

Catholic Synods in Australia, 1844-2011

Peter J Wilkinson

December 2011

Introduction

The *Open Letter to Pope Benedict XVI and the Catholic Bishops of Australia*, prepared by Catholics for Renewal in July 2011, contains the recommendation ‘that each diocesan bishop convene at an early date a synod in his diocese, under the provisions of Canon Law (C.460-468), to discuss how the local Church might be a more authentic witness in the 21st century’¹.

Synods have been an integral part of church governance since the time of the Apostles and have played a key role in how Catholics understand their faith, live it, and confront the issues of their times in the light of their understanding of the Gospel.

Since the establishment of the Catholic Church in Australia in 1834, at least 145 Catholic synods – 3 provincial, 4 plenary and 138 diocesan – have been held throughout the nation. However, in the 46 years since the 2nd Vatican Council (1962-1965) which explicitly called for synods ‘to flourish with new vigour’ (*Christus Dominus*, n. 36), and insisted that the laity have an active role in them, no plenary or

provincial councils or synods have been held, and only five Australian bishops have convened just six diocesan synods. This is a serious concern for many Australian Catholics who feel they have been denied official church forums allowing their voices to be heard and their views to be properly considered.

A tradition of synods

Synods are the earliest and traditional forums for collegial discussion, debate and decision-making in the Church. The first was the Council of Jerusalem around 50 AD recorded in the Acts of the Apostles (Ch. 15) and referred to by St Paul in his letter to the Galatians (Ch. 2). It is the template for all later synods.

The word 'synod' derives from the Greek *syn* meaning 'together' and *hodos* meaning 'road' or 'way' and signifies a 'coming together', 'assembly' or 'meeting'. It is synonymous with the Latin *concilium* or 'council' and in a generic sense the terms are interchangeable. While synods are sometimes called 'councils' all have the characteristics of a synod. Some of the early synods were meetings of bishops only, and ecumenical synods are still understood in this sense, that is, as all the bishops of the world coming together under the presidency of the Pope to discuss and decide matters of faith, morals and discipline. In 1965 Paul VI established the Synod of Bishops, an advisory group serving, with the Pope, the collegiality of the bishops of the world.

There are also 'particular' synods, which can be plenary (national) or provincial. These were held frequently throughout the church from the 2nd century and continued throughout the Middle Ages. They became less frequent after the Council of Trent, but in 1917 the Code of Canon Law, seeking to revitalize them, made special provisions for their celebration (C. 281-292). A plenary council or synod could only be held with the authorization of the Supreme Pontiff, who would designate a delegate to convene and preside over it. Provincial councils or synods were to be convened at least every 20 years. Bishops' conferences or assemblies were also to be held in each province at least every 5 years, to deal with the problems of the dioceses and to prepare for the provincial synod.

There are also diocesan synods which were mandated at the 4th Lateran Council in 1215 AD, reinforced by the Council of Trent, and legislated for in the 1917 and 1983 Codes of Canon Law.

Australian Provincial Synods

The 1917 Code stated that provincial and plenary councils or synods are occasions for the bishops and others attending to 'studiously investigate and discern what things will increase the faith, moderate morals, correct abuses, resolve controversies, and preserve and lead to united discipline, insofar as these things seem opportune in each of their territories' (C.290).

There have been just two provincial councils or synods for the Australian Province (1844 and 1869) and one for the Melbourne Province (1907). The former were convened to establish uniform church legislation for the nascent Catholic Church in the new British colony which reflected the general law of the Church, but was 'flexible enough to allow for local differences' and would enable the Australian bishops, in the face of common problems, to form common policies which 'indicated, with confidence based on experience, methods for solving ... difficulties'².

The 1st Australian Provincial Council was convened by the inaugural Bishop of Sydney, John Bede Polding OSB, and held at St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney on 10-12 September 1844, just two years after the establishment of the Australian hierarchy³. It was called to promote Catholic unity and solidarity in a hostile sectarian environment, as well as to deal with internal organizational issues. Attended by the bishops of Sydney, Hobart and Adelaide and 33 priests of the colony⁴, it was the first Catholic synod held

with public solemnity in the British Dominions since the Reformation. It issued 50 decrees relating to the life and integrity of clerics (based on the Synodal Acts of St Charles Borromeo), the sacraments and preaching, which were presented to Rome in 1847 and approved in 1852⁵. In regulating clerical life this synod recognized the itinerant, missionary nature of the Australian priesthood and, contrary to the Irish practice of distinguishing between parish priests and curates, determined that all priests in Australia should be of equal status, an egalitarian stance that both reflected and significantly influenced clerical life⁶.

It also insisted on the celebration of the Eucharist being the central feature of the Australian mission, together with communion. It instructed travelling priests to always carry the consecrated host, to encourage frequent communion, and to promote individual confession before communion. Through these policies priests not only provided social cohesion to Catholics in dispersed communities, linked them and engendered a sense of belonging, but they also gained huge respect, affection and loyalty, as well as a degree of power. In the process, however, they formed a laity unable to do anything without them⁷. This synod also emphasised the sanctity of marriage, and urged compassion and tact where marriages had been contracted without a priest. But no mention of mixed marriages between Catholics and non-Catholics was made, for although Polding was opposed to them, his principal concern was that Catholics living in *de facto* liaisons should convert them into marriages. He preferred a mixed marriage to no marriage at all.

On 1 November 1862 a follow-up meeting of the bishops of Sydney, Hobart, Melbourne and Brisbane was held in Melbourne. It was not called a council or synod, but it issued a *Supplementum* to the decrees of the 1st Provincial Council, which renewed the *Observanda* promulgated by the Vicar-Apostolic of New Holland and its Dependencies in his Pastoral Letter of the 9th of January 1840, and added 15 articles, mostly concerned with financial matters. Priests (referred to as ‘missionaries’) were admonished to live a frugal life ‘in the mission’, to avoid getting caught up in personal land and stock acquisitions, to keep accurate records of all financial matters, to contribute to the Clerical Annuity Fund, and to stay out of politics⁸.

The 2nd Australian Provincial Council, also convened by Archbishop Polding, was held in St Patrick’s Cathedral, Melbourne on 18-25 April, 1869. Present were the bishops of Sydney, Hobart, Melbourne, Brisbane, Bathurst, Maitland, Adelaide and Goulburn. The Irish bishops had been urging the reluctant English bishop Polding to hold this synod for some time, and were hoping to use it as a means of imposing their ideas and policy on the fast growing Australian church. They had even secured a Roman directive instructing Polding that he must hold the synod⁹.

The decrees of the 2nd Council dealt principally with education, marriage (especially ‘mixed’ marriage), and the sustenance of bishops and priests (‘missionaries’)¹⁰. It defined authoritatively the Church’s position on education, relying heavily on Pius IX’s 1864 *Syllabus of Errors*. It condemned fully state-controlled and purely secular schools, and laid down the principle that education must take place in, and be infused by, a religious atmosphere which would act upon a child’s whole character of mind and heart. It insisted on more than just the direct teaching of Catholic doctrine, and looked for the inter-penetration of a vital Catholic atmosphere in the school and its infusion with a Catholic life and a spirit of prayer. It declared unacceptable any education system that excluded Catholic teaching, practices and atmosphere; it insisted that education was integral to the church’s mission; and it determined not to surrender church authority to the state or anyone else. It declared that the state had no right to interfere with the authority of the Church or to compel parents to violate their consciences by sending their children to schools where an alien religion, or no religion at all, was taught¹¹.

