

Friends of Caroline Chisholm

NEWSLETTER

4
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For one reason and another, this Newsletter issue is late. The July and following issues will, we hope, be more timely.

There is something old and something new in this issue. Beginning with the old — well, relatively old — we have the late Mary Hoban's statement of primary and secondary reasons which would justify the Church's commencement of the cause for Caroline Chisholm. We understand she provided the statement to the Australian Bishops' Conference around the late 1970s, along with a detailed summary of the historical records referring to Mrs Chisholm. The primary reasons advanced are, as Mrs Hoban noted, to be considered in any cause, but the secondary reasons are those which personalize, and make more real, the heroic virtue of the particular individual.

Through introducing and pursuing a cause, and definitely concluding it with beatification or canonization, the Church may seek to "teach a certain lesson", "emphasise a certain virtue" or "include people from a wider spectrum of nations, classes and callings". Mary Hoban's statement was aimed not just at the bishops but at the laity, too. Impressing on the bishops the desirability of commencing a cause for Caroline Chisholm continues to be necessary. To be effective it will need to arise from what is technically called "evidence of cult", including

use of the approved intercessory prayer and documentation of favours received.

Another kind of "evidence of cult" is inclusion of Caroline Chisholm among the pioneering Australian Catholics portrayed in the Domus Australia chapel in Rome. Paul Newton's portrait of her is something new, and we have an article and two photographic images on the topic.

The launching by Sir James Gobbo of the reprinted *A Saviour of Living Cargoes* last September is likewise something new. Sir James spoke of the tenacity of Caroline Chisholm in pursuing her call to assist immigrant women and families, and he read extracts from the book which highlighted her heroic virtue. Although Caroline herself expressed dismay at the lack of support from the churches, he said that her independence from them may have given her the freedom to act independently and according to her own judgment.

More details about the launching are in Anna Krohn's interview with Dr Carole Walker, the author of *A Saviour of Living Cargoes*. In many such insights, Dr Walker cautions against "overly romantic or overly ideological" stereotypes. It was the concreteness of Caroline Chisholm's life and work that caught her attention and guided her research and writing. We could apply a similar approach when gathering "evidence of cult".

Interview: Caroline Chisholm — the Concrete Woman

In September 2011, Connor Court Publishing reprinted Dr Carole Walker's *A Saviour of Living Cargoes*, a scholarly study of Caroline Chisholm. Fittingly, former Victorian Governor Sir James Gobbo launched the reprint with the sponsorship of the publisher, the Friends of Caroline Chisholm and the Caroline Chisholm Library Inc., at the Library in Lonsdale Street Melbourne.

The Library's Events Convenor, Anna Krohn, spoke to the author about her concern to discover the importance of Caroline Chisholm for British readers and English history as well

as discerning the realities that both challenged and inspired her. Dr Walker first came across the British roots of Caroline Chisholm's life while researching material about female emigration to Australia for her Master's degree in Victorian Studies at Leicester University. She became involved in a university bereavement group, and this prompted her to explore what fired people to devote their lives to the care of others.

Dr Walker went on to complete a doctoral degree on Caroline Chisholm at Loughborough University. (continued on page 4)

Caroline Chisholm reappears in Rome

Through the artistry of Paul Newton and the foresight of Cardinal George Pell, the commissioner, Caroline Chisholm is once again in Rome. More exactly, her painted image is now displayed above one of the side altars of the chapel in Domus Australia pilgrim centre.

Pictured with her (see below) are Archbishop John Bede Polding and Fr John Therry, both contemporaries in the Colony of New South Wales, and Archbishop Vaughan, who is wearing his episcopal biretta.



Paul Newton's well-received Our Lady of the Southern Cross portrait was specially painted for World Youth Day in 2008. He has since completed 32 paintings for the restored chapel, in time for viewing by the Australian bishops at the end of their Ad Limina visit last year. Domus Australia was officially opened by Pope Benedict on 19 October, 2011.

