

Chapter 1: Introduction

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations. (Jer 1:5)

Scope of the Project

This dissertation aims to take on the task of writing not just about the creation but also the re-creation of a Christian activist. The reason why there is this re-creation is because the activist in question, Paddy Kearney, was busy across more than five decades and through periods of great change in South Africa, in the Church and in his own life. I hope to show that what holds his life together with coherence is 'the theology of Paddy Kearney'.

Some might challenge that he was not a theologian. Although Kearney wrote extensively about the Church¹ and ecclesial issues, and reviewed works by theologians, he did not himself write any works of academic theology. And although he had a post at a university, three degrees and two honorary doctorates, none of these were in theology-related fields. Nevertheless, for me, his life is his theological statement: it proves its role as theology in that it was a response to reflections on theological themes, it commented on and challenged theological issues of his day, and it inspired others for the way they should live and write (including the current author).

Although there will be many biographical elements, this is not strictly a detailed biography of Paddy Kearney (nor a history of the organisations with which he was mostly closely associated, Diakonia and the Denis Hurley Centre). I am cautioned by the words of one of Kearney's heroes, Alan Paton, who described one biography as 'a dull book about a dull man'.² Whilst that would be unlikely in the case of Kearney, lists of dates and events and talks and publications may not always inspire a future generation. Yet that is what I intend to do with this project.

In the task of inspiring others, there can certainly be value in some biographical accounts. On this I agree with the author of *African Christian Biography* who argues:

Biography is powerful. On a popular level, biography introduces ordinary people to the excitement of history by exploring the loves, hates, struggles, and victories of actual human beings.... Biography illustrates how people construct meaning in the midst of social, cultural and political processes that often seem overwhelming and uncontrollable....In short, through biography people become, to borrow a concept made popular by liberation theology, the 'subjects of their own history'.³

I will therefore be drawing on those elements of Kearney's life which I believe are inspiring and which tie in with the theological themes that dominate his life: this is 'Biography as Theology'.

¹ The use of the word 'Church' can be confusing. Most Roman Catholics tend to use the term to mean only 'the Roman Catholic Church'; but clearly other Christians (and some Roman Catholics) use it to mean the whole community that follows Christ. I will mostly use 'Church' to mean 'Roman Catholic Church'; if I mean 'the whole Christian community' that will be specified or be clear from the context. I do this, with apologies to my fellow Christians, but to avoid being too wordy: I am a Catholic writing about a Catholic and often quoting Catholic documents – to keep saying Roman Catholic Church and not just Church will become irksome for the reader. Even if Vatican II, Kearney and I all try to be ecumenical in our outlook, it is only honest to admit that the referent of 'Church' mostly remains specific and not general.

² Paton, Alan. *Journey Continued*. (Cape Town: David Philip, 1988) 52

³ Robert, Dana. *African Christian Biography*. (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2018) viii

As someone who knew and was inspired by Kearney, and on behalf of the 70 people I interviewed who knew him much better than I did and who were almost without exception inspired by him, I want to present his life as an inspiration to future generations. They will not get a chance to meet him in person. But, through these pages, I hope that they will meet him in a way that brings him to life for them but also situates his life in a theological context.

Biography as Theology

For this idea of 'Biography as Theology', I draw on the American writer, James McClendon who argues that reflecting on people who consciously lived in response to faith can provide a form of theology.⁴ I have no reason to believe that Kearney read this book (it would not have been easily accessible to him) and I am indebted to the Johannesburg-based Jesuit theologian, Anthony Egan, who drew my attention to it.⁵ Egan has also been engaged in biographical reflection for example on Rick Turner, an academic colleague of Kearney and a fellow anti-Apartheid activist who was assassinated in 1978 only a few kilometres from Kearney's own home.⁶ Egan encouraged me to start with the premise that Kearney did have a theological viewpoint and look for evidence for this, in part in what he wrote, but more so in how he lived.