Though Polding had avoided making mixed marriages an issue at the 1844 Provincial Council, by the 1860s the Irish bishops, particularly Bishop Murray of Maitland, had become vehemently opposed to what they saw as a watered-down approach to the issue. Murray considered these marriages so scandalous

that he refused to allow them in his diocese. But when couples went to Sydney to have them recognized, he interpreted it as a threat to his Episcopal authority and the laws of the church. At this Council, therefore, he and other Irish bishops insisted on a strong stance against mixed marriages and the decrees enacted enunciated an unequivocal prohibition which became general policy¹⁹. To instruct the faithful, the bishops ordered an English translation of the decrees to be read in all parishes, which stated: 'In regard to mixed marriages...they are strictly forbidden by the ancient law of the Church, which the Popes have always inculcated.... We reprobate such marriages...[and] feel bound to admonish all Priests to adhere to this doctrine, and that they do not cease to set forth the evils arising from marriages of this kind...[which can proceed only with a written dispensation from the Ordinary and] are to be celebrated outside the Church and without any sacred ceremony....'

The only other provincial synod to be held in Australia was the 1st Provincial Synod [sic] of Melbourne, convened by Archbishop Thomas Carr of Melbourne, and attended by the suffragan bishops of Sale, Sandhurst, and Ballarat together with 18 clerical theological advisors. Held in Melbourne on the 17-24 November 1907, its decrees related essentially to the sacraments and a range of regulatory matters, but with some directed to collections for African slaves and the Propagation of the Faith. It also adopted resolutions regarding the establishment of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine in every parish and the teaching of the Catechism to adults and young people, which the bishops had agreed on in November 1905¹².

Australian Plenary or National Synods

There have been four plenary synods or national councils held in Australia: in 1885, 1895, 1905 and 1937. In many ways these, and the two earlier Australian provincial synods, set the foundations, framework and direction for the national expression of Catholicism in Australia.

The 1st Plenary Council or national synod of the Bishops of Australia and New Zealand was convened, at the invitation of Pope Leo XIII, by Cardinal Moran in 1885, the year after his appointment as Archbishop of Sydney. Held in Sydney on 14-19 November, it was attended by 18 prelates of Australia and New Zealand together with 52 clerical theologians. Under its Order of Business and Rules of Procedure five 'Deputations' were set up to deal with the subjects of faith, discipline, the sacraments, and education, on which 272 decrees (in Latin) were issued¹³. The synod also varied the liturgical calendar to favour Irish and English saints, promoted sodalities and confraternities, called for support for missionary work among the original peoples of Australia and New Zealand, and gave further guidance to the clergy on the 'Life and Integrity of Missionaries' Seven Appendices were attached to the Decrees, including the 19 May 1866 *Instruction from the S.C. de Propaganda Fide on the Election of Bishops in Australia* (Appendix III), two Reports of the Mission among the Aboriginal Peoples in Port Victoria (Benedictine) and Rapid Creek (Jesuit) (Appendix V), and letters of greeting to the Pope, as well as to the Bishops of Germany, the United States, China and Ireland. At the conclusion of the council, the assembled bishops issued a Pastoral Letter (in English) to the clergy and laity of Australian and New Zealand¹⁴, a practice which became standard.

In his early years, Cardinal Moran favoured synods. Because he placed enormous value on unity and authority, he viewed synods as a key means for laying the foundations of a united Australian church modelled on the Church in Ireland, but in a land where Catholics were free. In his determination to impose uniformity of practice and discipline throughout Australia, he used plenary councils to introduce a new era of unity, in which state distinctions would vanish and his vision of a church with a 'national' character, and not just a collection of separate colonial churches, could be implemented.

The 1885 synod, therefore, obliged all Australian Catholic parents to send their children to Catholic schools under penalty of denial of absolution unless they could show good cause. It insisted that every

new parish (called a 'district' or 'mission' until 1932) have as its first priority the building of a Catholic school which could be used for parish Masses until a church was built. It forbade priests to introduce anything new into their religious practices, or to use prayers in the vernacular at any liturgical function. A catechism, based on the Irish *Maynooth Catechism* and which emphasised acceptance of authority and prescribed obligations, was mandated for use in every diocese throughout the nation and, true to the Irish model, promoted a faith and spirituality supported by pious and devotional practices¹⁵.

Cardinal Moran also convened frequent assemblies of all the Australian bishops. However, by 1894 his influence and supervision had become so dominant that his personal wishes came to determine development. Like his uncle, Cardinal Cullen, in Ireland, 'he became the episcopacy' and from 1894 onwards he discontinued the regular advisory meetings of bishops. Though he did convene the 2nd Plenary Council in 1895, regular meetings of the bishops did not begin again until after his death in 1911, and then only following pressure from Rome¹⁶.

The 2nd Plenary Council, convened by Cardinal Moran, was held in Sydney from 17 November to 1 December 1895. It was attended by 23 Australian prelates together with 49 clerical theologians, male religious superiors and an elected delegate of the parish clergy. Four 'Deputations', each consisting of 3 bishops and 9-13 theologians, drew up 344 decrees on the subjects of faith, discipline, the sacraments, and Catholic education, and added 20 appendices covering matters ranging from the Rite of Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament to the election of bishops¹⁷. The synod also addressed the growing secularism and materialism in Australian society and decreed that dances and fancy-dress balls were unbecoming and should not be held under Catholic auspices.

This council also reaffirmed the earlier decrees on mixed marriage and again prescribed the 1869 Pastoral Letter to be read each year in all parishes¹⁸. The prohibition on mixed marriage, which some bishops had originally promoted for the sake of the survival of Catholicism in Australia, had now become fixed policy, was reaffirmed at the Plenary Councils of 1885, 1895 and 1905 and was prosecuted strongly by all the bishops in every diocese. However, it was a policy widely resented and resisted within the Church, regarded by many as an undesirable innovation, probably had little effect on the incidence of mixed marriage - about one in three Catholics entered them - and remained a nagging problem until change came in the 1960s²⁰.

The 3rd Plenary Council, also convoked by Cardinal Moran, was held in Sydney in 1905 and attended by 21 Australian prelates, 12 superiors of male religious orders, and 37 theologians. It issued 371 decrees with 9 appendices, including the 1866 Roman *Instruction on the Election of Bishops in Australia*, an announcement of a reduction to five of the Holy Days of Obligation, and the 1869 decrees on mixed marriage²¹. It also addressed the socialist debate of the time, issuing a statement invoking the social teachings of Leo XIII contained in his 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* on the Condition of Labour²², and discussed Church-State relations and the issue of divorce.

The 4th and last Plenary Council of Australia and New Zealand, delayed for many years due to the Great War and the 1930s Depression, was convoked and presided over by the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Giovanni Panico, at the instigation of Pope Pius XI. During the 32 years since the previous plenary council a great deal of change, in the world and the church, had taken place and this synod was designed to bring local church legislation into line with the 1917 Code of Canon Law, as well as to devise a plan and strategies for confronting the growing influence of Communism in Australia. Meeting in Sydney on the 4-12 December 1937, the synod was attended by 33 Australian and New Zealand prelates, 22 theologians, 17 priests from various dioceses, and 16 superiors of male religious congregations. It enacted a total of 685 decrees dealing with issues of faith, clerics, religious and laity, the sacraments, sacred places and times, the liturgy, teaching, and education²³. Eighteen appendices were added to the decrees, including a Joint Pastoral Letter outlining the local church's achievements and concerns²⁴.

