

# AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC

UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF THE ARCHBISHOP OF SYDNEY

## NEWSLETTER

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### Australian Catholic Historical Society Inc. Program for May to December 2023

*This information was correct at the time of publication, but changes may occur.*

DATE	TOPIC	SPEAKER
21 May <b>*1:15 pm start</b>	<b>*1:15pm Annual General Meeting</b> <b>2:00pm Presentation:</b> “Milk of Paradise” Reflections on Family, Church and Media --1935-2023 [Acknowledging the final line of Coleridge’s Kubla Khan]	<b>Patrick Kirkwood</b> , Formerly: Head of Religious Program (Radio and TV) and Director Catholic Audio-Visual Centre (Homebush)
18 June	From Taproot to Rhizome: what you never knew about women religious' lives: 1968-2008	<b>Sr Dr Catherine Thom rsj</b> , Formerly: academic (History and Theology) in Australia, United Kingdom, Hong Kong, Vietnam and Lithuania
16 July	Catholic “Culture wars”	<b>Andrew West</b> , Presenter: Religion and Ethics Report ABC Radio National. Formerly: NSW State Political Editor, <i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>
20 August	Resolving Catholicism’s Dichotomies	<b>Dr Paul Collins</b> , Freelance religious affairs commentator. Formerly: Head, ABC Religious Broadcasts
17 September	“Wise as Serpents, Innocent as Doves”: Navigating a Broken World with a Catholic Purpose	<b>Professor Francis Campbell</b> , Vice-Chancellor University of Notre Dame Australia
15 October	St John's College: on the way to a history	<b>Dr Peter Cunich</b> , College Historian, St John’s College (University of Sydney)
19 November	A panorama of Australian religious poetry through reading it	<b>Dr Stephen McInerney</b> , Champion College, Sydney
9 December 11:45 am	Annual Mass and Christmas Lunch	MacKillop Chapel and Place Mount Street North Sydney

**Location, time and contact:** Sunday afternoons at 2.00pm (unless otherwise stated) in the Crypt of St Patrick's at Church Hill [Grosvenor Street], The Rocks. Admission is free and does not require membership of ACHS, but a donation is welcome. **Visit the ACHS website** [\[http://www.australiancatholichistoricalsociety.com.au\]](http://www.australiancatholichistoricalsociety.com.au) **for diverse information and features.**

## NOTICE OF THE 2023 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE ACHS

1:15 PM ON SUNDAY, 21 MAY 2023

*Crypt Hall of St Patrick's at Church Hill [Grosvenor Street], The Rocks.*

- **The Agenda:**
- **Minutes of 2023 Annual General Meeting**
- **President's Report**
- **Treasurer's Report**
- **Election of Office Bearers for 2023**
- **Items of business and motions of which due notice had been given.**
- Agenda items must have reached the Secretary by Friday 21 April 2023.
- **Register your intention to attend** via email giving your name and contact details:  
secretary@achscouncil.com

### NOMINATIONS REQUESTED FOR COUNCILLORS

All positions on the Council are declared vacant at the AGM. Positions: President, Vice Presidents (2), Secretary, Treasurer, Councillors (up to 7). Nominations must be in writing, signed by the nominee, nominator and seconder who must be financial members of the ACHS and received by the secretary prior to the meeting.

### REMINDER: MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Payment of fees for Membership of ACHS for 2023 were due on 1st April 2023 and must be paid by 1 July 2023. Application/Renewal forms are included in the envelopes with this Newsletter. A form will also be available on the ACHS website. NB Fees remain the same as last year.

### President's Message

Our Society's year is, by now, well under way, with three diverse presentations having already been given and enjoyed. There are, of course, even more to come -- needless to say, they're equally diverse in presenters and topics --- with the May colloquium to be delivered (on Sunday, 21 May) by Patrick Kirkwood, who is one of the true giants of the religious media in Australia.

That meeting will be preceded by our AGM. They're *all* important, of course, but this year the AGM is *especially* significant because Dr Lesley Hughes plans to retire after several really successful years as our Honorary Treasurer: I am exceedingly grateful to her in more ways than I can express.

We will need nominations from members who are willing to serve on our Council. **Please give serious consideration to that possibility.** I cannot stress too much how important this is. Without sufficient office-bearers, our Society simply cannot continue to exist.