McClendon supports this:

The best way to understand theology is to see it not as a study about God (for there are godless theologies as well as godly ones) but as the investigation of a convictional community, discovering its convictions, interpreting them, criticising them in the light of all that we can know and creatively transforming them into better ones if possible.⁷

In or near the community, there appear from time to time, singular or striking lives, the lives of persons who embody the convictions of the community but in a new way; who share the vision of the community but with new scope or power; who exhibit the style of the community but with significant differences. It is patent that the example of these lives may serve to disclose, and perhaps to correct or enlarge, the community's moral vision, at the same time arousing impotent wills within the community to a better fulfilment of the vision already acquired.

Such lives, by their very attractiveness or beauty, may serve as data for the Christian thinker, enabling him more fully to reflect on the tension between what is and what ought to be believed and lived by all. To engage in such reflection is the proper task of Christian theology.⁸

I intend to show that Kearney's life is an excellent example of this with a number of overlapping communities: the Catholic Church in Durban, the wider Christian community in Durban, and the wider faith community across South Africa; and in relation to the convictional communities of those

⁴ McClendon, James. *Biography as Theology: how life stories can remake today's theology* (New York: Abingdon, 1974)

⁵ Egan, Anthony. Personal interview by author, 16 October 2020 via Zoom (Jesuit priest and theologian).

⁶ Egan, Anthony. "Remembering to think critically: Rick Turner 40 years on" *Spotlight Africa* <https://spotlight.africa/2018/01/08/thinking-rick-turner/> (accessed 24 March 2022)

⁷ McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 35

⁸ McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 37

who fought against Apartheid before 1994, and of those who have attempted to build a new South Africa in the last 2-3 decades.

The reference above to a number of faith communities (like concentric circles) and to socio-political communities which may or may not include people of faith, raises the question of the importance of propositional beliefs in this theology. Should we be asking: what did Kearney think about the role of Christ? The role of the Catholic Church? The possibility of redemption? And do his beliefs about these matter?

McClendon cautions against us focusing on statements-of-truth to the neglect of actions-in-truth:

By recognising that Christian beliefs are not so many propositions to be catalogued or juggled like truth-functions in a computer, but are living conditions that give shape to actual lives and actual communities, we open ourselves to the possibility that the only relevant critical examination of Christian beliefs may be one which begins by attending to lived lives.⁹

Writing in 1974 (a critical year in Kearney's life), McClendon's book covers four lives. Unfortunately, all of them are men and all living in the United States, but at least one is not white!¹⁰ McClendon explains his choice: "Others can choose other lives and reap an equal or better harvest. I have chosen these because, with all their flaws, I like them very much."¹¹ I would certainly say the same about my choice of Kearney; but I also have closer links to the subject as I shall explain later in this chapter.

Writing about one of his subjects, McClendon says: "My intention cannot be to discover what Dag [Hammar skjöld] believed religiously and argue that we should believe the same. That is not what biography as theology means."¹² In the same way, my focus will not be to try and neatly formulate the set of theological propositions that Kearney held strongly; rather it is to show how aspects of his life were shaped by certain convictions and that he encouraged others to share these convictions: beliefs, then, not as theological propositions but as a moral guide to a good life.

This, of course, is in keeping with the Catholic tradition of recognising and honouring saints. That was something of which Kearney was very aware; moreover, it was also something in which he was personally invested: starting the process towards 'St Denis of Durban' (technically 'opening the cause for his canonisation') was one of the unfinished tasks of Kearney's life.¹³ In fact, only a few months before his death, Kearney encouraged me to appear in a national television programme about saints and talk specifically about this cause.¹⁴

Saints mattered to Kearney, to me and to McClendon: "Saints serve as models for new styles of being Christian, opening paths that others may follow."¹⁵ Kearney clearly believed that about Archbishop Hurley which is why he invested a large part of the 14 years between Hurley's death in 2004 and his own in 2018 in ensuring that the Archbishop's model and style would open paths for others to follow. Whilst I might hesitate to make a similar canonisation claim for Kearney – not least

⁹ McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 37

¹⁰ His focuses are Dag Hammarskjöld (Secretary General of the United Nations), Martin Luther King (civil rights activist), Charles Ives (composer) and Clarence Jordan (founder of Habitat for Humanity). Though all are people of strong Christian conviction, only King is a formal Church minister.