The most significant outcome of the 1937 synod was the establishment of a National Secretariat of Catholic Action proposed by Archbishop Mannix of Melbourne. This quickly led to the inauguration of four organizations which had a huge and lasting influence on Australian Catholic youth: the Young Christian Workers (YCW), the Young Christian Students' Movement, the National Catholic Girls' Movement, and the National Catholic Rural Movement. All flourished, particularly in Victoria, and made a generation of young Catholics acutely aware of justice and equity in their world of work and in society at large. But they also exposed a division between Melbourne and Sydney on how Catholic Action should be structured and to what extent it should be under episcopal and clerical control. While Sydney preferred parish and diocesan lay organizations controlled by the clergy, Melbourne wanted the laity to have more initiative and autonomy²⁵.

It was also the 1937 synod that changed the procedure for the selection of new bishops. The Irish bishops wanted to prevent the local Australian clergy from electing their own bishops. At the time it was Vatican policy to appoint Australian-born priests as bishops, thus reducing the influence of the Irish bishops; but at this synod the senior priests lost their right to vote in a formal election process, and instead the bishops would consult only their senior advisers and draw up a list of candidates for the Apostolic Delegate²⁶. The synod also reminded bishops of their obligation to hold diocesan synods (Decree n. 102) and reaffirmed the standing policy of prohibiting mixed marriages introduced by the 1869 Council.

In the 74 years since 1937 no other plenary synod or national council has been held.

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

The bishops of Australia have not always relied on synods or councils to formulate policy or to make pastoral decisions. From the earliest years the bishops met frequently to develop plans, discuss common problems and to offer mutual advice. Over the years, but especially since the improvement of communications, they have organized national meetings regularly. However, in 1976, following the recommendation of Vatican II's Decree *Christus Dominus* (n. 37-38) on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, they established the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) as a permanent institution. It is the assembly of the bishops of Australia exercising together certain pastoral offices for Christ's faithful in Australia (C. 447), and its members are all the local Ordinaries of every rite, coadjutors, auxiliaries, and other titular bishops who perform a special work entrusted to them by the Apostolic See or the Conference. The ACBC has a Permanent Committee and 12 Commissions dealing with governance, ministry and the various apostolates of the Catholic Church in Australia²⁷. The ACBC meets in Plenary Session at least once each year and receives input from the clergy, religious congregations and the lay leaders of many organizations. While its plenary meetings are not called synods, *Christus Dominus* refers to the Episcopal Conference as 'a kind of council' (n.38, 1), as it functions with many of the characteristics of a synod. Nevertheless, the Episcopal Conference is not intended to take the place of particular councils or synods, and separate sections of the Code of Canon Law make this quite clear.

Regional or Continental Synods

While the 1st Plenary Council of 1885 and the 4th Plenary Council of 1937 included the bishops of Australia and New Zealand, it was not until 1998 that the 1st Special Assembly of Oceania for the Synod of Bishops, better known as the Synod for Oceania, convoked by John Paul II and held in Rome, brought together 117 bishops from the wider region of Oceania. It was one of five continental synods convened to discuss *inter alia* the original peoples 'who in a unique way evoke aspects of human prehistory, as well as the encounter of Christianity with the most ancient forms of religion' (*Tertio Millenio Adveniente*, n. 38). While the synod produced a final document titled *Ecclesia in Oceania*²⁸ and with *communio* as its leitmotif, it has been largely forgotten. It was another document, the *Statement of Conclusions*²⁹, prepared

during the synod and critical of the inroads made by secularism in Australia and New Zealand, which has become the synod's most memorable legacy. Though this synod did not take place in Australia it should, nevertheless, be considered as one very much related to the Church in Australia.

Diocesan Synods

Diocesan synods are, according to Canon Law, assemblies of priests, religious and lay members of Christ's faithful at the local Church level which, for the good of the whole diocesan community, assist the local bishop in the governance of the community³⁰. They are solemn manifestations of the communion between bishop, clergy, religious and laity in the local church, and forums which allow a broad spectrum of Catholics living in a diocese to express their voice on matters proposed by the bishop and important to the local church. They are official instruments for effecting renewal, for shaping the pastoral activities of the local church, for lending continuity to local liturgical, spiritual and disciplinary traditions, and for reviewing existing diocesan pastoral plans and programs and proposing new ones.

Since the 4th century diocesan synods have been preeminent instruments for formulating laws and pastoral policies in local churches. The 4th Lateran Council in 1215 AD decreed that each diocese should hold a synod annually, a rule reaffirmed by the Council of Trent in 1563³¹ and not changed until 1917 when the Code of Canon Law required all dioceses to hold a synod every 10 years³². However, from 1215 until 1917 diocesan synods were typically clerical assemblies with no lay input, and they remained that way until the 2nd Vatican Council gave back to the laity a participative and consultative role. Since 1983 bishops are obliged to invite to a diocesan synod not only clerics (*ex officio*, elected or nominated) and religious superiors, but also laypersons and other religious either elected or nominated by the bishop. The bishop may even invite as 'observers' ministers or members of other Christian traditions. Since 1983 the diocesan bishop, after consulting his Council of Priests, may convene a synod for his local church whenever he believes it opportune³³.

Canon Law states that at a diocesan synod 'all proposed matters are subject to the free discussion of synod members during synod sessions' (C. 465), which may be multiple and run over several years. In preparing the agenda the bishop should also afford all the faithful of the diocese the opportunity to express their needs, desires and opinions. He should also ask his clergy, separately, to formulate their proposals on the pastoral challenges confronting them. However, the 1997 *Instruction on Diocesan Synods*³⁴ insists that the bishop must exclude from synod discussions theses or positions not in accord with the traditional doctrine of the Church or the Magisterium, or matters reserved to the Pope or to other ecclesiastical authorities. It also advises that it would not be prudent indiscriminately to place on the agenda matters concerning the life and ministry of clerics.

At a diocesan synod it is the convening bishop alone who presides and has a deliberative vote; other participants have only a consultative vote. The bishop is the sole legislator at the synod, and he alone can sign synod declarations and decrees and authorize their publication. Diocesan synod decrees which are contrary to superior law, namely, the universal law of the Church, the general decrees of particular Councils and of the Conference of Bishops and the general decrees of the meeting of the bishops of a Province in matters of its competence, will be invalid http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cbishops/documents/rc_con_cbishops_doc_20041118_diocesan-synods-1997_en.html - ftn64.

Diocesan Synods in Australia

Since 1834 there have been at least 138 diocesan synods in Australia (Table 1)³⁵.

