

The Austin Woodbury Archives: Collection and Preservation of Historical Materials

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With the great emphasis of aligning our libraries with the most contemporary IT developments and matching our digital and online services along with major academic libraries, and in the thrust of all this activity to constantly maintain the relevance of our libraries, we can overlook the distinctive nature and responsibility of theological libraries and libraries with a strong theological component.

The Champion College Library is a liberal arts library in the Catholic tradition with no vocational subjects, the only one of its kind in Australia – liberal arts meaning the inclusion of Theology along with Philosophy, History, Literature, from antiquity through the medieval period to modern times based on the early Oxford tradition of incorporating Theology and Church History as the major fulcrum around which the related subjects develop.

The College occupies what was once a Marist Seminary continuing an historical line from a teaching seminary, to the establishment of Champion College for the formation of young students in the Catholic faith in the heritage of the European western traditions of historical inquiry and learning.

The Marist Seminary at Old Toongabbie (the third settlement in the historical establishment of Sydney), was the first Marist Seminary in Australia. The Marist Fathers originated in France founded by Fr Jean Claude Colin in 1836.¹

One of the first major missions of the Marist Fathers was to the Oceania Region at the end of 1836.² St Peter Chanel was a member of that original missionary group.³ He was martyred in 1841 in the South Pacific on the Island of Futuna after having succeeded in converting the son of the king of the island to the Christian faith. This conversion aroused the anger of the king and his followers and hence he was murdered – clubbed to death.⁴ Following this horrific murder the entire island was converted to Christianity, as Fr Chanel was known for his perseverance,

1 Stanley W. Hosie SM, *Anonymous Apostle: The Life of Jean Claude Colin, Marist*. (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1967).

2 “The missionaries went armed with a long letter of his [Colin’s] advice, assuring them that it was with a kind of holy jealousy he watched them go into the unknown void of the Pacific, knowing himself to be unworthy of the grace of the mission apostolate and of martyrdom” (ibid., 137); “He called the mission his first love”; (ibid., 149); “no facet of the Society of Mary under Colin shone with greater splendor than the South Pacific Mission” (ibid., 215).

3 “Among the first twenty Marists who made their religious vows on the 24th September, 1836, was Peter Chanel, who on hearing that he was one of the seven first missionaries to be sent to Western Oceania almost immediately, could hardly repress his joy. ‘Ah’, he said, in a letter to a religious friend, ‘what good news I have to tell! I am amongst the first missionaries who are to leave for Polynesia. ... We may meet with many dangers, but candidly I do not fear them, for I am willing to sacrifice my life for God ... In spirit I am almost always beyond the sea; I feel as though I were already amongst the pagans; I seem to see them, to speak to them, to love them.’” (Basil Tozer, ed., *The Life of Blessed Peter Aloysius Mary Chanel, Marist, First Martyr of Oceania and Apostle of Futuna*. From the French, ed. Basil Tozer. London: Art and Book Company, 1891, 9-10).

4 Ibid., 83-88.

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continuing love and patience.⁵ In spite of great hardships he was known to be joyful, hopeful and steadfast in conviction. His deepest wish was to be a light to the gentiles.⁶

Peter Chanel was declared a saint in 1954 by Pope Pius XII and has been honoured by these words from the Gospel of John: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit (John 12:24)⁷

Initially the Marists were members of the Province of Oceania, later, in 1889, they became part of the New Zealand Province.⁸ In 1938 Australia became an independent Marist Fathers’ Province. At the same time the Marist Seminary was established at Old Toongabbie, Western Sydney.⁹ Peter Chanel’s remains were temporarily held in a chapel dedicated to Peter Chanel in Hunters Hill in 1849 before they were transferred to Lyons, France on a ship in 1850 to Fr Jean Claude Colin, Founder of the Society of Mary. In 1977 his bones were returned to Futuna Island.¹⁰

A statue has been erected at the Marist Seminary of Old Toongabbie in honour of Peter Chanel’s martyrdom and missionary work in the Pacific.

As I have mentioned the first Marist Seminary in Australia was established in 1938 at Old Toongabbie. The first Rector of the Blessed St Peter Chanel’s Marist Seminary was The Rev’d Dr Austin Woodbury SM from 1938–1943, an enthusiastic and dedicated teacher, known belovedly as “the Doc”. He was born at Spencer in March 1899 in the Hawkesbury region and had his early training from 1921 in the Marist order at the New Zealand Marist Province Seminary, Greenmeadows, Hawkes Bay, New Zealand. He studied further in Rome at the Dominican Angelicum 1926–1928. He was ordained in Rome July 1927 and gained his doctorates in Theology and Philosophy, very much influenced by the revival of Thomistic

5 Ibid., 88–89.

6 Florence Gilmore, *The Martyr of Futuna: Blessed Peter Chanel of the Society of Mary*, prepared from the French by Florence Gilmore (Maryknoll, New York: Catholic Foreign Mission Society, 1917), 165, 186–191, 196–199.

