



Archbishop James Duhig: Limerick 1871 – Brisbane 1965

by T. P. Boland.



An Australian in Ireland is likely to be asked about Archbishop Daniel Mannix. His vigorous campaigning for the Irish cause is remembered. People – in Australia as well as Ireland – think of him as not only the leader of that campaign but also typical of it. This is not so. Among Chrchmen Archbishop James Duhig of Brisbane (1917 - 1965) is a case of another powerful strain.

Daniel Mannix was born in 1864 near Rathluirc, Co. Cork. James Duhig was born in 1871 at Killila, near Broadford, Co. Limerick. Both were on the border of Limerick and Cork. Only 15 miles separated their places of birth. In Australia this would have made them neighbours, but Mannix remained a Corkman for just under 100 years and Duhig a Limerickman for 93. He came to Australia as a boy in 1885, Mannix as a middle-aged man in 1913. Duhig discovered among the students of the Irish College in Rome in the 1890s that he was Australian. It was their custom to drink toasts at Christmas time to the men of the four provinces of Ireland. He thought he was included in the Munster toast, but found that he was expected to speak to a fifth, Ireland Over the Seas. He learned the lesson. More successfully than Mannix, he made the transition to being Australian, but Limerick was in his heart.

When he was born to John Duhig and Margaret, née Barry (of Tullylease across the Cork border), his father worked a small holding at Mt. Plummer (Killila). There were three brothers and two sisters older than himself. Another sister was born subsequently. In his earliest years the district suffered acute distress, and John Duhig died of famine fever when James was four years old. The family ensured that he was buried at Killeedy, around the ruins of the church of the Limerick Patron, St. Ita. When he became Archbishop of Brisbane, James named one of his first churches (at Dutton Park) St. Ita's. In 1909, as Bishop of Rockhampton, he visited his home village and arranged for a notable monument to be raised over his father's grave.

The family struggled to maintain themselves on the land, but they were early victims of the land wars of the 1880's. Evicted from their farm, they went first to Middlesborough in the north of England, then a boom town in

the iron and steel trade. There they made enough money to be able to emigrate. One brother went to Chicago, another brother and two sisters to Brisbane, Australia. For some time Mrs. Duhig and the three younger children lived in a tiny store in Broadford. It was here that James learned simple principles of village economy that he put into effect with vast sums of money on the other side of the world. Though now in Broadford, he did not go back to the village national school, but to one in neighbouring Ashford. He maintained a lifelong friendship with the teacher there. During his years in England he attended school in Middlesborough. With his mother, his brother Patrick and his younger sister Ellen, he sailed for Australia in 1885.

In Brisbane the young Duhig worked for five years in the city. After a spell at

the Christian Brothers' St Joseph's College, Gregory Terrace, he went to Rome to study for the priesthood at the Irish College. Ordained in 1896, he returned to Brisbane in 1897. After eight years pastoral experience, he was made Bishop of Rockhampton in 1905. At that time the diocese included the territory of the present see of Townsville. For some years he did the visitation work of the aged Robert Dunne, Archbishop of Brisbane (including the present diocese of Toowoomba). This vast area introduced him to the problem of all Australian activity, the tyranny of distance. He did not find it a tyranny. He loved the limitless plains of the Queensland West, the kingdom-sized cattle and sheep stations and the broad minds and hearts of the Westerners. He developed a passion for travel that never left him.

He also developed a knowledge of the State of Queensland that few could



... the slim, young James, then Bishop of Rockhampton...



Villagers lead Duhig home from Mass, led by the Archbishop Duhig Band, Broadford, Co. Limerick, 1950.

equal. Especially in the earlier years of his episcopate he spoke regularly on public issues on which his experience gave him valuable information. He believed that his position as archbishop gave him the obligation to serve the whole community, not just his Roman Catholic flock. In his sixty years as bishop in Queensland he was respected by citizens of all faiths and of none in his service to the people.

The Church to which he became pastor in 1917 was still oriented towards Ireland, but it was not Irish. From the first, he urged the Catholics of his diocese to think of themselves as Australian first, while maintaining their pride in Irish origins and following closely developments in the struggle for Irish autonomy.⁽¹⁾ He saw Australia as a British community in which Irish men and women of his class had found opportunity not open to them in Ireland. He saw opportunity for equality – not automatically realised – for the Church of most Irishmen. He wanted all those opportunities for Irishmen in Ireland. He believed they could be enjoyed by Irishmen there, if the kind of British justice he enjoyed in Australia could be extended to Ireland. Like most Irish-Australians of his time, he believed this equity would flow from Home Rule for Ireland. In this movement he believed that Ireland's problems would be solved without any

threat to the harmony of British-Australian society in Brisbane.