Table 1: Catholic Diocesan Synods in Australia 1844-2011

Diocese	Established	Years when Diocesan Synods held	Total
Adelaide	1842	1885,1889,1908,1916,1945	5
Armidale	1862	1873, 1949, 1951	3
Ballarat	1874	1881,1885,1889,1890,1892,1894,1899,1900,1901,1902,1906,1909,1910, 1944	14
Bathurst	1865	1883,1886,1893,1894,1895,1896,1902,1903,1904,1905,1906,1911	12
Brisbane	1859	1863,1864,1865,1870(?),1883,1885,1887, 2003	8
Broken Bay	1986	2011-current	1
Broome	1966	Nil	0
Bunbury	1954	1961	1
Cairns	1941	(1 st & 2 nd : 1949-1967?), 2008-2011(3 rd)	3
Canberra & Goulburn	1862	1871,1885,1888,1949,1989, 2004	6
Darwin	1938	Nil	0
Geraldton	1898	Nil	0
Hobart	1842	1885,1910,1916	3
Lismore	1887	1889,1920,1948,1958	4
Maitland-Newcastle	1847	1873, 1927(13 th), 1939 (14 th), 1956 (15 th), 1992-1993, [Pastoral Assembly in 2007]	16
Melbourne	1847	1875,1885,1887-1906 (3 rd - 21 st ; annual),1909 -1916 (22 nd -29 th ; annual)	29
Parramatta	1986	Nil	0
Perth	1845	1850 (?),1940, [Synod of Laity in 2001]	2
Port Pirie	1887	1890, 1950s (?)	2
Rockhampton	1882	1959	1
Sale	1887	1898,1901,1905,1906	4
Sandhurst	1874	1881,1888,1893,1901,1948 (3 rd)	5
Sydney	1842	1873,1882,1886,1887,1888,1890,1891,1895,1896,1936,1941,1942,1951	13
Toowoomba	1929	1948, [Gatherings/Assemblies in 1998,2001,2004,2007,2011]	1
Townsville	1930	1948, 1958 (2 nd)	2
Wagga Wagga	1917	1942, 1952	2
Wilcannia-Forbes	1887	1890 (1 st)	1
Wollongong	1951	[Diocesan Consultations in 2010]	0
Total			138

Sources: *Acta et Decreta* of various synods (see Synod Documents attached); *Summary and Index to The Advocate 1868-1990* (see 'Synods'); *Freeman's Journal 1850-1932*; *Catholic Times 1877-1880*; *[Bathurst]Record*; information supplied by various diocesan archives; O'Farrell (1977, see Index for Councils and Synods)

Those held before Vatican II typically were gatherings of clerics only, usually taking place at the conclusion of the diocesan priests' annual retreat, with the bishop presiding. They usually coincided with the annual canonical examination of newly ordained priests on their knowledge of theology and church law. In some dioceses synods were held annually, in others very infrequently, and in several not at all. The dioceses which held the most synods were Melbourne (29), Maitland-Newcastle (16), Ballarat (14), Sydney (13), Bathurst (12) and Brisbane (8).

Since Vatican II and the publication of the 1983 Code, which allows a bishop, after consulting his Council of Priests, to convene a diocesan synod whenever he considers it opportune, just 5 bishops of Australia's 28 territorial dioceses have convened a collective total of 6 diocesan synods: two in Canberra & Goulburn, and one each in Brisbane, Broken Bay (current), Cairns and Maitland-Newcastle. However, during the same period, 4 Australian bishops have also convened 8 non-canonical assemblies, including 5 'Diocesan Gatherings or Assemblies' in Toowoomba, one 'Diocesan Assembly' in Maitland-Newcastle, a

series of ‘Diocesan Consultations’ in Wollongong³⁶ and a ‘Synod of the Laity’ in Perth, all with elements of a diocesan synod, but without the canonical restrictions.

A clear problem with canonical synods is setting the agenda, especially since the 1997 *Instructions* explicitly forbid bishops to allow for discussion on a range of difficult issues likely to be raised by the faithful, such as the ordination of married men and women, birth-control within marriage, homosexuality and other serious pastoral and liturgical matters considered ‘hot-button topics’ and which most bishops consider outside their competence and beyond the scope of a canonical diocesan synod. The planning for the current Broken Bay Synod highlights this difficulty³⁷.

When to hold a diocesan synod

While a bishop, after consulting his Council of Priests, may convene a diocesan synod whenever he considers it opportune, the 1997 *Instruction* makes several suggestions when that might be.

The first is when a bishop decides to prepare a Pastoral Plan for his diocese. It could also include when a pastoral plan, already in operation, is in need of review or refreshment to ensure that it meets the changed circumstances of the diocese. The need to formulate an entirely new plan may also be an opportune time. While many Australian dioceses have pastoral plans, few have been developed or reviewed using a diocesan synod.

The second is when a crisis emerges in the diocese which requires urgent and significant pastoral, administrative or disciplinary change. Many Australian dioceses currently face such crises, especially those to do with the acute shortage of locally-sourced priests to celebrate the Eucharist, the need to close or amalgamate parishes, and the wisdom of recruiting priests and seminarians from other countries. A diocesan synod would clearly be the most appropriate forum for dealing with such issues, yet, to date, very few Australian bishops have convened them for this purpose.

The third is when the knowledge gained from the bishop’s own pastoral visitation suggests it is opportune.

Another opportune time would be when a new bishop is to be appointed. This could be when an incumbent bishop tenders his resignation or approaches canonical retirement age, or the pastoral demands of a diocese suggest the need for an auxiliary bishop. The appointment of a new bishop is a time of grace for any diocese, but also a time when gathered together in synod the clergy and laity of a diocese - or province - are able to discern the needs of their community, describe the type of person they need as their bishop, and, if possible, identify those among the clergy who might be suitable for this office and ministry. During the first millennium, it was often at synods that clergy and people, assembled with their archbishop and other bishops of the province, selected a new bishop³⁸. In the 5th century, Popes Celestine I and Leo I both insisted on the right of the faithful to elect their bishop and condemned any attempt to impose a bishop without their consent. Celestine I wrote: ‘The one who is to be head over all should be elected by all. No one should be made a bishop over the unwilling...’³⁹.

Conclusion

Synods are the oldest form of collegial governance in the church. They are assemblies which highlight the unity and collegiality of bishops among themselves and with the Bishop of Rome and which allow and encourage a true expression of the principle of subsidiarity. They are forums where truth is sought and given expression, where guidance of the Spirit in understanding the ‘signs of the times’ is received, and where fresh hope for justice and peace in the world can be discovered and shared.

Since earliest times, local church synods have been encouraged, regulated and mandated. In local or particular churches, plenary, provincial and diocesan synods, operating on the principle of subsidiarity, have a special role in ensuring that the church is deeply planted among the local people, their culture, cherished customs, and societal values. Synods can have a unique function in discovering how a local church in its territory can embrace the best of local values and traditions, and communicate the gospel message in a language which the local people can readily understand and make their own.

According to the 1983 Code, particular councils or synods can be called at any opportune time to ensure that the pastoral needs of the People of God are provided for. With their power of governance, especially legislative power, but always without prejudice to the universal law of the Church, these synods are able to decide what seems opportune for the increase of the faith, the organization of common pastoral action, the regulation of morals and the common ecclesiastical discipline to be observed, promoted, and protected (C. 445).

Up until 1917 Australia's local ordinaries were under an obligations to convene a diocesan synod every year and from 1917 to 1983 at least once every 10 years. If all the bishops of Australia's territorial dioceses had followed these rules strictly, they should have convened some 900 diocesan synods prior to 1917, and a further 140 from 1918 to 1983, a total of 1040 diocesan synods. However, by 1983 they had convened less than 140. And of all those recorded, 95 percent were held prior to Vatican II.

The 1917 Code did not specify how often a plenary or national synod should be held, but the 1983 Code states that a plenary council can be celebrated whenever it seems necessary or useful to the conference of bishops, with the approval of the Apostolic See (C. 439). No plenary synod has been held in Australia since 1937, 74 years ago.