¹¹ McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 38

¹² McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 40

¹³ Mary Gardner, Personal interview by author, 2 October 2020 in Pietermaritzburg (widow of Chair of Christian Institute)

¹⁴ 'Saints'. *Issue of Faith*. SABC 2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsioMIEBNbU> (accessed 8 September 2022) (The programme aired on SABC2 in June 2018 but can be viewed via You Tube).

¹⁵ McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 186

because he would not want it! – I certainly believe, and hope to show, that Kearney’s life also provides a model and style that open paths for others to follow.

A starting point for that, then, is to set out the key shape of that life. Kearney did this for +Hurley with his award-winning biography which will be frequently referenced throughout this work.¹⁶ I will not be attempting in this work a comparably exhaustive biography of Kearney and will instead be focusing on specific aspects of his life and work. But just as Kearney was able to condense his 380-page book into a ‘short biography’ of 2,500 words for the Denis Hurley Centre website, so I shall start with a short overview of Kearney’s life, also in under 2,500 words.¹⁷

The shape of this life already gives some insights into the character of Kearney, both by what he chose to do and by the ways in which he enabled himself (and others) to develop. McClendon stresses the importance of character, something which is both a given and also continuously developed:

To have character, then, is to enter at a new level the realm of morality, the level at which one’s person, with its continuities, its interconnections, its integrity, is intimately involved in one’s deeds. By being the persons we are, we are able to do what we do, and conversely, by those very deeds, we form or re-form our own characters... Thus character is paradoxically both the cause and the consequence of what we do.¹⁸

Brief life of Kearney

Kearney was born in Pietermaritzburg South Africa on 28 August 1942 to Jack and Margie Kearney. His father was a civil servant with the provincial government and they lived a ‘respectable lifestyle’ typical of middle-class white South Africans of their era.^{19 20} Although christened Gerald Patrick, he was always known by the nickname ‘Paddy’ – probably (as mentioned at his funeral) because ‘Gerry’ was at the time of World War II a derogatory way of referring to Germans!²¹ He had a brother four years his senior (also Jack) and one two years younger than him (Brian). Whilst proudly South African, the family were also conscious of their Irish roots²²; for example, of Kearney’s great-great grandfather James Kearney who had been the Superintendent of St Stephen’s Green in Dublin (effectively, a very upmarket park curator). Kearney was pleased (in a visit to Ireland in 1992) to see the plaque that commemorated his ancestor’s actions during the Easter Uprising of 1916, entering the park during the ceasefire to feed the ducks.²³ Perhaps he saw this as evidence of a family tradition of non-violent resistance in the midst of conflict.²⁴

¹⁶ Kearney, G Paddy. *Guardian of the Light* (Pietermaritzburg: UKZN, 2009)

¹⁷ Kearney, G Patrick. ‘Short biographies’. *Denis Hurley Centre website* <http://www.denishurleycentre.org/page/short-biography-of-hurley> (accessed 8 September 2022)

¹⁸ McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 30

¹⁹ Houston, Gregory. “Interview with Paddy Kearney”. *Unsung Heroes and Heroines of the Liberation Struggle* (Cape Town: Human Science Research Council, 2013) 2; Goemans, Loek. Personal interview by author, 15 October 2020 in Johannesburg (member of The Grail)

²⁰ For more on this, see Appendix A: “Kearney’s racial identity”.

²¹ ‘Kearney obituaries and sermons’. *Denis Hurley Centre website* <http://www.denishurleycentre.org/page/kearney-obituaries-and-sermons> (accessed 8 September 2022)

²² Keane, Marie-Henry. Personal interview by author, 16 September 2021 via Zoom (Dominican sister and co-worker)

²³ SJTI Archive: BIO- 496/C/1 “Kearney’s letters to his parents, September 1991 to August 1992” (Letter dated 10 April 1992)

²⁴ For more on non-violence, see Appendix E: “+Hurley, Kearney and Gandhi”.