1917 was not a happy year for an Irish-born archbishop to take over leadership in Australia. The atmosphere of hyper-British patriotism of the First World War created suspicion of the loyalty of a Church associated with Ireland. This was intensified by the Easter Rising of 1916. It reached fever pitch in the conscription referenda of 1916 and 1917, in which Archbishop Daniel Mannix and Queensland Roman Catholic Premier, T.J. Ryan, opposed the Empire loyalists. Duhig, who had publicly advocated recruitment for the volunteer forces, adopted a position of silent neutrality in the national debate.⁽²⁾ Community harmony was his overriding public objective. He did not want his Church alienated from the general community, and he did not want division with his own Church. He was aware that one third of his flock were of what he called "the Conservative interest".⁽³⁾ Mannix either was not aware of this or did not care. The divisions inside and outside the Church he created still exist, at least, in memory. Duhig's problem was with the minority of Irish zealots in his own city who shared Mannix's views. For some years he needed diplomacy and a delicate step to maintain the harmony he desired.

The Anglo-Irish war inflamed Austra-

lian Irish opinion. Duhig himself found it impossible to contain his own indignation at the tactics of the government forces. At the same time he objected equally to the same tactics on the Irish side – a stand few Australian bishops were prepared to take.⁽⁴⁾ It did not win him the approval of those clergy and laity in Brisbane whose loyalty to Sinn Féin was without discrimination. In particular, he did not share Daniel Mannix's increasingly republican inclination. Mannix's triumphant tour of the United States in 1921 did not please him in the stridency of its anti-British tone. When the Royal Navy arrested Mannix on the high seas, Duhig did not protest with any vigour.

He visited Ireland himself in the worst days of 1922. He was appalled to find in the newspapers accounts of fighting in his own County Limerick. In Australia he had avoided taking sides. His object was harmony within the British community and within his Church. From distant Brisbane it seemed that the Treaty, imperfect as it was, provided the basis for such harmony in Ireland. He could not accept civil war as an alternative. In Dublin he said so publicly. Various newspapers reported his statements. The *Catholic Herald* reported him as saying: "Australia will have no sympathy for the Irish Irregulars".⁽⁵⁾ The *Irish Times* seized on his remarks to denounce de



Valera. (6)

On his way to visit his native village he stayed some time with Bishop Daniel Fogarty of Killaloe. There he heard of the national occupation of Newcastlewest on 8th August and of Dromcolliher the following day. Bishop Fogarty forbade him to travel further into the disturbed countryside, but he wished to see old friends. (7) While he was there, he heard of the death of Arthur Griffith. He returned to Dublin for the State Funeral. Mr. Seamus Browne of Broadford, then a schoolboy, saw him pacing the station at Athlone, waiting for his irregular journey to continue. In the pro-Cathedral he knelt in the sanctuary and was sketched among the prelates by Sir John Lavery. (8)

After the Requiem Mass, he was introduced to Michael Collins by their mutual friend Bishop Fogarty. The influence of the strong Fogarty and the legendary Collins charm made him more firmly partisan than before. This intensified his grief when, such a short time later, he knelt again in the same sanctuary, while Bishop Fogarty celebrated the Requiem for Michael Collins. He always regarded de Valera as ultimately responsible, and it was thirty years before he could deal with him in courteous fashion.

During this time he became friendly

with some of the Anglo-Irish leaders. His successor in Rockhampton, Bishop Shiel, was acquainted with the Earl of Fingall. Duhig stayed at Kileen and dined with Oliver St John Gogarty, more than once, at Ely Place and at Kilteragh with Sir Horace Plunkett. On one occasion George Bernard Shaw was a fellow guest. He was convinced that these people ensured the future of the Free State, the status of Ireland that he saw as a parallel to the conditions he found desirable in Australia. Their friendship cost him dear in the next months at home, and he regretted the destruction of their houses and their position. (9)

He returned to Brisbane in January, 1923, only to find that his city and his Church were divided in a way he tried to avoid. The sensational style of Archbishop Mannix had won many to the cause of de Valera. He declared that Ireland was now a nation once again, and that it was for Australians to turn their minds to their own problems. (10) His views were accorded scant respect in the Brisbane Catholic newspapers. (11) Mannix would not let the issue drop. Two representatives of de Valera, known in Australia as the Republican Delegates, arrived in Melbourne in time for the St Patrick's Day celebrations. They were on a tour to raise support in Australia and the United States