Provincial councils, under the 1917 Code, were to be held at least every 20 years (C. 283). None were held. The 1983 Code says provincial synods are to be held whenever it seems opportune in the judgment of the majority of the diocesan bishops of the province (C. 440). No provincial council or synod has been held since 1983. Indeed, no Australian ecclesiastical province had held a synod since 1907, 104 years ago.

Even allowing for good reasons why synods may have been deferred, postponed or rejected, the record suggests that the majority of Australia's bishops have been less than enthusiastic about local synods, whether plenary, provincial or diocesan, and have even shown disregard for their canonical obligations to hold them. This is clearly evident in some of the metropolitan dioceses, where the most recent diocesan synods were 1951 in Sydney, 1916 in Melbourne and Hobart, 1940 in Perth, and 1945 in Adelaide. Though Vatican II called for synods 'to flourish with vigour', Australia's bishops have overwhelmingly refused to take this call to heart.

Vatican II also called for a change to participation in local synods, wanting to see a wider representation of the faithful involved in their planning and deliberations. Under the current Code, even retired bishops, with a deliberative vote, must be called to particular councils. Also to be called, but with a consultative vote only, are vicars general and Episcopal vicars, superiors of both male and female religious congregations, rectors and certain deans of universities, seminary rectors, and a limited number of priests and laypersons. Provincial councils must also invite two delegates from the cathedral chapter, the council of priests and the pastoral council of each particular church⁴⁰. Diocesan synods are to include clerical, religious and lay members, and even ministers or members of other churches or ecclesial communities, which are not in full communion with the Catholic Church, may be invited as observers (C. 463).

Vatican II sought to restore to the laity full co-responsibility for the mission and ministry of the Church, and it saw particular and diocesan synods as a key instrument for ensuring that their voice be heard and respected at the local level. The Open Letter issued by Catholics for Renewal in 2011 pointed to this and urged Australia's bishops to move in that direction.

While some of Australia's bishops have tried to render the Catholic laity 'docile and pious' and to organize their faith life around devotional practices and total deference to the clergy⁴¹, the law of the Church now insists that Christ's faithful have 'a right and a duty in keeping with their knowledge, competence and position, to manifest to their pastors their views on matters which concern the good to the church' (C. 212.2). Australia's Catholic lay men and women, graced by the Spirit at Confirmation with wisdom, understanding, counsel and knowledge, now want to offer these gifts, enriched by their life experiences, for the good and service of the church. But they need forums where their wisdom, understanding, counsel and knowledge can to be expressed, heard and received. Local synods and councils are the ideal forums.

Archbishop Francis Carroll when announcing the 2004 Diocesan Synod for Canberra and Goulburn, wrote: 'We are speaking to a church that is weary and often discouraged. Many of its members are disillusioned and apathetic. It is speaking in a world that is tense with anxiety about its future, fearful of terrorism and war and desperately in need of a message of hope. In listening and responding we all have a part to play. The Synod seeks to be all inclusive and invites the active participation of all members of our Catholic Church - lay, clergy, religious, married and single, young and old, church-going and non-church going. There is a place for all. It will seek positive interaction with Christians of other traditions and dialogue with the wider Australian society and culture'⁴².

Peter J Wilkinson

December 2011

Notes:

1. The text of the Open Letter can be viewed at www.petitiononline.com/adlim11/petition.html
2. Bourke, D.F. CM, *A History of the Catholic Church in Victoria*, The Book Printer, Australia, 1988; p.198.
3. *Acta et Decreta Conciliorum Primi et Secundi Provincialium Australiensium: et Synodorum Primae, Secundae, Tertiae, Quartae, Quintae, et Sextae Dioecesanarum Melbournensium*, Advocate Office, Melbourne, 1891.
4. Moran, Patrick Francis, *History of the Catholic Church in Australasia*, Oceanic Publishing Co., Sydney, 1896. At p. 439 he lists all the clergy participating at the synod, and states where they are from.
5. Moran, *ibid.*, p.440, notes that Bishop Pompallier of New Zealand arrived in Sydney a few days after the council had ended and asked if he could examine the manuscript of the decrees. When preparing to sail to the Pacific Islands, he mistakenly packed the manuscripts in his luggage and they were not returned to Sydney until 1846. The decrees were approved by the Holy See in 1852, eight years after the council.
6. O'Farrell, Patrick, *The Catholic Church and Community in Australia*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1977, p. 62-63.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

8. *Supplementum. Observanda, Quae addita fuerunt decretis Primi Concilii Provincialis a Reverendissimo Archiepiscopo et Episcopis Congregatis, in Ecclesia Cathedrali Melbournensi, Festo Omnium Sanctorum, 1862.* Published by the Advocate Office, Melbourne with the Decrees of the 1st and 2nd Provincial Councils in 1891. O'Farrell, *op. cit.*, p. 116 and p. 127, mistakenly refers to the 1862 bishops meeting as the 2nd Provincial Council.
9. O'Farrell, *op. cit.*, p. 202.
10. *Acta et Decreta Concilii Plenarii Australasiae, habiti apud Sydney A.D. 1885, a Sancta Sede recognita.* F. Cunninghame & Co. Sydney, 1887.
11. O'Farrell, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-162.
12. *Acta et Decreta Synodi Provincialis Melbournensis Iae apud Melbourne habitae 17-24 Novembris, 1907,* The Advocate Press, Melbourne, 1909.
13. *Acta et Decreta Concilii Plenarii Australasiae, habiti apud Sydney [Die 14 Novembris et sequentibus usque ad Diem 29 Novembris] Anno Domini 1885, a Sancta Sede Recognita,* F. Cunninghame & Co, Sydney, 1887. Appendix III, pp. 140-147; Appendix V, pp. 153-157.
14. *Pastoral letter of the Archbishops and Bishops of Australasia in plenary council assembled to the clergy and laity of their charge.* Pastoral Letter issued by 18 Catholic bishops of Australia and New Zealand at the 1st Plenary Council of Australia, Sydney 1885. Published by F. Cunninghame & Co., Sydney, 1886. 38 pp.
15. O'Farrell, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-242.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 248-253
17. *Acta et decreta Concilii Plenarii Australiensis II., habiti apud Sydney Die 17 Novembris et sequentibus usque ad Diem 1 Decembris, Anno 1895,* F. Cunninghame & Co., Sydney, 1898.
18. *Ibid.* Appendix XIII, pp. 177-181.
19. O'Farrell, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-203.
20. *Ibid.* pp. 204-206 and p. 351-352. Before the 1860s, 30-40 percent of all marriages which took place in Catholic churches were 'mixed'. In 1929, 54 percent of all marriages at St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney were 'mixed'. Up until the 1950s, all the denunciations, the need for dispensations, and the off-putting sacristy arrangements did not deter Catholics from entering mixed marriages, but it did drive many to contract marriages outside the church. In the suburban parish of Croydon (Sydney) between 1924 and 1962, one third of 498 marriages celebrated were 'mixed', and in 80 percent of them the Catholic party was the bride.
21. *Acta et Decreta Concilii Plenarii Australiensis III habiti apud Sydney, Die 2a Septembris et sequentibus usque ad Diem 10am Septembris, Anno Domini 1905,* William Brooks & Co., Sydney, 1907.
22. Murtagh, James G., *Australia: The Catholic Chapter,* Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1959, pp. 141-143.
23. [Concilium Plenarium IV Australiae et Novae Zelandiae habitum apud Sydney a die 4a ad diem 12am mensis Septembris Anno Domini 1937](#), Praeside Excell.mo ac Rev.mo Domine Joanne Panico, Archiepiscopo Tit. Justinianen. Delegato Apostolico, A Sancta Sede Recognitum. Editio Officialis, Printed by The Manly Daily Pty Ltd, Manly, NSW, 1939. 207 pp. Canon 281 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law states that 'several Ordinaries of ecclesiastical provinces can convene a plenary Council, having come with a petition to the Roman Pontiff, who will designate his Legate to convoke and preside over the Council'.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 179-188.
25. O'Farrell, *op. cit.*, pp. 386-387.
26. Vodola, Max, *Simonds: a Rewarding Life,* Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, 1997, p. 32.
27. A detailed background of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference as well as information on its Permanent Committee, Commissions, Secretariats, Offices, Councils, Joint Committee and liaising organizations, is contained in *The Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Australia, July 2011-June 2012,* NCP, Belmont, 2011, pp. 22-27.
28. For the text, propositions, and background to the document, see Gibbs, Philip SVD, *Alive in Christ: The Synod for Oceania and the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea, 1998-2005,* Melanesian Institute, Goroka, 2006
29. The full text of the *Statement of Conclusions* is available at www.vatican.va. At the time of its publication it aroused much controversy. It has recently reemerged in a survey of the views of over 500 Australian Catholic priests. See McGillion, C. and O'Carroll, J., *Our Fathers,* John Garrett Publishing, Melbourne, 2011, pp. 87-90. They note that in early 1999, 75 priests, religious brothers and sisters wrote a letter to the bishops of Australia suggesting that in the light of the *Statement* it might be a good time to convene a synod of Australian Catholics. The suggestion was ignored (p. 89).
30. *1983 Revised Code of Canon Law.* Canons 460-468 deal with diocesan synods. An English translation is available at www.vatican.va
31. Council of Trent, Session XXIV, c, ii, 'De ref.'

