

Paddy Kearney:

An example of the creation and re-creation of  
a Christian Activist over Five Decades

*PhD dissertation*

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# COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

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Signed at Durban, 22 November 2022



Supervisor's approval:



## Acknowledgements

The most important person for me to acknowledge is, of course, Paddy Kearney himself. His unexpected death in November 2018, aged only 76, was a great shock and created an immense sense of loss for all those who worked closely with him. I had only had that pleasure for the preceding four years but had been greatly inspired and encouraged by his witness as a Christian activist. Talking, in those days of mourning, to those who had known him better and for longer, soon showed me the importance of capturing Paddy's story and presenting it – not as a regular biography but as a theological biography to inspire future generations.

In this I am following in his own footsteps. Paddy's award-winning biography of +Denis Hurley is not only a major contribution to South African historiography but also an on-going inspiration to people like me who did not know +Hurley and want to know why he mattered. (Many of us also pray that it will be an important first step on the road towards him one day being declared 'St Denis of Durban'). The title of that book uses the name that Alan Paton coined for the Archbishop, playing on Hurley père's profession as a lighthouse keeper: 'The Guardian of the Light'. I used to tease Paddy that that meant he was 'The Guardian of the Guardian of the Light'. I wonder if that now makes me 'The Guardian of the Guardian of the Guardian of the Light'?

I therefore wish to acknowledge the many people who were willing to be interviewed for this work: his family, friends and colleagues from across almost six decades, who shared with me their stories and insights. I am conscious that some of them will not be around much longer to pass on their wisdom – and sadly a few have died since I interviewed them – and this makes it all the more important for them, and for South Africa history, that they have been recorded. Among these, particular thanks goes to Sarah Kearney, one of Paddy's nieces, who was probably closest to him among his family members and had also worked with him in his final months on sorting his archive, a wonderful posthumous gift from him to me as a researcher.

Work on this dissertation took place whilst I was also the director of the Denis Hurley Centre – a busy role at the best of times, but all the more so during the last few years of COVID, riots and floods. However, far from being a distraction, it meant that I had a daily exposure to the on-going mission of Paddy's last great project. I could thus constantly connect what I was reading and learning from his past with our attempts to live out that vision in the present. I therefore wish to thank the Trustees, staff, volunteers, supporters and service users of the DHC whose commitment as *synergoi* ('energy sharers') in our God-given vocation has continued to motivate me.

The deepest thanks are for my illustrious supervisor, Br Philippe Denis OP. It is important to have a supervisor who can commit the time and care to working with a first-time academic like me; it is rare to find someone with the unparalleled breadth of reading and experience that he has; it is an even greater blessing that he also knew and worked with Paddy and shares my belief that this is a story worth capturing. I am very grateful for all the efforts that he spent on nurturing me through this process and I hope that he feels that the result lives up to his very high standards. I also wish to acknowledge the kindness and patience shown me by the librarians and archivists at St Joseph's Theological Institute, Cedara.

Finally, a word of personal thanks. One of the most poignant discoveries in Paddy's archives was of bundles of handwritten letters that he had sent home during three different trips overseas (in 1958, 1972 and 1991). His parents, I assume, had treasured these letters safely; Paddy then inherited the collection when they died. Being able to 'listen in' on the thoughts shared between son and parents across the decades was an unexpected insight into the thoughts of a very private man. This therefore prompts me to acknowledge the support and encouragement of my own mother and father, many thousands of miles away, Phil and Winston Perrier. And also, closer to hand, the words of reassurance and love, matched with cups of tea and glasses of wine, from Caroline Joubert, Illa Thompson and Dr Ockert Fourie.

I should like to dedicate this work – in the hope that it is worthy of them – to three great South African men of faith. I had the great honour to know them towards the end of their days; they showed me through their lives and their work that in every age and in different ways, we are called to carry out the words that are the motto of the OMI: 'go and bring good news to the poor'. From a better place, I hope that in some small way this work can honour the memory of Paddy Kearney, Paul Nadal and Albert Nolan. May they rest in peace and rise in glory!

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