Recently, many of us will have participated in the liturgical celebrations of the climax of the Church year--Holy Week and Easter. Perhaps, as for Diana and me, this included for you re-experiencing some of the

sublime music which, over the centuries, so many deeply-gifted composers have produced for the season. This year -- for the first time in some years -- I made a point of listening to Handel's *Messiah* in its entirety: what an unfalteringly sublime and wonderful piece it is, especially, the profound chorus (with solo mezzo-soprano), "He was despised and rejected of men". It is not in the least surprising that the entire work is so beloved and famous!

Naturally, as with the Christmas feast, the seasonal symbolism is all wrong for our antipodean part of the world. Yet, with a little intellectual rationalisation, we can also make sense of it as an epitome of our whole year. What does it matter if we were then entering winter, a symbol of the amazing Passion story, with Spring -- the trope of the Resurrection --- to follow in a few months' time. We are not Europe -- as we are all-too-slowly learning -- but we are *ourselves* and we are none the worse for that. We are, in Les Murray's words, "absolved of Europe" and are, instead (as he also wrote), the land of "the wedge tail eagle and her mate, that dour brush hook-faced family".

*John Carmody (ACHS President)*

### Report of Sydney Meeting on 19 February 2023

**Topic:** The Church changes its mind -- An Australian History

**Speaker:** Professor Fr Edmund Campion

On Sunday February 19, the ever-popular historian, Emeritus Professor Fr Edmund Campion, opened the 2023 program of ACHS with a presentation entitled,

"Can the Church change its mind? An Australian story." It dealt with relations between church and state -- in particular, in this country -- with an emphasis on

what the Second Vatican Council had to say about ecumenism.

Professor Campion began by recalling a comment by Professor Leicester Webb (of the ANU) to a seminar at the University of Melbourne in 1959, that if Catholics ever came to power they might disadvantage, even persecute, Protestants and others simply doing what their church told them to do. In the light of the then very-recent Labour split -- which followed the attempt by BA Santamaria to make the ALP an arm of Catholicism – these were potent remarks. After all, it was an era of corrosive sectarianism here and Ronald Knox had, briefly, said as much whilst Thomas Aquinas had written that “we execute forgers of money” [which was seen as treasonable], “so we should execute forgers of belief, too”. Furthermore, some of the people at that seminar would have recalled the heated NSW state election of 1922 in which the contentious Papal marital decree, “*Ne temere*”, was a major issue.

That Vatican Council (which John XXIII had convoked) effectively disposed of such attitudes but, as Campion discussed (and the lively subsequent discussion vividly elaborated), vestiges of such attitudes persisted (even, perhaps, remaining in attenuated form to the present day). He cited one hostile commentator (the ex-Catholic scholar, Austin Gough) who insisted that the Church was “necessarily opposed to political liberalism and a free society”; as well as a famous essay by the Catholic philosopher, Max Charlesworth (reprinted in 1973 in his collection “Church, state and conscience”), which cited Canon Law (clause 1351): “No one can be constrained to embrace the Catholic faith against his will”. Charlesworth argued that this implies, “that no one should act against his conscience”.

Professor Campion concluded his thoroughly-researched yet elegant address with a resounding clarion call: “Can the Church change its mind? Oh, yes! As John Henry Newman said, ‘Change is the sign of life’.”

*John Carmody, (ACHS President)*

### **Report of Sydney Meeting on 19 March 2023**

**Topic:** My family and my mission to Papua New Guinea

**Speaker:** Mary Mennis (née Eccles)

Mary Mennis – a daughter of the great Australian Nobel Prize-winner, Sir John Eccles – began her presentation to the March meeting of ACHS (“My family and my mission to Papua-New Guinea”) by showing the cover of her most recent book about that former Australian colony, where she and her late husband lived and worked for many years, she as a teacher.

Its photograph showed several clerics, one of whom, Cardinal Sir John Ribat MSC, the Archbishop of Port Moresby, a Tolai man from Volavolo Island, is descended from the local man who (in September 1882) warned the three early missionaries, who had just arrived, that, if they set foot on that island, they would be murdered. Undeterred, they proceeded and their beautiful singing of the “*Te Deum*” (in Latin) so enchanted those hostile head-men that they decided to welcome them, instead. Just over 100 years later, John Ribat was ordained a priest – such are the unpredictable twists of history.