The family were 'staunchly Catholic' attending St Mary's Church in Pietermaritzburg (the only Catholic church in the town at the time) and all three boys were sent to the local whites-only Catholic boys' school, St Charles (which Archbishop Hurley had also attended in the 1920s). The school was run by the Marists, a Catholic order of brothers (i.e. not priests) founded in France in the early 19th century and which had been running a number of schools (at the time only for boys) across South Africa since 1867.²⁵ The myth that Kearney was an altar boy when +Hurley was made a bishop is not substantiated by investigation of the official photograph (aged 4 in March 1947, Kearney would have been too young).²⁶ But he certainly would have served the (Arch)Bishop at Mass at St Mary's and also in the chapel at St Charles and was confirmed by him in 1957. In 1958, he had his first experience outside of South Africa, travelling for 6 weeks, with his grandfather and some members of the Church community, to Italy, France and the United Kingdom.

On completing his education in 1959, aged still only 17, and having shown himself to be an able scholar, Kearney (not untypical for young Catholics of his generation) immediately joined religious life, in fact the Marist order itself. Like other South African Marist novices, he was sent to spend 18 months on a rural farm in Australia. The noviceship was intended as a period of isolation for the candidate Marists, not just from their friends and family but also from most of the world around them. But, in two significant respects, it provided the opposite experience for Kearney.

Apartheid – formalised when the National Party came to power when Kearney was six – meant that his life as a white South African would have kept him isolated from 'other races'. But at the noviciate he did have the experience of living with people of colour since there were also novices from the Pacific Islands.²⁷ In addition, the news coverage in Australia was not censored as it was back home and so Kearney recalls hearing reports about the Sharpeville massacre in March 1960.²⁸

On his return to South Africa in 1961, he spent 18 months teaching at the Marist school in Port Elizabeth and then, from 1963 to 1965, he was back in Pietermaritzburg (living in a Marist house, not with his parents) and studying for a B.A., first with UNISA and then completed at the University of Natal. In 1966 (aged 23) he moved to Johannesburg where he was sent to teach at the more upmarket of the city's two Marist schools (St David's Inanda) whilst also studying part-time for a U.Ed. at the University of the Witwatersrand. During this period, there is the first evidence of his straying beyond the formal confines of his situation: he was exposed to other forms of Catholic life (regularly visiting the Grail, a community of lay women); he had ecumenical contacts (including Ds. Beyers Naudé); and he was engaged in social justice (illicitly conducting classes for black children in Soweto in the choir loft of Regina Mundi church).²⁹ In 1967 he took his 'Final Vows' as a Marist though, compared to his peers, he had delayed this commitment by a year.³⁰

Nevertheless, after a Christmas break, with no forewarning to his friends, his family or his fellow-Marists, Kearney did not return to St David's as planned in January 1970 but instead announced that he was leaving the order and asked to be released from his vows. He turned 28 in this year and spent some of it back in Pietermaritzburg completing a Diploma in Education at the University of

²⁵ 'Marist Schools in South Africa'. *Marist Brothers website*. <https://champagnat.org/mundo-marista/marist-schools-in-south-africa/> (accessed 8 September 2022)

²⁶ Nadal, Paul. Personal interview by author, 26 October 2020 in Durban (Catholic Monsignor, Vicar-General to +Hurley and Patron/ Trustee of Denis Hurley Centre). Nadal clung to the view that when +Hurley was consecrated bishop, Kearney was a train bearer.

²⁷ Colussi, Mario. Personal interview by author, 13 and 16 October 2020 in Johannesburg (Fellow Marist novice/ brother with Kearney).

²⁸ Houston, "Interview with Paddy Kearney", 3

²⁹ Ceruti, Ines. Personal interview by author, 8 April 2019 in Johannesburg (member of The Grail)

³⁰ Colussi, Mario. Personal interview by author, 13 and 16 October 2020 in Johannesburg (Fellow Marist novice/ brother with Kearney).

