

# Friends of Caroline Chisholm

## NEWSLETTER

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Two longer than usual articles are included in this issue. Despite their relative length, both could be said to fall short of substantiating all that seems to be implicated in their respective accounts.

Exactly how did Caroline Chisholm's work for social reforms constitute a new path with regard to the Church's social doctrine? And can the claim be sustained that underlying her work were the foundational and abiding principles of that social doctrine? An affirmative response to the second question is quickly made through reference to Mrs Chisholm's respectful treatment

of individuals, especially those oppressed, her numerous acts of solidarity protecting at-risk women, her insistence on a fair wage and reuniting families, to mention only a few. But more focused study and reflection are needed so that her heroic virtue can be fully explicated.

The clearing leases article adds personal details and a context to the Shellharbour episode not found in the standard biographies. Yet it remains incomplete. It and the broader biographical sweep require further in-depth research of Mrs Chisholm's specific undertakings, her allies and opponents, and their historical situation.

### The Church's Social Doctrine — New 19<sup>th</sup> Century Paths

The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace prepared the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, published in 2004, as an authoritative document on the Church's social doctrine. It affirms [on page 49] that this social doctrine :

“has its roots in Sacred Scripture, especially the Gospels and the apostolic writings, and takes shape and body beginning from the Fathers of the Church and the Great Doctors of the Middle Ages, constituting a doctrine in which, even without explicit and direct Magisterial pronouncements, the Church finally came to recognize her competence.”

The *Compendium* also acknowledges “a new path” was begun with Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* [On the New Things] in 1891. It describes this encyclical as “a singular development of the Church's teaching in the area of social matters” [page 49]. The development through the papal magisterium occurred at the end of a century of rapid industrialization in Europe and the USA, the deepening of economic inequalities, widespread political unrest, and the undermining of time-honoured familial, social, religious and cultural supports.

The encyclical dealt primarily with the condition of the working classes, responding to what was variously called “the social question” or “the labour question”, not with economic and social relations as a whole or more generally. As the *Compendium* skillfully explains, the encyclical was based on and advanced “permanent principles” of the Church's social doctrine [page 49ff].

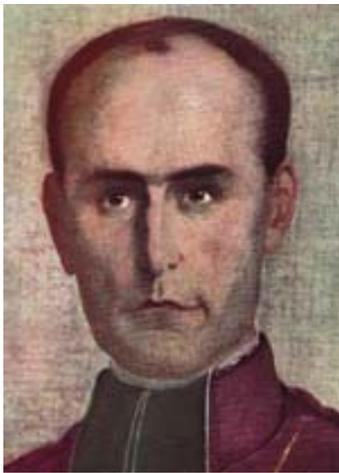
Owing to its focus, the *Compendium* did not set out to delineate the progress of Pope Leo XIII's understanding of the subject prior to the encyclical's release. Had it done so, the importance of Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel Von Ketteler would surely have been foremost.

The Pope himself said of this German bishop, with respect to the encyclical, “He was my great predecessor”. The remark, made to the sociologist Gaspar Decurtins, is quoted on page 5 of George Metlake's *Christian Social Reform*, published in 1912.

Cardinal William O'Connell's preface to the same book states that *Rerum Novarum* was “framed . . . along the lines of Von Ketteler's program of action” [page iii]. That reliance can readily be seen when one reads Metlake's book. (continued on page 2)

## The Church's Social Doctrine (continued)

Von Ketteler was a capable, pastorally sound and energetic priest who had private means from a family inheritance. He soon expended much of it on the education and well being of his parishioners. All the while, he studied and wrote about aspects of "the labour question", consulting with his parishioners and others and preaching and advocating reforms. His drive and efforts increased after he became Bishop of Mainz in 1850, and he was recognised as a pioneering Church leader in Germany and in other industrializing countries.



Bishop Von Ketteler shortly after his election as Bishop of Mainz in Germany. The image, painted by a Professor Noack, is reproduced in George Metlake's *Christian Social Reform*.

Very perceptively and in full accord with the Church's "permanent principles", he maintained that "the labour question, like all the other great social questions, is in the last analysis a question of religion and morality" [*Christian Social Reform*, page 170]. This foundation principle is found in his lengthy 1869 sermon on the "Labor Movement and its relation to Religion and Morality", which came to be called a "Christian Labour Catechism" and which became a resource for German bishops and priests and, eventually, Pope Leo XIII.

The "Christian Labour Catechism" considered the topics of just wages, co-operation (not antagonism) between workers and bosses, the

need for shorter working hours and days of rest, and prohibition of child labour in factories, of girls working alongside men in factories, and of any factory work by women, particularly mothers of families [page 159 ff]. *Rerum Novarum*, of course, was more extensive regarding the topics covered and more expansive in its treatment of the "permanent principles" of the Church's social doctrine.

The *Compendium* in turn puts forward a much more detailed explanation of the foundational and abiding principles of the Church's social doctrine. These are [cf. Chapter 4]:

- ◆ the inviolable dignity of the human person, who is made in the image and likeness of God;
- ◆ the common good, which contributes to the shared life of society, allowing individuals and groups to flourish, having special concern for the poor, and identifying and removing societal structures that harm particular groups and undermine the common good;
- ◆ subsidiarity, which ensures each person, family and immediate group is enabled to fulfil their legitimate obligations without imposts by any higher-level social authority; and
- ◆ solidarity among individuals and groups, which reflects the equality and interdependence of all and which moves towards ever more committed unity.

