

# INTERVIEWS

## Quo Vadis? - The Centenary Interviews

*By Jim Kelly, Past Grand President*

The idea of Centenary Interviews originated in discussion between Peter Bleakley, then Director Province 13, and myself, when considering ways in which Catena might add to the celebrations of the Centenary. Despite Alexis de Tocqueville's aphorism that "History is a gallery of pictures in which there are few originals and many copies", we came to a view that some part of the year's celebration should look to the future, knowing that the past had already been carefully considered in the scholarly work of the two authors of the histories of the Association.

In the description of the beginnings of the Catenian Association, originally known as "The Chums", Peter Lane quoted the historian Hubert Butterfield, who warned that 'anyone seeking to unravel the tapestry of history would find himself holding 'ropes of sand' that would disappear as the tapestry was being examined'.<sup>1</sup> Some twenty five years later, in his scholarly history written as part of our Centenary celebrations, Dr James Hagerty led us through the early days of our Association, highlighting both the challenges which faced the founding fathers and also the socio-religious context which provided a cradle for the Association's birth. Both historians pay tribute to the formative influence of Bishop Louis Casartelli who, 'in his first pastoral letter "The Signs of the Times" emphasised the need for the Catholic laity to come together to address the social and political issues of the day'. Bishop Casartelli's insistence that The Chums 'preserve a completely lay character in their work' was paradoxical, given his unremitting and firm belief that an essential role of the episcopacy at that time was to be leaders of the Catholic community. However he also saw the twentieth century as 'the century of the laity' and would no doubt have welcomed the Chums' expressed intention to operate on a non political basis. It was in this spirit that the interviews were conducted.

Whilst an ethos of "active Catholics rather than Catholic Action" remains characteristic of our Association today, the work of the Public Affairs Committee in recent times has highlighted and reminded us of the many and serious challenges which Catholics and all people of faith face in the modern world. In recent years we have had to face a consistent lowering of moral standards in our countries: abortion, that 'Silent Holocaust' which has so frighteningly and steadily increased over the last forty years; the status of marriage and family life have been diminished in our society; sexual unions of people of the same sex have been recognised; and, as a consequence of these changes of the law, our Adoption Societies have been forced either to radically change or to close. The sad inventory of legal change does not end there. The focussed activity of secular and humanist political lobbies continues to threaten faith and spiritual values, as was evidenced in the debates in both houses of Parliament, on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act. Furthermore history

almost seems to be repeating itself as the public debate is again guided into the arena of education and the very existence of our Catholic Schools once more threatened.

Given the wide range of the challenges of our times, we were fortunate to gain agreement from a number of prominent Catholics of our generation who in their different careers and from their different perspectives are facing those challenges and have agreed to share their thoughts and responses with us.

### The Honourable Tony Abbott MP



After university degrees from Sydney University in Economics and Law and an MA as a Rhodes Scholar in Oxford, he held a variety of posts in commerce and politics prior to being elected to the House of Representatives of the Australian Parliament as the member for Warringah in New South Wales in

1994. He has been re-elected in the five subsequent elections since 1994. During his time in Government he has held a number of junior posts prior to spending ten years in a variety of ministerial posts, his final job being Minister of Health in the Howard Government. Since moving into opposition he has been Shadow Minister for Families, Community Services, Indigenous Affairs and the Voluntary Sector.

Known for calling a spade a spade, recently Tony spoke out on issues relating to his current ministerial shadowing post, "The problem with politicians getting to know the issues in indigenous townships is that we tend to suffer from what Aboriginal people call the 'seagull syndrome' — we fly in, scratch around and fly out ... You learn a hell of a lot more living in a place than just going in and talking to people about what it's like". He then spent three weeks of the parliamentary winter break working with Aboriginal people in the township of Coen, north of Cairns (one of the most disadvantaged areas of Australia). Whilst he was there he taught remedial reading to Aboriginal children in the mornings and worked with an income management group in the afternoons, helping families manage their welfare payments. This action prompted a well know Australian political commentator to remark "Sadly, this down to earth, commonsense, gutsy action by an Australian politician strikes me as so extraordinarily unusual that I feel compelled to draw attention to it."

### His Eminence Cardinal Francis Stafford.

As many of our brothers will remember, Cardinal Stafford was a guest at the Torquay Conference in 2005 where he was the Keynote Speaker. There, he brought us into the heart of the church as he described the momentous events following the death of Pope John Paul II and the election of Pope



Benedict XVI, before leading us, in his address, to focus on the Beatitudes as we search for true happiness in our lives. He also displayed both his sense of humour and also his precise use of language when he described the drizzle of the rainy weekend as ‘a gentle mist’.