Natal which he later converted into a B.Ed. Armed with this, in 1971 he spent a year teaching at the Inanda Seminary School outside Durban, an all-girls, all-black, Congregational school (in stark contrast to the all-boys, all-white, Catholic school at the Johannesburg Inanda). This gave him a much fuller insight into the lived situation of black families in South Africa at the time and the research element of his B.Ed. focused on this.³¹

Between 1972 and 1974, Kearney worked part-time as a Junior Lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Natal while also starting to get involved in Justice & Peace activities with the Archdiocese of Durban.³² He also won a Fulbright scholarship which enabled him to earn an M.Ed. at the University of Toledo, Ohio. During his time away (September 1972 to November 1973) he also visited Mexico (where he met Ivan Illich who was the focus of his M.Ed. dissertation³³), and then the United Kingdom.³⁴

From late 1974, he was engaged by +Hurley to conduct research into the planning of an 'ecumenical centre for social justice' that would serve the greater Durban area and support all the Christian churches in their response to the social challenges of the time.³⁵ By 1976, he became the first employee of the organisation, called Diakonia, initially as 'Secretary' and then later as 'Director'. He oversaw the development and growth of the organisation (up to 30 staff when he left).³⁶

Even though the project was only focused on Durban, it earned a national and international reputation as a locus for resistance to injustice and in particular to the Apartheid policies of the Nationalist Government. This was partly for the programmes that it ran itself and also for its association with a building (initially called the Ecumenical Centre and later the Diakonia Centre) which hosted a number of other organisations fighting for social justice (Black Sash, Legal Resource Centre, End Conscription Campaign, Detainees Support Committee, etc). For the police it was 'the HQ for trouble-makers'.³⁷

Diakonia received praise from fellow-activists (in South Africa and in exile) and also substantial funding from European anti-Apartheid supporters; it also received criticism from some Church members and leaders and was treated with great suspicion by the authorities who would regularly harass, threaten and investigate Kearney and his associates.³⁸ Throughout this period, +Hurley remained closely associated with the work of Diakonia as its Chair and principal spokesperson.³⁹

Highlights of this time in the history of Diakonia were Kearney's involvement in the Durban part of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983 and campaigning against the Tri-Cameral Parliament. In April 1985, he initiated an annual 'Good Friday Walk of Witness' which, in defiance of State of Emergency legislation at the time, enabled a group of people to publicly protest about Apartheid and show solidarity with its various victims, though under the guise of a religious service. Also in 1985, Kearney was one of a number of Diakonia employees who were detained by the security

³¹ Kearney, G Paddy. "A Study of School Leavers from a High School for African Girls", B.Ed. dissertation (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1972)

³² Irvine, Doug. Personal interview by author, 12 October 2020 in Johannesburg (personal friend and involved in Archdiocese of Durban Justice & Peace).

³³ Kearney, G Paddy. "Towards a Critical Analysis of Ivan D Illich's *Deschooling Society*", M.Ed. dissertation (University of Toledo, 1973)

³⁴ SJTI Archive: BIO- 496/C/1 "Kearney's letters to his parents, September 1972 to November 1973"

³⁵ Kearney, *Guardian of the Light*, 196-198

³⁶ Houston, "Interview with Paddy Kearney", 7

³⁷ Apelgren, Eric. Personal interview by author, 6 October 2020 in Durban (volunteer at Diakonia and local Government official)

³⁸ Cason, Fred and Marylyn. Personal interview by author, 21 January 2022 via Zoom (co-workers at Diakonia)

³⁹ Kearney, G Paddy. "Diakonia". *Serving Humanity – a Sabbath Reflection*. Stuart Bate ed. (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 1996) 192-197

police as a threat to the state. A high-profile and precedent-setting court case led by Archbishop Hurley resulted in Kearney being released after 17 days, mostly in solitary confinement though he was not tortured (unlike some other detainees).

The creation of 14 Community Resource Centres meant that Diakonia's reach went right out into local areas, providing practical help to those who most needed it.⁴⁰ Kearney and Diakonia were also involved in trying to address the increasing violence in Natal between various factions (principally supporters of the ANC and the IFP). The anti-Apartheid work of Diakonia culminated in a Freedom March organised by Kearney and others, again in defiance of State of Emergency restrictions, in September 1989 (in the end this was only a few months before the unbanning of the ANC and the release of Nelson Mandela in February 1990). It is a mark of the significance of Diakonia at this time that Mandela's first speech in Durban was at the Diakonia Centre.

