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NEWSLETTER

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Australian Catholic Historical Society Inc. Program for November to December 2023

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

DATE	TOPIC	SPEAKER
19 November	A panorama of Australian religious poetry through reading it	Dr Stephen McInerney , Campion College, Sydney
9 December 11:45 am	Annual Mass and Christmas Lunch	St Mary's Church, 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>] for diverse information and features.

Christmas Luncheon 9th December

Mass and light lunch for Christmas: Our end of year gathering will be at North Sydney, St Mary's Church for Mass at 11.45am on Saturday 9 December followed by a light lunch in the Ron Dyer Centre next to the church. The church is on the corner of Ridge and Miller Streets and car entrance is in Ridge St. There is parking in the church grounds and also a multi storey paid parking opposite. Buses run from the city (Bridge St) or from North Sydney station along Miller St to the stop at Ridge St. (check trip planner) A booking form is enclosed with this newsletter.

Helen Scanlon

Report of Sydney Meeting on 16th July 2023

Topic: 'Catholic culture wars'

Speaker: Andrew West

Andrew opened by characterising himself as an Anglican in Sydney who appreciates Catholic social teaching. His talk focussed on the current papacy of Pope Francis, against which he framed the latest chapter of the Catholic culture wars. He sees Francis as being largely orthodox, for example in his defence of traditional understandings of sexuality, gender, Christian marriage and priesthood.

One such culture war he sees as the power shift of focal Church activity away from Europe and North America. Francis' overtures to China and a 2018 agreement allowing government input to episcopal appointments was spurred by an estimated 150 million Christians living in China who represent a huge opportunity for Catholic mission. Similarly, Francis' appointment of cardinals has also swung away from North America and Europe, comprising more than seventy percent of those eligible to vote in the next conclave. Yet they represent both conservative and liberal ecclesiologies.

Andrew sees Francis as both loving and pastoral, yet not a social liberal. He is continuing the tradition of Rerum Novarum and a tough political operator, advocating a more transparent, accountable Church.

Francis' public comments and teachings like *Amoris Laetitia*, relative to the sexuality culture wars, reflect Church doctrine on the family, abortion, divorce and gay rights, for example, although he has moderated the tone. Yet Andrew notes also that the Pope has refused to be drawn into the U.S. abortion debate around how Catholic President Biden really is. Referencing the last US presidential election, Andrew mentions the two duelling nuns, Sisters Simone Campbell and Deidre Byrne, each with contrasting values and party-political affiliations.

Andrew considers another of the culture wars to be around indigenous rights, Francis supporting the dignity of indigenous peoples, including the Synod on the Amazon. Yet his traditionalism was also evident

in his lack of anticipated support for either married priests or women deacons.

Francis' attitude to religious outreach has proved disturbing for some hardline Catholics. Some of the examples cited including his asking Muslims for prayers, his Israel and South Sudan visits and his Iraq meeting with a leading Shia Ayatollah.

On the culturally polarising issues of climate change and immigration he is generally conservative, yet also generated *Laudato Si*. Yet Francis' inclusive position on European immigration has upset the "rad trad" movement as diminishing the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The liturgy has been another battlefield, Pope Benedict XVI having loosened some of the restrictions around celebrating the Latin Mass which Francis now sees as a rallying point for his opponents. Andrew also mentioned Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano's call for Francis' resignation over covering up the Theodore McCarrick sexual abuse scandal. Yet ironically, he had himself been US Nuncio and failed to act, it was originally Pope John Paul II who had received the initial reports and years later Francis had believed that Benedict XVI had already dealt with it.

Michael Cullen

Report of Sydney Meeting on 20th August 2023

Topic: Resolving Catholicism's Dichotomies

Speaker: Dr Paul Collins

Because of illness, Paul Collins could not give his August presentation -- Resolving Catholicism's Dichotomies -- in person to the Society: instead, his text was read by Diana and John Carmody. I imagine that his approach was a little different from what most of us might have expected. He began with these thoughts: "Committed Christians are inevitably involved in various dichotomies. By 'dichotomy' I mean a paradoxical contrast between two apparently irreconcilable realities. Perhaps the most fundamental of these dichotomies is the tension between commitment to the kingdom of God and its values and living in the reality of the world," a theme which, by an unplanned serendipity, was to be expanded, differently, by Francis Campbell in September.