7 *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, “Chanel, Peter Louis Marie, St,” 2nd ed., Vol. 3, 378–379; and Tozer, 88–89.

8 “New Zealand Marist History,” at *Society of Mary, New Zealand*, accessed July, 2012, updated 2013, <http://www.sm.org.nz/about/nz-province/new-zealand-marist-history1>.

9 Fr John Thornhill SM, “Woodbury, Austin Maloney (1899–1979),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, accessed July 12, 2012, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/woodbury-austin-maloney-12066>. First published in hardcopy *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 16 (Melbourne University Press, 2002).

10 B. Quin SM, “The Story of his ‘Relics’”, *St Peter Chanel – 200 years on*, accessed July, 2012, updated 2013, <http://www.peterchanel.info/relics.htm>.

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Theology and Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas through the writings and commentaries of Garrigou-Lagrange.¹¹

According to Fr John Thornhill SM, biographer of Austin Woodbury in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Woodbury went on further to establish the Aquinas Academy in Sydney in 1945 to fulfil his desire to teach the laity, “sharing his philosophical and theological insights”.¹² This activity was very progressive in engaging enthusiastically with, and contributing to, the formation and edification of the laity well before the influences of Vatican II. The Aquinas Academy, named in honour of the teaching of Thomas Aquinas, was the first step towards a Catholic university in Australia. This only became a reality in 1990 with the establishment of the University of Notre Dame in Fremantle and the Australian Catholic University with branches in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.¹³

The Rev'd Dr Austin Woodbury SM continued his active teaching at the Aquinas Academy until 1974, when he retired to the Villa Maria, the Marist Provincial at Hunters Hill. In that same year the Marist Seminary spiritual formation and educational activities were transferred from Old Toongabbie to Hunters Hill.


As College Librarian of Campion College, over and above my activities in shaping a library supportive of the liberal arts education of the students, it has also been my personal mission to establish a link to the educational history of the beginnings of Campion College with the foundations of the Marist Seminary. Also especially to honour our lecturer in Theology, Fr Luke Holohan, Marist Priest, continuing the spiritual formation and educational goals in teaching the young, as well as to nurture in the young students a sense of historical continuity from the significant early beginnings of the site of Campion College. From the time of my appointment in 2007, I commenced gathering archives of Austin Woodbury's writings, those left behind from the previous teaching responsibilities of the Marist Seminary, those coming my way buried in bequests, such as The Rev'd Dr Barry Miller Bequest, Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of New England and Marist Priest, through a large number of quality donations from donors who had been taught by Austin Woodbury and who have fond and loving memories of him.

Finally, in 2009 The Rev'd Dr Luke Holohan SM, on behalf of Campion College, became the mediator for the dispersal of the collection of the Colin Library at Hunters Hill, named in honour of the founding father of the Marists, Jean Claude Colin. Especially also

11 Thornhill, “Woodbury,” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, and Sister Maur Woodbury, SM, *The Memorial Mass and Re-Internment of Dr Austin Woodbury, SM (1899-1979)*, accessed July 12, 2013, <http://www.cts.org.au/1997/reinter1.htm>.

12 Thornhill, “Woodbury,” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

13 The Aquinas Academy, accessed July 11, 2013, <http://www.aquinas-academy.com/about%20us.php>. Notre Dame later opened a branch in Central Sydney at Broadway (2006) around St Benedict's Catholic Church.



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through The Rev'd Dr Luke Holohan SM, I was given permission to have access to the Austin Woodbury Room containing the vast breadth of his writings and personal books. This room had been left untouched for 30 years, I repeat 30 years – from 1979 to 2009 – I was given the good fortune to enter this room and commence sorting and organizing the archival history of Austin Woodbury's writing and reading activity and transferring 41 boxes of valuable material to Campion College Library.

