

# Friends of Caroline Chisholm

## NEWSLETTER

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The editorial in the previous *Newsletter* posed two questions. A Cause for Caroline Chisholm is yet to commence: “why is this so?” How is it that she also seems to be “beyond the understanding of our Catholic hierarchy”?

“Recognition and Praise in Verse” in this issue provides three poems written by Mrs Chisholm’s contemporaries. They are, one could argue,

evidence of fame for sanctity. The sum of the favourable historical and current evidence is, of course, far, far greater. Why are our two questions still being posed?

A short — but possibly partial — answer can be gleaned from the lead article below. In spite of the desire of so many Catholics, lay and clerical, for commencement of a Cause, the Australian hierarchy appears to hear a different drum.

### Some Background to the Cause’s Non-commencement

A senior priest of the Archdiocese of Sydney told me more a decade ago that an historical study into Caroline Chisholm’s life had been undertaken by the Church. His source did not disclose the specifics. Serendipitously, that study was identified in a recent unrelated search of the Fairfax newspaper archive.

According to the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 6 May, 1967, Mary Hoban began the study in 1964, having received the approval of “Catholic authorities in Melbourne”. The news article stated that, “When the case is completed, the findings will be studied by the Australian bishops. If they agree, the findings will be sent to the Vatican for consideration.” The opening of the “official canonisation process” needs the Vatican Congregation of Rites’ consent, the newspaper reported.

Mary Hoban is quoted as saying, “What I am trying to establish is the heroic virtues of Caroline Chisholm. I am not looking for miracles at this stage”. Assuming that she has been accurately quoted, one must observe that Mary Hoban had misunderstood her role as a researcher and compiler. It was not her responsibility, nor within her competency, to “establish” heroic virtue. The local ordinary — the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne — and his advisers would decide whether the historical evidence supported referring the study to the Australian bishops, accepting the steps mentioned in the news article.

In fact, both Mary Hoban and the “Catholic authorities in Melbourne” who approved the study got things wrong. Caroline Chisholm died in the Archdiocese of Westminster, and canon law stipulates that the ordinary there may appoint a tribunal to investigate the deceased’s fame for sanctity or agree to another diocese (or archdiocese) setting one up.

Fully ten years later, in a letter dated 15 June, 1977, the Secretary of the Australian Episcopal Conference wrote to the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Hume. The letter notified him of interest in the Australian Church to begin “a Process of Beautification” for Caroline Chisholm and asked for his thoughts on the topic, including any fame for sanctity in England and “the appropriateness or otherwise of beginning a canonical (necessarily ‘historical’) Process”.

The letter did not inform Cardinal Hume that the National Conference of Catholic Laity in 1976 had enthusiastically passed a resolution asking the Australian Episcopal Conference to consider the proposed Cause. But it did inform Cardinal Hume that “the matter is not one of top priority or urgency as far as the Australian Bishops are concerned”.

I can cite excerpts because a copy of the 15 June, 1977 letter was mailed to me. My contact assured me that Cardinal Hume never replied; nor did his successor. Forty-one years have now gone by.

Rodney Stinson

## Recognition and Praise in Verse

Clara Geoghegan's "Recognising Apostolic Sanctity" article in the previous *Newsletter* prompted two Friends to remind the editorial team of Henry Kendall's laudatory poem about Caroline Chisholm. Kendall was a highly-regarded Australian poet in the 19th Century.

Colonial born, he wrote his poem titled "Caroline Chisholm" in 1862, when he was aged 23 and his subject had not long returned to public life in Sydney, following a serious illness. The poem, though, looks back at Mrs Chisholm's pioneering work and her promotion of improved emigration arrangements in the late 1840s and into the mid 1850s. He names her "God's servant" and "His Chosen", who responded to a divine call to build a home, not the 1841-42 Home but a permanent, prosperous home for poor emigrants. The poem is on page 4.

Robert Lowe's "To Mrs. Chisholm", written in the mid 1840s, praises her unstinting commit-

ment, focusing closely on her work with young female emigrants and her bush journeys to settle them and families. She is called "[t]he guardian angel of her helpless sex" and, less sharp to our ears, "the generous and the good". Whereas those who "hold the balance and the sword" (figuratively the Justice system, but here Government generally) give "paltry" alms and "toil for earth", Caroline Chisholm gives much and "labors still for Heaven".

The third poem chosen for this issue is Walter Savage Landor's "To Caroline Chisholm". He was a very popular and prolific English poet. His poem gets into its stride half-way through, at Mrs Chisholm's entry: "Chisholm! Of all the ages that have roll'd/Around this rolling globe, what age hath seen/Such arduous, such heaven-guided enterprise/As thine? Crime flees before thee . . .". Moreover, "One alone guides *her*", whose only command was "*Be virtuous and free*".

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### TO MRS. CHISHOLM

The guardian angel of her helpless sex,  
Whom no fatigue could daunt, no crosses vex;  
With manly reason and with spirit pure,  
Crown'd with the blessings of the grateful poor,  
For them with unrepining love she bore  
The boarded cottage and the earthen floor.  
The sultry day in tedious labor spent,  
The endless tale of whining discontent;  
Bore noonday's burning sun and midnight's chill,  
The scanty meal, the journey lengthening still;  
Lavished her scanty store on *their* distress,  
And sought no other guerdon than success.