Educated in Loyola High School and Loyola College in Baltimore, he entered St Mary’s Seminary in Baltimore, followed by theological studies in Rome, earning degrees in arts, social welfare and theology. He was ordained priest for the Diocese of Baltimore on 15th December 1957. He was consecrated auxiliary bishop of Baltimore and Titular Bishop of Respecta on 11th January 1976.

In 1982 Bishop Stafford was appointed Bishop of the Diocese of Memphis. Four years later he was named Archbishop of Denver, in which capacity he served for ten years before being called to Rome. Archbishop Stafford oversaw the arrangements for World Youth Day in 1993.

Named President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity on 20th August 1996, he became Cardinal Deacon of Gesù Buon Pastore alla Montagnola in the consistory of 1998. In 2003, Cardinal Stafford was appointed Major Penitentiary, overseeing matters pertaining to indulgences and the internal forum of the Church. The Major Penitentiary is one of the few Curia officials whose office is not automatically suspended upon the death of the Pope, and is the only one allowed to be in contact with anyone in the outside world during the conclave. Cardinal Stafford was one of the cardinal electors who participated in the 2005 conclave which elected Pope Benedict XVI. He remains eligible to vote in any future papal conclaves arising from the death of a Pope before his 80th birthday.

Following his distinguished career, in accordance with the Code of Canon Law, Cardinal Stafford submitted his letter of resignation to Pope Benedict XVI on the occasion of his 75th birthday in 2007. In 2008, Cardinal Stafford, after ten years as a Cardinal Deacon, was raised to the rank of Cardinal Priest, and was assigned the titular church of San Pietro in Montorio. On 2nd June 2009 Pope Benedict finally accepted his resignation and appointed Archbishop Fortunato Baldelli, who at that time was the Apostolic Nuncio to France, as his successor.

### Lord Brennan of Bibury in the County of Gloucestershire



Lord Dan Brennan was educated at St Bede’s Grammar School, Bradford, and graduated with a Bachelor of Law degree from Manchester University, where subsequently he was awarded an honorary Doctorate in 2000. A member of the renowned Matrix Chambers, he has specialized

in personal injury and medical work, commercial law, international business issues, public and private international law, and international arbitration. He was called to the Bar at Gray’s Inn in 1967, became a Queen’s Counsel in 1985, and he is a Deputy High Court Judge and a Recorder in the Crown

Court. He is also a former member of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board and ex-Chairman of the Personal Injuries Bar Association. During 1999, he was Chairman of the Bar of England and Wales, the organisation that represents 10,000 practising barristers - specialist advocates and advisers in litigation - and in 2000 he was voted Barrister of the Year. He was created Baron Brennan of Bibury in the County of Gloucestershire on 2nd May 2000.

Lord Brennan is currently the Bar representative on the Council of the International Bar Association. He is a member of the Bars of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. He is also a member of the London Court of International Arbitration and a member of the Arbitration Foundation of South Africa, as well as a member of its Appeals Panel, South Africa. He is also on the panel of consultants to the World Bank for Latin America and South and East Asia.

He is Chair of the Across Party Parliamentary Group on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, which is a cross party grouping of MPs and Peers in Parliament focused on discussing issues relating to the legal profession and the reform of the law and constitution.

Currently president of the Catholic Union of Great Britain, and a Knight Commander of the Order of St Gregory, in 2006 Lord Brennan was appointed Delegate for Great Britain and Ireland of the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of Saint George.

Lord Brennan has been a powerful advocate of Christian principles in the Upper House, as was clearly evidenced in his contributions to the debate on the Human Fertilization and Embryology Bill (HFE Bill), where, inter alia, he argued strongly for the creation of a National Bioethics Commission. On 19th November 2007 he collapsed in the House of Lords shortly after concluding a speech on the HFE Bill. He was given heart massage in the House of Lords by, among others, Baron Darzi of Denham, the then health minister. On regaining consciousness, he was asked by Baron Darzi “Is there anything more I can do for you?” to which, with characteristic humour, he replied, “Yes. Give me my National Bioethics Commission”.

All of our distinguished interviewees have first-hand knowledge of our Association, are eminent in their chosen vocations and have wide-ranging experience in facing the challenges which the modern world poses to modern ‘men of faith’. Each of their interviews lasted just under an hour. Therefore, it is important to note that the full richness and potential of the interviews can only be gained from the complete transcripts which are available on the Association website. The summative articles which appear in this Centenary edition should be viewed as extended, contextual sketches to whet the reader’s appetite.

*I am sure, having had the privilege of conducting the interviews, that the combined experience, wisdom and foresight of our interviewees will provide us with much to think about as we continue to face the challenges of the 21st century.*