Combined with all that I had collected since 2007, the writings of The Rev'd Dr Austin Woodbury SM displayed an evolution of spiritual and intellectual thought from his first days in the Marist Seminary of the Oceania region of New Zealand, Greenmeadows, Hawkes Bay, to the finding of his doctorate in Theology, presented to the “Collegio Angelico” in Rome 1928, to the records of his teaching material as first Rector of the Marist Seminary 1938-1943, to working drafts and notes from his activity at the Aquinas Academy – his sets of lecture material on a broad range of topics, to mention a few - The Supernatural and Grace, The Trinity, on the Eucharist, Natural Theology, Metaphysics, Basic Morals, Natural Philosophy, Political Economy, Socialism, and Educational Rights. Also sets of Reference materials from the Aquinas Academy that he would have consulted in the preparation of his lectures, comprehensive sets of classical and rare editions of Thomas Aquinas texts, including the rare Carmelite edition. In the acquisition of all this archival material we now have a comprehensive laboratory of the evolution of his thinking and writing activity.

Because of this treasure trove of Austin Woodbury materials I established contacts with a life-time researcher of Austin Woodbury, Mr Andrew Wood, who has spent about 20 years visiting the pupils of Austin Woodbury building a database of the vast array of his lecture texts; I collaborated with Dr Luciano Boschiero our Lecturer in History and Director of our Centre for Western Tradition in establishing a research scholarship around the study of this archival material. Currently (July – August, 2012) we have a knowledgeable researcher, in fact, Dr Christine Wood, sister of Andrew Wood, a devotee to Austin Woodbury's teaching, having studied and taught for 10 years at the Centre for Thomistic Studies in Sydney and having written a chapter on Austin Woodbury in her PhD.¹⁴ She is now researching the archives, exploring at great depth the content of his themes in the revival of Thomistic Studies in Australia.

The significance of this preservation project is to highlight the value of the responsibilities that librarians in theological and academic libraries still have in this virtual information age. A responsibility over and above gathering published historical and contemporary materials, to research, gather, preserve and organize records that are

14 Christine Wood, “*The Metaphysics and Intellectual Psychology in the Natural Desire for Seeing God: Henri de Lubac and Neo-scholasticism.*” (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 2011).

“A responsibility over and above gathering published historical and contemporary materials, to research, gather, preserve and organize records that are original links to our past, which can further enlighten the influences of the spiritual activities of dedicated teachers and missionaries, who could easily be forgotten, yet remain an inspiration, an encouragement to lift our spirits far beyond that of being useful and practical in the material world, but to be a light of spiritual nourishment, to enrich the inner being to “goodness, truth and beauty”.”

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I am reminded of the time of Kings in the Bible, when the Jewish nation had lost its spiritual identity, had merged in with the decadent influences of the surrounding nations – King Josiah was keen to repair the temple that had become dilapidated. When the work commenced to repair the house – the engagement of the activity of the carpenters, the builders, the masons – Hilkiah, the High Priest said to Shaphan the Secretary,

“I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. And Shaphan the secretary came to the king, and reported to the king, ‘Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the Lord’. Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, ‘Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.’ And Shaphan read it before the King.

And when the King heard the words of the book of the law, he rent his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Micaiah, and Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the king’s servant, saying, ‘Go inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do all that is written concerning us.’”¹⁶

Following the reading of the book Josiah restored the spiritual teachings of the Lord and restored peace and dignity to the Jewish nation for the period of his kingship.

As librarians of theological and academic libraries, recorders and collectors of history and the present, we have a special role in opening the gate to knowledge, to the seekers of truth.

Summary

Through this preservation project we have gained special insight into the historical continuity of the missionary activities of the

15 “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Phil 4:8, RSV)
See also: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology, Vol 1: The Word Made Flesh*, “Revelation and the Beautiful” (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 95-127.
Title of the German original: *Verbum Caro (Skizzen zur Theologie I)* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1960).

16 2 Kings 22:8-13.

“Through this preservation project we have gained special insight into the historical continuity of the missionary activities of the Marist martyr in the Pacific, St Peter Chanel; the beginnings of the first Marist Seminary in Australia at Old Toongabbie through the leadership of Austin Woodbury; ... the beginnings of wider visionary educational projects, such as Campion College; and the restoration of the insights gained through the teachings of Thomas Aquinas.”

Marist martyr in the Pacific, St Peter Chanel; the beginnings of the first Marist Seminary in Australia at Old Toongabbie through the leadership of Austin Woodbury; the educational project of the Aquinas Academy, educating the laity in the conviction of theological foundations of faith; the beginnings of wider visionary educational projects, such as Campion College; and the restoration of the insights gained through the teachings of Thomas Aquinas.

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