes – *to put a stop forever to the interference of the clergy in school management !*
- This Act foreshadowed passage of the *Public Instruction Act*, introduced into Parliament, again by Parkes in 1879 that signalled the withdrawal of state aid to denominational schools by 1883.
- (My personal reflection on Parkes... I was educated by the nuns who spoke with disdain about the man who did harm to Catholic education. He was the historical figure “we didn't talk about”)

Bishop Quinn's Legacy to Catholic Education was and is enormously significant: A system of Catholic education for the Diocese of Bathurst and for the whole of the colony – a system independent of the state system, operating without government funding

HOW? Br Sweeney's writing focuses on the how...

- Laity – he inspired a unity of purpose, confidence and enthusiasm for the cause of Catholic education with the laity
- Bishops – in working with the Bishops he urged unity – which resulted in the *Joint Pastoral Letter of the Archbishop and Bishops exercising Jurisdiction in NSW 1879*. A brief overview shows its importance with its condemnation of secularist education, an emphasis on the necessity for all Catholic parents to provide their children with a Catholic education and the recommendation for the removal of all Catholic children from Public schools where practicable.

During this time Bishop Quinn's focus was on the following:

- Finding religious to staff schools
- Ensuring quality teaching with appropriate oversight – to ensure credibility and quality
- Resourcing of Catholic schools – through commitment to funding by laity

Within 20 years...The 'system' in his Diocese – built up over that time – had resulted in an orphanage, primary schools, secondary schools, boarding and day, girls and boys, convents, seminary, novitiates, model schools for the training of teachers

My joy in reading this book has been learning about Bishop Quinn, particularly through his spoken words and writings:

- As he commenced his leadership of a calculated campaign to convince all about the primacy of Catholic education he was quoted thus *"we are ready to make (sacrifices) and to take on the whole burden of the education of our children on ourselves if the State will not give us free and unfettered action in this matter (1867)*
- He summed up their shared achievement when he was welcomed to Forbes in 1882: *We are proud that in all Australia there is no diocese better provided with means of religious worship and religious education*

During these years he faced enormous challenges and public criticism, particularly in the media...

He exhorted all with whom he worked and whom he led – to show moderation and charity to others. In his words...

I would rather cut off my right hand than say one word that would be offensive to any member of the community

I finish with a reflection on Bishop Quinn's Legacy to Stannies

- He arrived in Bathurst in November 1866

- Jan 1867: He opened a high school for boys in Bathurst attached to the Catholic Boys Certified Denominational School – St Stanislaus High School – under the direction of Mr Michael McGirr,
 - Curriculum: Latin, French, Greek, Mathematics and higher branches of English literature with a view to preparing the students for matriculation for University entry and for commercial pursuits.
 - It became a College some months later when boarders were accepted. They lived in a house in George St under the care of Mr and Mrs McGirr. As more boarders came, they moved along George St to a larger house.
 - The College transferred to its present site in 1873.
- Bishop Quinn also established a Seminary on the College site – St Charles Ecclesiastical Seminary 1875 – 1891: 27 became priests and 2 became NSW Bishops
 - In January 1867 Bishop Quinn expressed his hope for the College:

It is the earnest wish of my heart that before many years have elapsed, the brightest laurel and proudest boasts of the young men of my diocese, shall be to have been educated at St Stanislaus High School

A modern day Insight into teacher expectations has been captured by Br Sweeney: In the Memorandum of Agreement drawn up between the President of the College and a Mr Joseph P Buggy, teacher (1874)

1. *Salary 80 pounds per year payable monthly*
2. *To retire to bedroom at 10.00 o'clock and to have no light after that hour except in case of necessity*

In 1882 – 15 years after it commenced, Bishop Quinn, reflected on St Stanislaus College saying:

I have always borne a love towards it like that of a parent for a child. From year to year it has progressed, and now I think, either materially as a building, or intellectually as a place of education, it is second, perhaps to none, but certainly, it is second to very few in these colonies.

Bishop Quinn died at St Stanislaus on 16 January, 1885 at the close of the annual Retreat of the clergy

His impact on the Diocese of Bathurst was immense:

- On arrival in 1866 - 6 priests, 5 churches, 5 chapels, 7 schools and 492 students,
- By 1885 - 28 priests, 43 new churches, 86 sisters of Mercy, 106 sisters of St Joseph, 4,000 students in 56 schools,

On his death, the editorial in *Freeman's Journal* included the following reflection:

As a single individual he was perhaps the greatest benefactor to the work of Catholic education that this country has ever seen

As the Diocese celebrates its 150 years I commend Br Sweeney's book as a record of the legacy, particularly to Catholic education, of our first Bishop, Matthew Quinn.