The profoundly philosophical Collins approach was thoroughly historical as well as contemporary and will repay a careful reading when it appears in the ACHS Journal.

He began, appropriately, with the Bible: "Jesus articulates the first side of the dichotomy when he tells Pontius Pilate in John's gospel account of the passion: 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom was from this world; my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to

the Jews.'" (18:35-36). But he reminded us that John also quotes Jesus saying: "For God so loved the world (κόσμος (kosmos) in the Greek text), that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

Dr Collins ended his presentation -- which included a serious consideration of our Australian context within his rich historical understanding -- in this way: "Certainly, living and proclaiming the gospel in an increasingly assertive secular world is difficult and often disheartening. Pope Francis has acknowledged the feeling of weariness among Catholics and actually compared European believers to 'tired and bitter' apostles cleaning their nets after unsuccessful fishing. While acknowledging that many are angry and disappointed because of the 'scandals that have disfigured the face of the Church.... the time has not come to stop and give up or be consumed by pessimism, let alone look back.' The constant challenge is to move forward; our hope is based in the gospel promise that, if we proclaim Jesus' message with integrity, he is with us 'always, to the end of time' (Matthew 28:20)."

John Carmody

Report of Sydney Meeting on 17th September 2023

Topic: Navigating a broken world with a Catholic purpose

Speaker: Professor Francis Campbell

The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Notre Dame Australia, Professor Francis Campbell, first spoke to ACHS last year when his topic was, "A place for faith in the public square" which was a reflection on "the theoretical underpinnings of a

pluralist society and the place of faith in the public square that came about over recent centuries".

He addressed us again this year, in September, calling his presentation, "'Wise as Serpents, Innocent as Doves': Navigating a Broken World with a Catholic Purpose". Those first six words

were Christ's advice to his followers -- about their behaviour in the world when promulgating his teachings -- as recorded by St Matthew (10, 16).

After a sombre consideration of whether, indeed, our contemporary world is "broken", Professor Campbell directed his (and our) attention to an authentic Catholic response. "What does this mean," he asked, "for our world and how should one be as wise as a serpent or innocent as a dove in navigating a path through such a world? We can jump into the practical and deal with each situation as it arises but that is simply tactical and can leave us marooned in a place not of our choosing. It can also result in faith not doing society a service by asking it to focus on the difficult questions so that it does not avoid an intellectual drift.

"Questions for the broader Australian culture to ponder should focus on the place of faith in the wider society? Is it confined to Sunday morning? Is it a private belief that must not have a public dimension -- an individual freedom to worship, but without a collective dimension which is allowed to manifest itself in society? Does the society want to see a government system with a monopoly on health and education provision to the detriment of any other service-provider? What is the role of government when it comes to service provision? More crucially perhaps, what is the boundary or

distinction we see between the state, the wider society and the rights of individuals as both citizens and members of society?"

That phrase, "intellectual drift", was a vital aspect of his philosophy but there was also a pragmatic dimension to his speech. Catholic schools, he reminded us, educate "nearly 800,000 students, thereby providing 20% of the provision across Australia. In health it is equally compelling with Catholic hospitals providing over 10,000 beds -- that is split between 7,500 being private and 2,700 in public Catholic hospitals. In the Catholic residential sector over 25,000 beds are provided in residential and nursing homes. The Catholic Healthcare sector is by far the largest non-government provider of health and age care services in Australia. Between health and education, nearly 200,000 staff are employed in those facilities."

Plainly, faced by such realities, we of ACHS must realise (and agree) that "intellectual drift" is exceedingly dangerous and to be avoided. Whether everyone recognizes that truth, especially our leadership -- whether civil or ecclesial -- and are as clear-sighted, is another matter, entirely.

At least, we have thinkers like Francis Campbell to prod us.

John Carmody

Report of Sydney Meeting on 15th October 2023

Topic: St John's College: on the way to a history

Speaker: Dr Peter Cunich

Dr Peter Cunich -- until recently in the Department of History at the University of Hong Kong and, thereby, the sole overseas member of ACHS -- not long ago took up the position of Historian at St John's College (within Sydney University) and, in October, he spoke to Society about the personal and professional challenges associated with writing a history of that institution.