It is noteworthy that the last five letters of that word spell “story”. Accordingly, Mary composed her presentation from some of the innumerable stories which she collected during many years of conducting interviews and conversations with local people in

various parts of the country. These were with priests, brothers and nuns as well as many lay-people -- nurses, teachers and the like.

The presentation touched on how “primitive” (to contemporary Australian eyes) and tribal a series of isolated villages it had been (and the importance of small aircraft in its short modern history). Some of her tales of being a teacher were as touching as they were amusing. There also were a few harrowing accounts of the difficulties of distance and topography in managing to get access to good medical attention.

Strikingly, she emphasized how little of this information would be “found in any history books” which tend to downplay such communal and personal methods, preferring “official” documents and decrees. That observation resonated with a number of her audience, some of whom took particular pains to emphasise how important such a “narrative” (or “social”) approach is to the craft and collection of history.

Essentially, the message of both presentation and discussion was that history is the record of what we human beings and our societies *do* and that no single methodology can capture its entire essence.

*John Carmody, (ACHS President)*

## Report of Sydney Meeting on 16 April 2023

**Topic:** Catholic Action, Sydney Style: Catholic lay organisations from friendly societies to the Vice Squad

**Speaker:** Professor James Franklin

The talk first surveyed the wide range of vigorous lay Catholic associations in Sydney in the mid-twentieth century – the St Vincent de Paul Society, CYO, Legion of Mary, Holy Name Society and many other groups. Trade and professional guilds included the Transport Guild, the St Thomas More Society for lawyers and the Police Guild of St Christopher.

Parish-based organisations proved a solid foundation for Catholic-dominated Labour politics. During the Cahill government (1952-9), Catholics implemented and established policies they favoured. Including the abolition of the death penalty, baby health centres and a tightening of censorship. The government also supported the campaign against homosexuality of the first NSW Catholic police commissioner, who called homosexuality the “greatest menace” facing society.

The Vice Squad was directed to a near-exclusive focus on the issue. Prosecutions increased greatly and the world’s only jail exclusively for homosexual prisoners was opened at Cooma.

The text of the talk is published in the *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* (<https://web.maths.unsw.edu.au/~jim/vicesquadpublish.ed.pdf>) and also forms a chapter of Dr Franklin’s recent book, *Catholic Thought and Catholic Action: Scenes from Australian Catholic Life*: [https://www.connorcourtpublishing.com.au/Catholic-Thought-and-Catholic-Action-Scenes-from-Australian-Catholic-Life--James-Franklin\\_p\\_522.html](https://www.connorcourtpublishing.com.au/Catholic-Thought-and-Catholic-Action-Scenes-from-Australian-Catholic-Life--James-Franklin_p_522.html)

*Based on material provided by James Franklin*

### The Professor Dame Marie Bashir Medal

This medal is awarded to a member of the teaching profession who has shown outstanding leadership in the field of education. This year, this prestigious medal was awarded to one of the council members of the Australian Catholic Historical Society; Dr Anne Power.

### March 30<sup>th</sup> marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the Salesians to Fremantle WA

On March 30<sup>th</sup> of 1923, a group of Salesians arrived to Fremantle, WA with the genuine intention to work with the indigenous in Kimberley in the education of the young people, however due to unforeseeable circumstances, some had to return to Europe and some moved onto Melbourne to minister to Italian immigrants, while also serving in the education of the poor and abandoned young people in Victoria. These few Salesians were determined in moving forward while trusting that this new mission was God’s will. Now in gratitude to these dedicated first Salesians, the Australia-Pacific Province of Mary Help of Christians celebrates its centenary with pride.

### Death of Fr John de Luca

Fr John de Luca was an enthusiastic member of the ACHS born in Randwick on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1942. He was a seminarian at St Columba’s college, Springwood and St Patricks College and was ordained to the priesthood on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1966 at St Mary’s Cathedral by Cardinal Gilroy. He served as Assistant Priest at Surry Hills (1996), Chaplain to the Christian Brothers’ Training Collee at Strathfield (1968), Assistant Priest at the Cathedral (1970), Assistant and then Administrator at Mona Vale (1977) Asquith (1984), Matraville (1985) before being appointed Parish Priest of Maroubra Bay / Beach (1995) before retiring to lesser duties in October of 2007. Fr John de Luca passed away on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 2023 in his home in Little Bay at the age of 80. We pray that Fr John rests in peace.

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