The *Catholic Weekly* reports, on which this article relies, did not convey the Pope's response to the new artwork. The *Freeman's Journal* of 15 June, 1861, however, reported on Mrs Chisholm's attendance at an audience with Pope Pius IX in the papal anteroom some years before.

"She was about to make the usual obeisances on being presented when the Pope rose and took her by the arm and said, 'Caroline Chisholm, eccellentissima, perseveranza, bravo', and clapped his hands to show his approbation of her conduct.

She could speak but very little Italian, and he was not very well acquainted with her language, but they soon understood each other."

Source: Mary Hoban, *Fifty-One Pieces of Wedding Cake*, Lowden Publishing Co., Kilmore, 1973, pages 319-320.

In 1853, Caroline Chisholm had travelled to Rome so as to collect her son William, then in his second year as a minor seminarian at Propaganda College. William had to discontinue his studies because of ill health. He and Mrs Chisholm returned to London, carrying the Pope's gifts of a gold medal and a marble bust of herself. These, along with the Pope's dispensing of the usual presentation requirements and his fulsome greeting, were quite a change to the standard protocol and a mark of papal esteem for Caroline Chisholm and her work.



A closer view of the new portrait of Mrs Chisholm

Higher resolution copies of the two images are being uploaded to the news page of www.mrschisholm.com. The Newsletter team wish to thank Father Anthony Denton and Mr Gabriel Griffa, respectively Rector and General Manager of Domus Australia, for supplying the electronic copies.

Urged to a breath and maturity of outlook and action

Mary Hoban, who died in 1987, is best known as the author of *Fifty-one Pieces of Wedding Cake*, the 1973 biography of Caroline Chisholm. In the preceding decades, she undertook extensive historical research and worked with the late Father James Murtagh (historian, broadcaster and author of *Caroline Chisholm: was she a saint?*) and others in making Caroline Chisholm better known and in promoting her suitability for Catholic sainthood.

Mary Hoban lived for much of her life in Kilmore, Victoria, and she thus knew the same rolling countryside and weather as Caroline Chisholm did during her few years in the local region. Mrs Hoban also came to know a great deal about her heroine, and this was illustrated in the 1973 biography, shorter written pieces (such as the now out-of-print CTS booklet), lectures, and talks. These, however, did not fully portray the numerous reference sources and original documents on which she relied nor the very detailed bibliographic record she compiled and lodged in the Archdiocese of Melbourne's archives.

Included with that lodgement was her clear, telling and concise summary in support of the Church's introduction of the cause of Caroline Chisholm.

Mary Hoban described the primary reasons as those to be considered in the cause of any saint, viz:

- ◆ Praise to God through the witness of a good life.
- ◆ A reminder of eternal truths such as the Communion of Saints.
- ◆ Help to the faithful through intercessory prayer and inspiration.
- ◆ Recognition of the heroic virtue of the person concerned.

Regarding the secondary reasons, the Church may make canonisation the occasion to teach a certain lesson or to emphasise a certain virtue, and may wish to include people from a wider spectrum of nations, classes and callings, or

from modern times. If so, there are strong reasons, as given below, for including a person like Caroline Chisholm. Each point can be developed, Mrs Hoban wrote, with references from the Documents of Vatican II and from Mrs Chisholm's own writings.

- ◆ Her aim was to work for the moral good of the whole community without exception. Her promise to 'serve all' involved her in great personal sacrifices.
- ◆ She personifies the lay apostolate.
- ◆ She exemplifies the true role of woman.
- ◆ She and her husband illustrate the married state as a way of sanctification.
- ◆ She worked for the family as the basic social unit.
- ◆ She worked for migrants.
- ◆ She expressed Christian views on public questions of her day - world hunger, slavery, Aborigines, land monopoly etc.
- ◆ She combined Christianity with effective and sensitive social work.
- ◆ Her inter-church co-operation promoted goodwill.
- ◆ She was deeply concerned for the welfare of Australia.