A third new 19th Century path was forged by Caroline Chisholm's work for social reform. Just as in her lifetime, the historical emphasis has tended to be on her activities in relation to emigration. In that field she definitely led the way, effecting improvements of many sorts, prior, during and after the emigrants' lengthy journey to Australia.

It is true her emphasis was on the practical, but this was always underlined by the kind of social doctrine principles outlined above. Although she did not articulate them in precisely the same way, they are unmistakably evident.

Rodney Stinson

## Clearing leases, the Dorrough family, and Mrs Chisholm

On 6 December, 1843, a steamboat left Sydney for Shellharbour, about 100 kilometres to the South. Aboard were 240 immigrants gathered by Caroline Chisholm for a 4,000 acre settlement on the Petersborough estate, which was part-owned by Robert Towns. The settlement was to incorporate co-operative principles whereby the settlers assisted each other and shared farm and other equipment. This is thought to have happened, at least in the early years. Mrs Chisholm had proposed the scheme to the rich landowner, and he agreed to it.

The Dorroughs from County Donegal in Ireland were among the 30 families going to the new settlement. Aged in their early thirties, Matthew and Martha Dorrough had arrived in Sydney harbour with their five children on 13 February, 1842. Matilda (12 years) was the eldest and James (11 months) the youngest. They came under the bounty system on the *Broom*, whose passengers' list noted that the bounty was paid, except for James, and that both parents could read (though not write) and their children couldn't. The family's religion was recorded as "Protestant".

The local histories consulted for this article do not indicate what the Dorroughs did over the course of 1842, prior to their sea journey with Mrs Chisholm. In that year the Colony's economy remained depressed and a serious drought had taken hold. Work opportunities for agricultural labourers such as Matthew and for farm servants such as Martha were thus very limited in and close by Sydney. Selection for the new settlement must have been a welcome relief for the Dorroughs.

Like the other families, they were given a "clearing lease" of about thirty acres for six years. Robert Towns, the landowner, charged no rent during that time, but he benefited from the untamed bush being made into farmland and pastures. He also provided rations for five months and employed a teacher for the children and two old hands to train the settlers in land clearing, cropping and pasture improvement. Matthew was responsible for storing and issuing the rations, according to one of the local histories.



A small farm in the local district with a formation of cabbage trees on the left; behind are numerous tall trees and thick bush awaiting clearing. From G.F. Angas' *Savage Life and Scenes in Australia*, Volume II, published in 1847.

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Caroline Chisholm pursued the clearing lease avenue for new settlers with large, young families but without capital. She did so, because "[i]t is quite impossible to find situations that will . . . provide for their families; I am, therefore, endeavouring to procure them land on clearing leases, and I think I shall be able to do so" [Source: her letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 November, 1843].

At the end of 1843, £15 wages per annum and a single ration of meat, flour, sugar and tea was the going rate for an unskilled adult farm worker in New South Wales. Even when the employment situation included some form of accommodation, as it invariably did, it could not support a large, young family.

When Mrs Chisholm appeared before the NSW Legislative Council's Committee of Enquiry into unemployment in November, 1843, she could not convince it, nor Governor Gipps subsequently, to support and fund her plans for settling these families on clearing leases. The settlement at Shellharbour was to be the forerunner, and she had already visited the location along with some experienced bushmen and costed transport and related arrangements. She did persuade Robert Towns to proceed, and he provided not just the leases but other material aid that ensured the scheme's success.

(continued on page 4)

Clearing leases etc (continued)

The Shellharbour scheme does not appear to have been repeated elsewhere under Caroline Chisholm’s auspices. The pressing need for it was, at any rate, reduced by improving economic and seasonal conditions. Clearing leases continued to be taken up in the Shellharbour district until the 1870s, and through these “many of the immigrant settlers secured homes and properties from the people for whom they had worked” [Source: William A. Bayley’s *Green Meadows*, page 27].

Mrs Chisholm’s endeavours certainly helped the Dorrough family and the other families who settled on the Petersborough estate. Their lives were changed for the better.

Sir Joseph Carruthers, for a time Premier of New South Wales, said almost a century after

her endeavours: “Work such as this great and noble woman did ought never to be forgotten, least of all in places like Shellharbour where she did so much for settlement” [Source: *Green Meadows*, page 30].

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Reference sources: William A. Bayley, *Green Meadows*, Shellharbour Municipal Council, Albion Park, 1959; Andrea Humphreys and Anna London, *Thematic History*, November, 2005, accessed on [www.shellharbour.nsw.gov.au](http://www.shellharbour.nsw.gov.au); Mary Hoban, *Fifty-one Pieces of Wedding Cake*, Lowden Publishing Company, Kilmore, 1973; and emigrant arrivals searched on [www.records.nsw.gov.au/state-archives/indexes-online](http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/state-archives/indexes-online)



End-notes: The image on the left is Caroline Chisholm, not Mrs Chisholm herself but her daughter born in 1848.

It was included in one of William Brooks & Co. Ltd’s graded history texts for Australian primary schools. George Spaul was the writer of these once popular texts. Generations of primary school students from the 1920s to

early 1960s were told that this was the famous Mrs Chisholm.

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