

Brother Patrick Ambrose Treacy – An Overview

1834-1868 – Beginning

Patrick Ambrose Treacy was born 31 August 1834 in Thurles, Tipperary, Ireland. On Friday 13 February 1852 he left home for the Novitiate in Waterford. He taught in Waterford for three years before going to Wexford where he spent eight years, becoming an accomplished teacher. He took charge of the Brothers' school in Carlow in 1863, showing good leadership qualities. In July 1868 the Superior General appointed him as leader of the Australian mission to Melbourne. He and three other Brothers left Ireland on 15 August 1868 and arrived in Melbourne on 18 November 1868.

1868-1870 – In a new land

The Brothers began teaching in St Francis' school as well as collecting throughout Melbourne after school hours. The bishop told Ambrose, "I don't have a rap," when Ambrose expected financial help. "Throw yourself on the people," he told him. Ambrose accepted the challenge. He sent Br Barnabas Lynch to Bendigo to collect in the country and he himself began collecting in journeys that are the stuff of legend. Enough money was in hand to lay the foundation stone of the new school at Victoria Parade on 21 November 1870, the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lady in the Temple.

The 1870s – A busy decade and the beginning of trouble

The Parade was ready for school in 1871, less than three years after the Brothers arrived in Melbourne and the debt cleared the following year. Ambrose believed that accepting a small fee from those who could pay for their schooling would conserve a lot of energy. He asked the General Chapter of 1871 to allow this. They agreed on the proviso that those who could not pay would not be excluded.

In 1874 under pressure from Bishop Goold, he took over the responsibility for St Vincent's Orphanage in South Melbourne. When offered a school in Queensland he sent Br Joseph Barrett to look at the possibilities. A few months later, in 1875, Gregory Terrace opened.

The pace was quickening. The Brothers began work in the Jesuit parish of Richmond and for a while all went well. Ambrose moved the novitiate to this site. Schools were opened in Dunedin, New Zealand, and in Skipton Street, Ballarat. In 1878 St Kilda began. St Augustine's Orphanage in Geelong was taken over at the insistence of the Bishop, and Wakefield Street in Adelaide, which would soon take in boarders, was opened.

Problems multiplied. Several Brothers from Ireland were too ill and many died within a few years of arrival. There was unrest among the Brothers, some of whom were very critical of Ambrose's leadership and others who were unwilling to accept the discipline of religious life. Ambrose made a special trip to Ireland to obtain more Brothers, with only limited success. He attended the General Chapter of 1880, explaining the difficulties and opportunities of the Australian mission.

The 1880s – Backs to the Wall

While the General Chapter was sympathetic to Australia's needs, it decreed that there would be no new openings there for ten years. So this decade was one of holding on. Ambrose administered the schools, organised the finances, filled in when Brothers took ill, and handled problems that arose with bishops and Brothers. The strain was showing. Brothers spoke of how stooped the Provincial had become.

A major problem was a misunderstanding with the Jesuits in Richmond. Eventually Ambrose withdrew the Brothers from this mission. Another problem awaited him. The new Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr Thomas Carr, wanted to confine the Brothers to primary education and to inspect their schools. Ambrose resisted.

Before the decade was finished, Cardinal Moran of Sydney prevailed on the General Council to allow an opening in Balmain. At this time the Assistant, Br Joseph Butler, visited Australia and, impressed with its potential, arranged for an increase in the number of Brothers coming to Australia. The worst was passed.

After Balmain there were openings in Maryborough, Queensland, and in Ballarat, Victoria. Things were on the move again. In 1889 there were two new foundations in Sydney, one at St Thomas' in Lewisham and one at the nearby suburb of Newtown. Though all these meant increased work for Ambrose, the problems that had weighed him down were largely behind him.

The 1890s – On the move again

This was a decade of remarkable expansion, each year bringing new foundations. Ambrose opened both the High School at Lewisham and Nudgee College in 1891. The latter is a remarkable testimony to his faith in Providence. He had no Brothers, money was in short supply, but because the need was great he pressed ahead, believing that the Lord would enable it to come about.

1892 saw the beginning of Rozelle in Sydney and Ipswich in Queensland. There were three new schools in 1893: Abbotsford, Melbourne, the boarding school at St Patrick's, Ballarat,

and the primary school at St James' in Brisbane. 1894 saw openings at opposite ends of the continent: at Rockhampton in Central Queensland and St Malachy's at the Terrace in Perth. 1895 was comparatively quiet. Only St Patrick's primary school in Perth was opened.

In 1896 came the development of Province headquarters in Petersham, Sydney, where Ambrose also located the Novitiate. A third orphanage in addition to the two in Victoria was opened in Subiaco, Perth (Ambrose later moved it to Clontarf where there was a better water supply) in 1897. The following year saw the beginning at Albany in Western Australia and undertaking his fifth boarding school, St Patrick's, Goulburn.

The decade was completed in 1899 with the opening of the school in Toowoomba, Queensland. Secondary education for ordinary people in Australia owes its beginning to Ambrose as does affordable boarding schools.

The 1900s – Exiled

At the General Chapter of 1900 Ambrose was elected as First Assistant to the Superior General. He made the Visitation of communities in Australasia and South Africa in 1903-04. The first signs of the cancer that would take his life made its appearance at this time.

1910-1912 – Mission accomplished

Ambrose's story shows a man on mission. What motivated him? Providence was truly his inheritance, he had a close relationship with Mary, to whom he said he owed his vocation, and he worked unselfishly, expecting no personal reward for his labours. The prayer he said so often came alive within him: *Live Jesus in our hearts . . . forever.*