in the manner of the Home Rule envoys of an earlier time. Mannix was practically alone among the hierarchy in his recognition of de Valera, and the other bishops resented what they presumed was a covert use of the Church in a factional Irish affair. They had not been consulted in a matter that would have critical impact within and without. They were outraged and sought the intervention of the Apostolic Delegate. The de Valera representatives were J.J. O'Kelly, editor of the *Catholic Bulletin*, and Father Michael O'Flanagan, a former vice-president of Sinn Féin. The Apostolic Delegate's only aid to the bishops was a document of dubious relevance, which forbade European missionaries to intervene in the politics of their missionary countries in the interests of European power. It had no deterrent effect on Fr. O'Flanagan, let alone Mr. O'Kelly. Duhig refused to receive them in Brisbane, but they came anyhow and were well received by young Catholic laymen and some clergy. However, they managed to alienate even those enthusiastic supporters by intemperate attacks, on not only the Australian and Irish bishops, but also the Pope. They left for Sydney, where they were deported on 16th July, 1923, for inciting sedition against a British Dominion, the Irish Free State. Mannix was foiled and Duhig claimed



Return of a native son, complete with an F.C.A. bodyguard, 1950.



Sir William Dargie's portrait of James Duhig (by permission of Sir William Dargie and the Trustees of the Pius XII Queensland Regional Seminary).

the victory in letters to Irish friends, including President Cosgrave.⁽¹²⁾ The end of the Civil War was also the end of the Irish Australian polemics. It was also the end of the Duhig-Mannix sniping across the Cork-Limerick border. Their views on Church and Australian affairs were generally the same. They grew old together as the two strong pillars of the Australian Church.

Like his Melbourne fellow-archbishop James Duhig lived to a great age. In his fifty years in Brisbane he was responsible for raising over four hundred buildings in his diocese. He was known to the whole community as James the Builder. Brisbane is a city of hills, on each of which he aimed to build a noble church. He succeeded well enough to impose the image of his Church on his city. His dream was to cap it all by reorienting the city itself on a new, grand cathedral. It was to be called Holy Name. On 18th September, 1928, he had the satisfaction of seeing Cardinal Boraventura Cerretti lay the foundation stone as Papal Legate. In fact, there were two stones. The cardinal placed one over a capsule containing soil from the catacombs in Rome. The Archbishop of Tuam, Dr. Gilmartin, representing the Irish hierarchy, low-

ered another on a capsule containing soil from the four provinces of Ireland. It was an appropriate piece of symbolism from one sprung from the soil of Munster. It declared the foundations of the faith of the mainly Irish-Australian Roman Catholics of Brisbane.

The depression of the 1930s and the Second World War stopped him visiting Ireland. As soon as travel became possible again, he was in Ireland in 1947. In London he had met briefly with Eamon de Valera.⁽¹³⁾ It was not a warm encounter, but it was the beginning of a new relationship. At last, he was able to return to Broadford in peace. He was received with great acclaim as a loyal boy who had made good. In Limerick he met an Irish priest from the diocese of Sale in Victoria. Twenty-five years before the newly ordained Patrick Mary O'Donnell, of Fethard, Co. Tipperary, had stood among the crowd at the funeral of Michael Collins and asked the identity of the tall, handsome prelate with Bishop Fogarty. He did not realise that a quarter of a century later he would become his coadjutor and eventually his successor.

That meeting was of significance. For that quarter of a century James Duhig had fought a particular policy imposed by the Apostolic Delegates in Australia. Applying a Roman policy designed for missionary countries, they had excluded Irish-born priests from the Australian episcopate. Duhig welcomed the nomination of the Australian-born, but he found unjust and unwise the exclusion of talented men just because they were – like himself – born in Ireland. The object of his visit to Europe in 1947 was to put his case directly to the Pope. The consequence was the appointment of Dr. O'Donnell as his coadjutor in the following year. Since then several Irish-born priests have been made bishops in Australia. The meeting in Limerick on 25th September, 1947, reversed a long-established policy.⁽¹⁴⁾

In 1950 he was back again. He had led an Australian National Pilgrimage to Rome for the Holy Year. He followed an



Blessing the flag for the Archbishop Duhig Band, Broadford, 1950.



'The art fancier' (By courtesy of Courier Mail cartoonist, Ian Gall).

audience with the Pope with an unprecedented one, with King George VI at Windsor Castle. He saw this as nailing forever any suggestion of second-class status for his Church. Others saw it in a different light. He went from London to Dublin and on to Cork. There he was to have been met by representatives of his native parish, Dromcolligher, and escorted with honour to Broadford; but news of his reception at Windsor appeared in the Irish papers and the reception was cancelled. He was not received in the parish house, and he stayed with his good friend, Mr. Seamus Browne. On the Sunday of his visit he celebrated Mass in the Broadford church at an altar he donated himself after his visit in 1947. He blessed the instruments – again his donation – of the Broadford Archbishop Duhig Pipe Band. They played him home to Mr. Browne's, where he held a reception for the entire town. During his visit he was invited to take part in a ceremony on the Mass Rock of Monogea. There he blessed an altar on 15th August on the site of Penal Days celebration.