32. *1917 Code of Canon Law*. Canons 356-362 cover diocesan synods. Decree 102 of the 4th Plenary Council of Australasia reminded bishops of their obligation under C. 356 to hold synods.
33. *1983 Code of Canon Law*, Canon 465.
34. *Instruction on Diocesan Synods*, Congregation of Bishops and Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Rome 1997, II, A, 1. English text available at www.vatican.va
35. Information on diocesan synods was sought from the archives of all Australian territorial dioceses in 2011 as well as from published sources. A rich source was the *Summary and Index to The Advocate 1868-1990*, Melbourne Diocesan Historical Commission, 2003, compiled by Fr. Kevin Hannan. Other sources were the *Freeman's Journal* (Sydney) 1850-1932, *Catholic Times* 1877-1880 and *Record* (Bathurst).
36. See summary of Consultations and SWOT analysis at www.dow.org.au
37. See Planning Taskforce minutes at www.dbb.org.au
38. *Statuta Antiqua Ecclesiae*, (compiled circa 475 AD); the Second Council of Arles (453-473 AD); the Council of Clermont (535 AD); the Second Third and Fifth Council of Orleans (533, 538, 549 AD); the Third, Fourth and Fifth Councils of Paris (556, 561-562, 614 AD); the Council of Chalons-sur-Saone (647-653 AD).
39. Celestine I, *Epistolae*, 4.5, PL 50: 434-35.
40. 1983 Revised Code, Canon 443.
41. O'Farrell, *op. cit.*, p. 248.
42. Lenten Pastoral Letter, 2001. See 'History of Archdiocese' at www.cg.catholic.org.au

Acts and Decrees of Australian Synods and Councils

A. Provincial Synods and Councils

Acta et Decreta Primi Concilii Provincialis Australiensis habiti in Ecclesia Cathedrali S. Mariae, Sydneinsi, Diebus X., XI., et XII. Septembris, 1844, Advocate Office, Melbourne, 1891.

Supplementum. Observanda, quae addita fuerunt decretis Primi Concilii Provincialis a Reverendissimo Archiepiscopo et Episcopis Congregatis, in Ecclesia Cathedrali Melbournensi, Festo Omnium Sanctorum, 1862, Advocate Office, Melbourne, 1891.

Catholic Church, Province of Australia, Provincial Synod 1862, Melbourne, *The pastoral address of the Most Reverend the Archbishop and of the Right Reverend the Bishops of the Province of Australia in Council assembled*, F. Cunninghame, Sydney, 1862. Signed by Archbishop Polding and the bishops of Hobart, Melbourne and Brisbane. O'Farrell (1977: 126-127) mistakenly believed this was the 2nd Provincial Council.

Acta et Decreta Secundi Concilii Provincialis Australiensis, habiti in Ecclesia Cathedrali S. Patritii Melbournensi, Diebus XVIII., XIX., XXI., XXII., XXIII., XXIV., et XXV. Aprilis, 1869, Advocate Office, Melbourne, 1891.

Acta et Decreta Synodi Provincialis Melbournensis lae apud Melbourne habitae 17-24 Novembris, 1907, Advocate Press, Melbourne, 1909.

B. Plenary Councils

Acta et Decreta [Primi] Concilii Plenarii Australasiae, habiti apud Sydney [Die 14 Novembris et sequentibus usque ad Diem 29 Novembris] Anno Domini 1885, a Sancta Sede Recognita, F. Cunninghame & Co, Sydney, 1887.

Pastoral letter of the Archbishops and Bishops of Australasia in plenary council assembled to the clergy and laity of their charge. Pastoral Letter issued by 18 Catholic bishops of Australia and New Zealand at the 1st Plenary Council of Australia, Sydney, 1885. F. Cunninghame & Co., Sydney, 1886.

Acta et decreta Concilii Plenarii Australiensis II., habiti apud Sydney Die 17 Novembris et sequentibus usque ad Diem 1 Decembris, Anno 1895, F. Cunninghame & Co., Sydney, 1898.

Acta et Decreta Concilii Plenarii Australiensis III habiti apud Sydney, Die 2a Septembris et sequentibus usque ad Diem 10am Septembris, Anno Domini 1905, William Brooks & Co., Sydney, 1907.

[Concilium Plenarium IV Australiae et Novae Zelandiae habitum apud Sydney a Die 4a ad Diem 12am Mensis Septembris Anno Domini 1937](#), Praeside Excell.mo ac Rev.mo Domine Joanne Panico, Archiepiscopo Tit. Justinianen. Delegato Apostolico, A Sancta Sede Recognitum. Editio Officialis. Printed by The Manly Daily Pty Ltd, Manly, NSW, 1939.

C. Regional Synods

Ecclesia in Oceania: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women in the Consecrated Life and All the Lay Faithful on Jesus Christ and the Peoples of Oceania: Walking His Way, Telling His Truth, Living His Life, Rome, 22 November 2001. Full text available at www.vatican.va

Statement of Conclusions: A Final Declaration of the Interdicasteral Meeting of the Roman Curia with a Representative Group of Bishops for the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Rome, 14 December 1998. Full text available at www.vatican.va

D. Diocesan Synods

Adelaide

Synode Secundae Diocesanae, 21 November 1889: convened by Archbishop Christopher Reynolds

Adminicula Ad Synodum [for the use of the clergy], 29 April 1908: convened by Archbishop John O'Reily

Synode Diocesanae Adelaidensis, 15 March 1916: convened by Archbishop Robert Spence O.P.