Part of the problem is, certainly, the fraught history of the College, itself, whilst the other comprises the disparate expectations of the "interested parties", notably Church and College authorities and what might be termed the "Past Johnsmen". All too likely, both sets of "expectations" will be at serious odds with a professional historian's principles and work. To elaborate on that point, he considered the disappointed experiences and dispirited responses of two predecessors in the rôle, Drs Robert Daly and Tony Cahill.

It was a sorry tale.

Another serious issue in the College history has been the relationships -- in fact, the hostile personal relationships -- between the Cathedral and the College, notably the acidulated letters which the "talented" Rector, Fr Maurice O'Reilly CM, wrote to his Archbishop.

Though reluctant to go into detail about much of the history at this relatively early stage, Dr Cunich did express concern about the possibility that his research might -- giving credence to Dr John Burnheim's melancholy assessment of his own Rectorship as his "wasted years" -- lead to the dismal conclusion that the College has failed, intellectually and spiritually, in its crucial mission. He was scarcely consoled by the suggestion of one of his interlocutors that, apart from sport, failure is what Australians value most. Take Anzac Day as the emblematic example.

John Carmody

James MacGinley Award 2023

This year's two awardees of the James MacGinley award are Scott McCarthy who is a PhD candidate at Deacon University and his paper was 'Federation, Sectarianism and the Catholic Middle Class in Australia' and Monica van Gend who has an MA from Notre Dame University, and her paper was 'Confidently Catholic: The Knights of the Southern Cross and the 29th International Eucharistic Congress of 1928'.

Sydney Archdiocese's new home

Polding Centre in Sydney's CBD closed its doors last August after being home to the Sydney's Archdiocese for more than 21 years. The chancery has now moved to St Martha's in Leichhardt which has a proud and long history with the Catholic faith. It was first purchased by Cardinal Francis Moran in 1886 and has served Sydney's Archdiocese since. Little Sisters of the Poor ran an aged care home first, then Sisters of St Joseph used it as a home for girls and recently it was used as the head office of Sydney Catholic Schools. The staff has now settled and is enjoying their new work environment.

IT'S A WONDER IT WAS BUILT AT ALL

Building St John the Baptist Church, Clifton Hill

When: Saturday 28 October 2023 at 1.30 pm

Location: St John the Baptist church, 61 Queen's Parade, Clifton Hill

St John's is not the ordinary story of building a local church. Sectarianism almost lost it its land grant. And progress was slow in this poor Irish community which was undeveloped in those first years. Thanks to a successful businessman and resident, Thomas Verga, progress was faster than it otherwise would have been. Those years also brought a rich architectural history through the ideas of August Pugin and the church's architect, John Denny. Thanks to Verga, the church contains a wealth of stained-glass windows manufactured in Birmingham and later augmented by local products. The parish was predominantly of Irish descent and remained so until the post-1945 immigration wave. During that time the church was the centre of people's lives, meeting their spiritual, social, sporting and welfare needs. The congregation was not only Catholic but Irish Catholic, spurred on by their Irish archbishops, especially the feisty and at times controversial, Daniel Mannix.

A photographic exhibition of the church and its community can also be viewed along with the stained-glass windows and church interior.

The talk will be delivered by award-winning writer, historian, and parishioner, Dr John Andrews. John's most recent book, *St John the Baptist's: A church and its community* (Coventry Press, 2023) tells that story. For those who wish, the book can be purchased or ordered on the day. Profits from the book are being donated to the church's art restoration fund.

Gina Rinehart secures naming rights to Campion College's new library.

Gina Rinehart is one of Australia's great philanthropists. She has been the Executive Chairman of the Hancock Prospecting Group since 1992 and she has transformed the group into becoming the most successful mining companies in the world. She also quietly supports different medical, sporting, veteran, education and health organisations and has been recipient of many prestigious awards during her career and this year Campion College has named its new library after Gina Rinehart.

Death of Beth Macateer

With deep sadness we announced that Beth Macateer has died. She was married to Brian Macateer who was a former president of the ACHS. She was able to attend July's meeting in Sydney's in which Andrew West was the guest speaker.

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