One thousand people ascended the bleak mountainside in intermittent heavy rain. They climbed into cloud. There Duhig awaited them in the mist of time as much as of place. As he unveiled the monument and the Mass commenced, the sun appeared and Co. Limerick, its people, its past, its continuing stock and faith stretched to the edges of sight and memory. Duhig was moved more deeply than at any other

moment of his life. Like Moses on Mount Pisgah, he saw his Promised Land. In it his long life, his land, his faith, his culture and those of the Australian Church he served were in his sight, green, living and enduring. Past, present and future were telescoped into a moment of benediction. Like the elderly Simeon, he had a vision of salvation, and like Simeon he was ready to depart.¹⁵

In fact, he lived another 15 years, full of honours and the affectionate respect of all. He was made a Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George in 1954. Three universities made him an Honorary Doctor of Laws, including the National University of Ireland. He corresponded with President de Valera, all coldness forgotten, with Cardinal d'Alton of Armagh and with successive Ministers or Ambassadors to Australia from Ireland. He played his part in smoothing the difficulties of the Australian government about the designation of Australia's Ambassador to Dublin.¹⁶ His thoughts turned frequently to Irish culture and its place in Australian development. He assisted the Irish Ambassador to Australia, T.J. Kiernan, in his efforts to initiate Irish studies in Australian universities. They managed to set up a system of visiting lecturers which had some distinguished participants – notably Professor Myles Dillon in 1953. To encourage Celtic studies he purchased the Hutton Collection in 1954. It was lodged for

some years with the Augustinian Fathers in Brisbane. The scheme failed after his departure, and the collection is now housed in the National Library in Canberra.¹⁷ During this bicentennial year the Queensland Irish Association is trying to stir interest in the universities again.

Death came to the Archbishop on 10th April, 1965. It was 93 years since he was born in Killila, Co. Limerick. He had travelled a long way from there, but Limerick always stayed in his heart. What he had done, what he had become, he had learned there and in his Limerick family in Brisbane. He is remembered for many things, but he would like to be remembered as a son of Limerick.

References

1. Shortly after his return to Brisbane in 1912 he addressed a regional meeting of the Hibernian Australian Catholic Benefit Society at Esk in these terms. *Catholic Advocate*, 12th June, 1912.
2. His stand has been frequently misinterpreted. I have discussed it in my biography of him. cf. T.P. Boland, *James Duhig*, University of Queensland Press, 1986, pp. 135-138.
3. *The Age*, 13 January, 1917.
4. Pastoral Letter, 6th March, 1921.
5. *Catholic Herald*, 5th August, 1922.
6. *Irish Times*, 29th July, 1922.
7. Duhig to Mrs. Real, Limerick, 10th July, 1924. Letterbook 1924, Brisbane Archdiocesan Archives.
8. Duhig to Mr. Hogan, Cork, 25th August, 1923. Letterbook 1923, Brisbane Archdiocesan Archives.
9. Thirty years ago I saw this picture on display in a Dublin gallery. I did not then realise that Duhig was depicted in it. I have since been unable to relocate it.
10. Duhig to Oliver St John Gogarty, 22nd July, 1924. Letterbook 1924, Brisbane Archdiocesan Archives.
11. Duhig to Sir Horace Plunkett, 22nd July, 1924. Letterbook 1924, Brisbane Archdiocesan Archives.
12. *Brisbane Courier*, 4th January, 1923.
13. There were then two Catholic newspapers in Brisbane, neither controlled by the diocese, *The Age* and the *Catholic Advocate*. For three months Duhig was attacked in their columns.
14. cf. Boland, *James Duhig*, pp. 162-166. I am indebted to the valuable researches of Mr Brian Murphy of Glenstal for information on J.J. O'Kelly and the mission of the Republican Delegates. Dr. Dermot Keogh, of University College, Cork, whose paper on Mannix at the 1987 Dublin Australian-Ireland conference dealt with these issues, kindly showed me his researches on Duhig and President Cosgrave.
15. Duhig to Mannix, 12th February, 1948. Mannix File, Brisbane Archdiocesan Archives.
16. cf. Boland, *James Duhig*, p.p. 221-22; 287-289; 319-321.
17. cf. Boland, *James Duhig*, pp. 340-341.
18. cf. Boland, *James Duhig*, pp. 348-349.
19. cf. Boland, *James Duhig*, pp. 346-347.