Statutes of the Diocesan Synod of Adelaide, held at St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral, Adelaide, the 5th day of December, 1945, Archdiocese of Adelaide, 1945. Synod convened by Archbishop Matthew Beovich

Armidale

Note: Three diocesan synods have been held in St Mary's Cathedral, Armidale: in 1873 convened by Bishop Timothy O'Mahony; and in 1949 and 1951, both convened by Bishop Edward Doody.

Ballarat

Ballarat Diocesan Synod held on 14 January 1944, convened by Bishop James O'Collins

Brisbane

Regulations made pursuant to Deliberations of the Diocesan Synods, held at Brisbane, July 1863, and July 1864, and revised in the Synod of June 1865, W. Fairfax, Brisbane, 1865.

Extracts from the Proceedings of the Diocesan Synod of Brisbane, held in October, 1880. Brisbane (?). Refers to morning and evening sittings on 7 October 1880 and on 12 October 1880.

Brisbane Diocesan Synod held on 1-5 May 2003. The website

<http://bne.catholic.net.au/synod/index.php>

gives online access to all Submissions, Assembly Recommendations, and Archbishop's Decisions.

Broken Bay

1st Synod of Broken Bay Diocese held its 1st Session on 2-4 June 2011. A 2nd Session is planned for May 2012. Detailed information and documentation related to the Synod are available at

www.dbb.org.au/ourdiocese/synod/Pages/default.aspx

Bunbury

Convened by Bishop Goody and held at Bunbury in 1961. A booklet was published regarding the conduct of the clergy, administration of the sacraments and particular diocesan legislation. The stipend of assistant priests was also raised.

Cairns

Cairns Diocesan Synod held 4 Sessions: 6-7 June 2008, 22-23 May 2009, 21-22 May 2010 and 2-3 September 2011. Detailed information and documentation related to the Synod are available at

www.cairns.catholic.org.au/Synod.html

Canberra and Goulburn

Diocesan Synod 1989 'Coming Home in Christ': Celebrated by the Church of Canberra and Goulburn with the Most Reverend Francis P Carroll, Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn, St Christopher's Cathedral, Canberra, ACT, 26 November 1989

Diocesan Synod 2004, 'Called to be One in Christ Jesus'; Celebrated by the Church of Canberra and Goulburn with the Most Reverend Francis P Carroll, Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn, St Christopher's Cathedral, ACT, 2004

Hobart

Hobart Diocesan Synod held on 14 January 1916, convened by Archbishop Patrick Delany

Lismore

Diocesan Synod held in St Mary's Pro-Cathedral, Grafton, on the 5th July 1889: With Appendix containing Translation of some Decrees of the Plenary Council of Sydney 1885, G.H. Varley, Grafton, 1889

Decrees of the Diocesan Synod of Lismore held at St Carthage's Cathedral, Lismore, by His Lordship Rt. Rev. Dr Carroll, Bishop of Lismore, on August 19th 1920

Statutes of the Diocesan Synod of Lismore held at St Carthage's Cathedral, Lismore, the 31st Day of August 1948

Statutes of the Diocesan Synod of Lismore held at St Carthage's Cathedral, Lismore, the 23rd Day of September 1958

Maitland

Synodus Dioecesana Maitlandensis XIV habita in Ecclesia Pro-Cathedrali S. Joannis Baptistae in Civitate Maitlandensi Die 5 Decembris 1939, T. Dimmock Pty Ltd, West Maitland

Statutes of the [15th] Diocesan Synod of Maitland held at St. John's Pro-Cathedral, Maitland on the 7th day of November, 1956, Catholic Diocese of Maitland, 1956.

Diocese of Maitland: Diocesan Pastoral Plan adopted by the 1992-93 Diocesan Synod

Melbourne

Acta et Decreta Primae Synodi Dioecesanae Melbournensis habitae in Ecclesia Cathedrali S. Patricii, Diebus X. et XI. Martii, 1875, Advocate Press, Melbourne, 1891

Acta et Decreta Secundae Synodi Dioecesanae Melbournensis habitae in Ecclesia Cathedrali S. Patricii, Die Decimonona Maii, 1885, Advocate Press, Melbourne, 1891

Acta et Decreta Tertiae Synodi Dioecesanae Melbournensis habitae in Ecclesia Cathedrali Sancti Patricii, Die Decimasexta Novembris, 1887, Advocate Press, Melbourne, 1891

Acta et Decreta Quartae Synodi Dioecesanae Melbournensis habitae in Ecclesia Cathedrali Sancti Patricii, Die Quinta Decembris, 1888, Advocate Press, Melbourne, 1891

Acta et Decreta Quintae Synodi Dioecesanae Melbournensis habitae in Ecclesia Cathedrali Sancti Patricii, Die Tertia Decembris, 1889, Advocate Press, Melbourne, 1891

Acta et Decreta Sextae Synodi Dioecesanae Melbournensis habitae in Ecclesia Cathedrali Sancti Patricii, Die Tertia Decembris, 1890, Advocate Press, Melbourne, 1891

Acta et Decreta Septimae Synodi Dioecesanae Melbournensis habitae in Ecclesia Cathedrali Sancti Patricii, Die Tertia Decembris, 1891, Advocate Press, Melbourne, 1891

Acta et Decreta Vigesima Synodi Dioecesanae Melbournensis habitae in Ecclesia Cathedrali Sancti Patricii, Die 5 Decembris, 1905

Perth

A 'so-called' diocesan synod was convened by Bishop Brady on 21 January 1850 during a troubled period in Perth. However, he summoned only two priests, Frs Urquhart and Marino, to the synod, but not the other six priests in the diocese. There are no papers for this Synod, only references in various letters.

First Diocesan Synod of Perth, held on 16 December 1940, convened by Archbishop Redmond Prendiville. Its purpose was to implement the general decrees of the 4th Plenary Council of Australia and New Zealand held in Sydney in September 1937.

Rockhampton

A Diocesan Synod was convened by Bishop Tynan and held at Rockhampton on 19 August 1959.

Sandhurst

Synodus Dioecesis Sandhurstensis Tertia habita in Ecclesia Cathedrali Sacratissimi Cordis Jesu Die 17a Novembris 1948

Sydney

Decrees of the Diocesan Synod of Sydney, held at St. Patrick's College, Manly, by His Eminence The Cardinal Archbishop [Patrick Francis Moran], the 29th Day of July, 1891, Finn Brothers & Co., Sydney

Diocesan Synod of Sydney held on 29 July 1896.

Note: *The Freeman's Journal* dated 30th January 1941 (p.10) states that annual synods were conducted. However, the Sydney Diocesan Archives has found no evidence of them, and cannot confirm them.

Statutes of the Diocesan Synod of Sydney held at St. Mary's Cathedral, Sydney the 27th Day of January, 1942, Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, 1942

Statutes of the Diocesan Synod of Sydney held at St. Mary's Cathedral, Sydney the 27th Day of December. 1951, Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, 1952

Toowoomba

1st Diocesan Synod of Toowoomba, held in Toowoomba on 18th and 19th February 1948 convened by Bishop Joseph Roper. Acta et Decreta were published in Latin.

Bishop William Morris held the following Diocesan Gatherings and Assemblies: 1st Diocesan Gathering held at Roma on 29th and 30th August 1998; 1st Diocesan Gathering held at Toowoomba on 24th and 25th October 1998; 2nd Diocesan Assembly held at Toowoomba on 10th and 11th June 2001; 3rd Diocesan Assembly held at Toowoomba on 12th and 13th June 2004; 4th Diocesan Gathering held at Toowoomba on 9th and 10th June 2007; and 5th Diocesan Gathering held at Toowoomba on 12th and 13th June 2010. The 1997 Roman Instruction on Diocesan Synods does not approve of 'gatherings' or 'assemblies' which fall outside the canonical norms.