In view of the above, Mary Hoban proposed: it seems fitting that lay people, who have been urged to a breath and maturity of outlook and action similar to Caroline Chisholm's, and also to a dialogue with their bishops, should be the ones to request the raising of one of their number to a position where she may continue to help and inspire the people of Australia.

Minor editorial changes have been made to Mary Hoban's typed statement for ease of reading in this Newsletter. Her underlining for emphasis has been retained. It is thought she may have prepared the typed statement in the mid to late 1970s. Proposals for additional secondary reasons would be welcome.

Interview: Caroline Chisholm (continued)

Dr Walker also suggested that her interest in emigration may have been sparked during a visit to Western Australia, when she stood on the beach at Freemantle wondering about the “leaving of shores” for another country.

Later, as she learned more about Caroline Chisholm, Carole Walker describes herself being “knocked down by her story” and by the fact that Caroline was not a wealthy “lady” philanthropist, but a woman of humble means and connections. She said, “I found myself becoming more intrigued by what it was that motivated such a remarkable woman. Caroline is more remarkable because she didn’t have the family, wealth or the social standing” to attempt such a scale of reform at that time.

In her research, Dr Walker uncovered correspondence between Caroline Chisholm and Mary and Elizabeth Rathbone. This reveals their support for the ailing Mrs Chisholm and her family, who constantly struggled to survive financially on their return to England. The letters reveal the strain and poignancy of the philanthropist and social reformer herself reaching out for practical help.

Another fascinating theme for Dr Walker was Caroline Chisholm’s unrelenting participation in public affairs and public figures. “She was always telling people to stay informed, to read the papers and to become engaged in public debate.”

In a particularly revealing letter to Bishop Ullathorne, the heavy price of this engagement for Caroline in terms of her health and her anxiety for the care of her children is very evident. Dr Walker said, “It was a Eureka moment for me, showing Caroline as vulnerable and very concrete.”

This active public life also leaves a legacy for her researchers. “She left behind so few personal letters,” said Dr Walker, “her priority seemed always to be for the next written pamphlet, letters to the papers and other literature.”

“There are not diaries, though sometimes “Little Joe” gives us hints of her intimate life.”

Another fascinating subject was the person of Caroline’s husband, the Highlander Archibald Chisholm. Dr Walker said, “He was also remarkable, particularly for a man of his era. He had an

amazing ability to accept Caroline on her own terms, her public work and her absences and travels.”

Dr Walker believes Archibald shared and inspired Caroline’s vision and sense of vocation. She adds that her time in India with him must surely have given her the seeds of ideas such as the shelter sheds. It also gave her many invaluable skills such as the ability to ride and to handle horses and other transport animals. A closer study of her own familial and cultural origins is needed.

Her unassuming but hardworking and “broad Church” background in Northampton emerges distinctly from further inquiry. Carole Walker was fascinated by Caroline’s upbringing: “She absorbed her astonishing work ethic from her own close-knit family however we interpret this . . . Her father, William Jones, was a pig farmer not a gentleman yeoman.”

Tackling the concrete Caroline, for Carole Walker, means moving beyond the “many historical errors” about this notable woman and also beyond the stereotypes – both overly romantic or overly ideological.” For instance, “Ann Summers’ 1970s feminist reading of *Damned Whores and God’s Police* takes Caroline’s comments out of context. Whereas others, she said, are tempted to “fictionalize her imagination and thinking” in order “to understand her goodness”.

“Caroline led by doing – rather than by unpacking her thinking.” She was really haunted by financial issues rather than bettering them from some elevated station. Florence Nightingale in her attempt to have transferred a small pension to Caroline and Archibald’s surviving single daughter stated: “It is greatly to the credit of the Chisholm family that they have literally no fortune — everything is spent in the work” (*A Saviour of Living Cargoes*, page 151).

At the end of the interview, Carole Walker concluded: “I wanted to make Caroline Chisholm’s life readable and accessible . . . but no less remarkable.” In that the author has succeeded.

Anna Krohn is a writer and ethics educator at Australian Catholic University — Health Sciences School and at the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family, and convenor of the Anima Women’s Network.