Say ye who hold the balance and the sword,  
Into your lap the wealth of nations poured,  
What have ye done with all your hireling brood,  
Compared with her, the generous and the good?  
Much ye receive and little ye dispense,  
Your alms are paltry, and your debts immense;  
Your toil's reluctant — freely *hers* is given;  
You toil for earth, *she* labors still for Heaven.

ROBERT LOWE

*Spectator* (Sydney), 28 February 1846, page 62

TO CAROLINE CHISHOLM

How little have the powerful of the earth  
 Aided in raising up God's image, marred  
 In falling, and from age to age trod down!  
 Crowns have but crush'd it; shepherds and their flocks  
 Only the more defiled it; Laws have buzzed  
 Perplexing round about; before the prance  
 Of War they cower'd awhile, then seized his hand,  
 And, running at his side, took half the spoil.  
 Europe and Asia raised Gods over Gods,  
 Men over men; but gentle brotherhood  
 They never knew. Our island sent beyond  
 The Atlantic wave stern stubborn hearts, unmoved  
 By pity, and intolerant of tears  
 One after sent she forth of milder mein,  
 And Peace and Justice were the counsellors  
 On right and left of that sage patriarch.  
 Brave was the sire, but braver was the son,  
 Founder of States to live when Europe dies.

Greater than he comes one whom never gain  
 Attracted, never sanguinary field  
 Delighted, never idle peace allured  
 From earnest duty; thro' remoter seas  
 Her vessel sails . . . *Her* vessel? Yes that helm  
 A woman guides . . . but One alone guides *her*.

Chisholm! Of all the ages that have roll'd  
 Around this rolling globe, what age hath seen  
 Such arduous, such heaven-guided enterprise  
 As thine? Crime flees before thee, and the shores  
 Of Austral Asia lustrated by thee,  
 Collect no longer the putrescent weeds  
 Of Europe, cast by senates to infect  
 The only unpolluted continent.  
 Thither has thou conducted honest toil  
 Fainting of hunger on the wealthy street,  
 Thither the maiden, in whose pallid face  
 Lust thought he saw his victim, but could raise  
 Only one blush and one indignant tear.  
 These, these hast thou watch'd over, nor hast look'd  
 Beyond, where Glory sits awaiting thee;  
 Nor wouldst thou hear, with any fresh delight,  
 What sages in their histories will record,  
 That the most potent empire of the earth  
 Was planned, some five centuries before,  
 Under God's guidance by his Chisholm's hand.  
 Semiramis begirt with terraced walls  
 Her mighty city for the prince and slave;  
 Thy grander soul threw open a wide world  
 With one command — "*Be virtuous and free.*"

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR  
*Examiner*, 13 August, 1853

CAROLINE CHISHOLM

"A perfect woman, nobly planned,  
To warn, to comfort, and command." (Wordsworth)

The priests and the Levites went forth to feast at the courts of the Kings;  
They were vain of their greatness and worth, and gladdened with glittering things;  
They were fair in the favour of gold, and they walked on, with delicate feet,  
Where, famished and faint with the cold, the women fell down in the street.

The priests and the Levites looked round, all vexed and perplexed at the cries  
Of the maiden who crouched to the ground, with the madness of want in her eyes.  
And they muttered—"Few praises are earned when good hath been wrought  
in the dark;  
While the backs of the people are turned, we choose not to loiter nor hark."

Moreover, they said — "It is fair that our deeds in the daylight should shine;  
If we feasted you, who would declare that we gave you our honey and wine?"  
They gathered up garments of gold, and they stepped with their delicate feet.  
And the women who, famished with cold, were left with the snow in the street.

The winds and the rains were abroad — the homeless looked vainly for alms;  
And they prayed in the dark to the Lord, with agony clenched in their palms.  
"There is none of us left that is whole," they cried through their faltering breath;  
"We are clothed with a sickness of soul, and the shape of the shadow of death."

*He* heard them and turned to the earth! — "I am pained," said the Lord, "at the woe  
Of my children so smitten with dearth; but the night of their trouble shall go."  
He called on His Chosen to come: she listened, and hastened to rise;  
And He charged her to build them a home, where the tears should be dried  
from their eyes.

God's servant came forth from the South: she told of a plentiful land;  
And wisdom was set in her mouth, and strength in the thews of her hand.  
She lifted them out of their fear, and they thought her their Moses, and said:  
"We shall follow you, sister, from here to the country of sunshine and bread."

She fed them, and led them away, through tempest and tropical heat,  
Till they reached the far regions of day, and sweet-scented spaces of wheat!  
She hath made them a home with her hand, and they bloom like the summery vines;  
For they eat of the fat of the land, and drink of its glittering wines.

HENRY KENDALL

*Empire* (Sydney), 14 October 1862, page 5

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Other poems praising Caroline Chisholm and her social reforms and charitable work were written by contemporaries. These and the three printed in this issue will be included in a Collection on [www.mrschisholm.com](http://www.mrschisholm.com) — suggestions are very welcome.