Townsville

Diocesan Statutes enacted and proclaimed in the Second Diocesan Synod of the Diocese of Townsville, held on July, 16th, 1958 by His Lordship, Most Rev. Hugh. Edward Ryan, D.D. Bishop of Townsville, Catholic Diocese of Townsville, 1958.

Wagga Wagga

Note: Prior to the 1942 Diocesan Synod, preparation was made for an earlier synod, but it was postponed due, it seems, to the ill health of Bishop Joseph Dwyer.

Synodus Dioecesana Dioeceseos Corvopolitanae habita in Ecclesia Cathedrali Sancti Michaelis Wagga Wagga Die nona mensis Junii Anno Domini 1942, Praeside Illusmo. Ac Redsmo. Domino Francisco Henschke, D.D. Dei et Apostolicae Sedis gratia Episcopo Corvopolitano.

Synodus Dioecesana Dioeceseos Corvopolitanae habita in Ecclesia Cathedrali Sancti Michaelis Wagga Wagga in Festo Sacratissimi Rosarii Die septima mensis Octobris Anno Domini 1952, Praeside Illusmo. Ac Redsmo. Domino Francisco Henschke, D.D. Dei et Apostolicae Sedis gratia Episcopo Corvopolitano.

E. Episcopal Conferences

Paul VI, Motu Proprio *Ecclesiae Sanctae* (6 August 1966), I. *Normae ad exsequenda Decreta SS. Concilii Vaticani II* “Christus Dominus” et “Presbyterorum Ordinis”, No. 41: AAS 58 (1966), 773-774.

Congregation for Bishops, Directory *Ecclesiae Imago, De Pastoralis Ministerio Episcoporum*, Rome, 22 February 1973

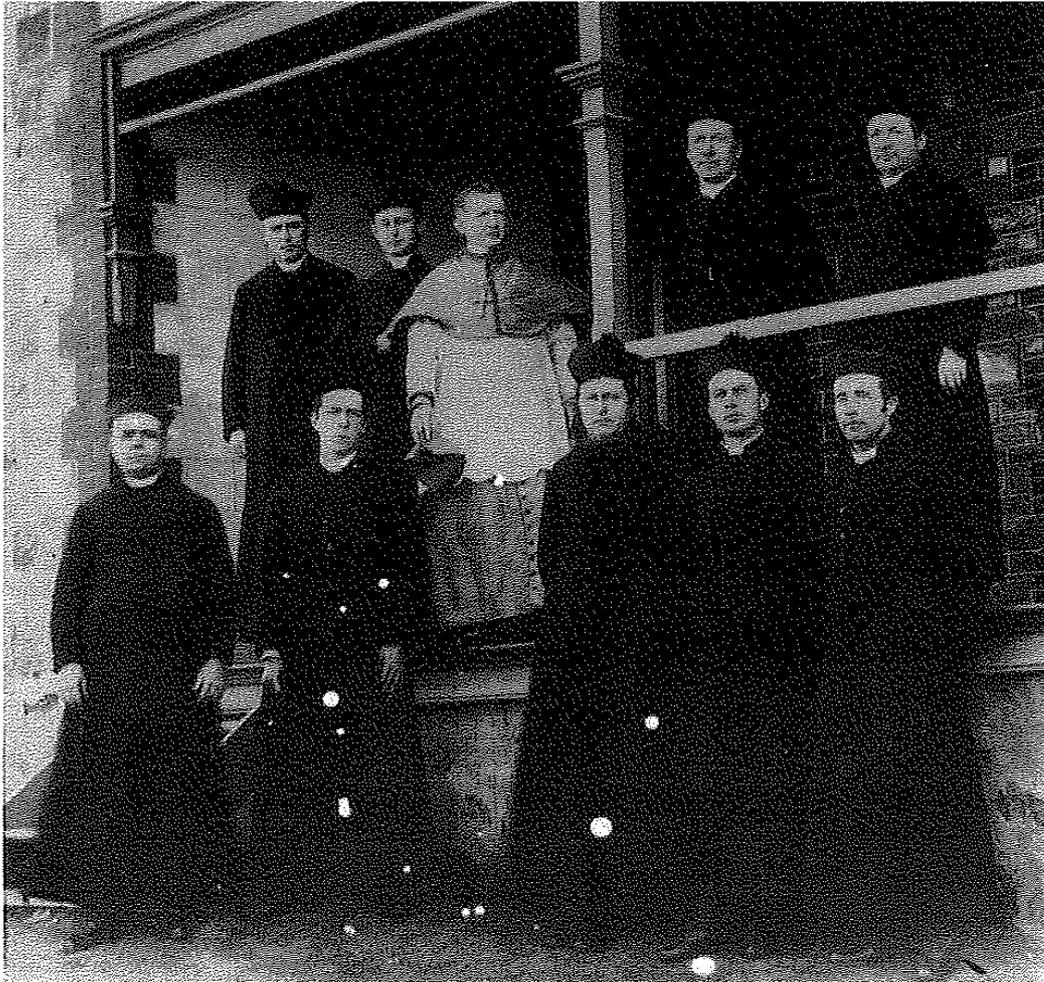
Synod of Bishops of 1985, *Final Report*, II, C), 5: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10 December 1985, p. 7.

John Paul II, Apostolic Letter issued ‘Motu Proprio’ *Apostolos Suos*, on the Theological and Juridical Nature of Episcopal Conferences, Rome, 21 May, 1998

First Diocese of Wilcannia Synod

This morning the first Synod of the Diocese of Wilcannia will take place at the Sacred Heart Church. It will be attended by nine priests, and will be presided over by the Bishop. We learn that during the past week all have been engaged in a spiritual retreat, the exercises of which were conducted by **Father Dowling, S.J.** Silver Age 4 August 1890

First Synod of the Diocese

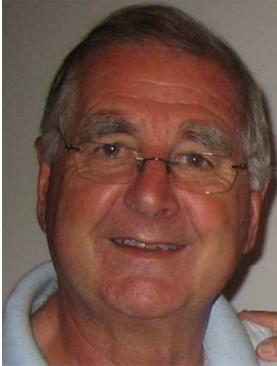


Back; Revs. Davern (Wilcannia), T. O'Connell (Broken Hill), Bishop J Dunne,
Revs. Treacy (Deniliquin), Richard Kiley.

Front: Revs. W. H. Connolly (Broken Hill), T. Cahill, P. Carroll (Broken Hill),
P Shore (Wentworth), J Barry

Note: the above picture is taken at what was the front of the Bishop's House
It is now referred to as the back of the Bishop's House

About the author:



Peter J Wilkinson, B.Ed., L.Miss., D.Miss.(PUG) is the author of the recently published *Catholic Parish Ministry in Australia: Facing disaster?* A missiologist and former Columban missionary priest, he has worked as Director of the Clearing House on Migration Issues (CHOMI) at the Ecumenical Migration Centre, as a Senior Research Fellow and Head of Community Education at the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs, and as a Guest Lecturer in Missiology at Yarra Theological Union. In 2001 he was awarded the Centenary Medal for his work in advocacy. He is a member of Catholics for Renewal.