During this period, Kearney was very closely connected, both professionally and personally, with Carmel Rickard. She was a noted legal and social justice journalist of the time who played a significant role in highlighting the work of Diakonia. Moreover, they lived together as a couple from 1975 and married (according to Church law at least) in 1983.⁴¹ Although they lived in modest houses in the centre of Durban, their chosen parish was the Catholic church in Wentworth, a 'coloured area' almost one hour's drive away, with an Oblate priest, Fr Cyril Carey, known for his strong commitment to social justice.⁴² They did not have any children. They separated in 2004 when Rickard left Durban, though they remained friends until Kearney's death.

Kearney took a year's sabbatical with Rickard between September 1991 and August 1992 when they both studied at Harvard in the USA and also travelled to Canada, El Salvador, the UK, Ireland and Italy.⁴³ On his return to Durban, unlike many fellow activists, he did not accept any offers of better paid jobs within the new establishment.⁴⁴ Instead he chose to continue as Director of Diakonia, which in 1994 re-formed to become 'Diakonia Council of Churches'. The organisation was influential in voter education and monitoring for the first democratic elections in April 1994; it also supported the Truth & Reconciliation Commission's work in Durban. Though he stepped down as Archbishop of Durban in 1992, +Hurley continued to be actively involved in Diakonia, and also in the life of the Church in the Durban city centre, being based at Emmanuel Cathedral until his final retirement in 2002.

Kearney's mother died in May 2000, his father in July 2002 and +Hurley himself in February 2004. Kearney's own health was also under pressure and a heart attack in 2003 led to a sabbatical period and the decision to step down from Diakonia, after 28 years, in April 2004. He joked at his retirement party that he had been in office longer than President Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe!⁴⁵

Although now almost 62, Kearney showed no sign of retiring. Over the next few years he spent time continuing to work with and mentor the other ecumenical organisations that he had helped set up, in the spirit of Diakonia, both for the Province as a whole (KZNCC) and also for regions within the Province. He also supported other organisations involved in education, social justice and non-violent resistance: serving as Chair of the Gandhi Development Trust, Co-Chair of a Social Cohesion Commission inaugurated by the Province Premier, a board member of the International Centre of

⁴⁰ Houston, "Interview with Paddy Kearney", 8

⁴¹ Kerchhoff, Joan. Personal interview by author, 6 April 2022 in Pietermaritzburg (widow of head of PACSA)

⁴² Apelgren, Eric. Personal interview by author, 6 October 2020 in Durban (Volunteer at Diakonia and local Government official).

⁴³ SJTI Archive: BIO- 496/C/1 "Kearney's letters to his parents, September 1991 to August 1992"

⁴⁴ Gandhi, Ela. Personal interview by author, 18 March 2021 in Durban (Fellow worker on Gandhi Development Trust and Patron of Denis Hurley Centre)

⁴⁵ Houston, "Interview with Paddy Kearney", 6

Non-Violence at Durban University of Technology (ICON), a co-founder of the Active Citizens Movement (ACM), and a Trustee of the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Foundation. Also, during this time, he was an active member of the Emmanuel Cathedral Catholic parish, serving on the Pastoral Council and leading the Liturgy Committee.⁴⁶ Again (as in Wentworth) he found himself as one of the only white parishioners, but this time joined by an influx of Africans from other parts of the continent.

Kearney's main focus in his final years was on the legacy of +Hurley. He completed research (started while +Hurley was alive) to feed into memoirs and biographies of the Archbishop which were published in 2005⁴⁷, 2006⁴⁸, 2009⁴⁹ and 2012⁵⁰. Not content with written histories, Kearney also wanted to create (in his words) a 'living legacy'. The idea of the Denis Hurley Centre – a building and an NGO to respond to the needs of inner-city Durban – was first floated in 2006. Some people close to him thought he had 'lost his mind' to take on such a huge project at this time of his life.⁵¹ By 2010 a formal Trust was established with Kearney as Chair (a role he played actively until his death), as well as principal fundraiser; in February 2009 the foundation stone was laid; the NGO moved into the building in December 2014 which was officially opened on 9 November 2015, the centenary of +Hurley's birth. The uniqueness of the Denis Hurley Centre being an inter-faith collaboration to help the poor was a key motivation for Kearney's commitment to this cause.

Though never one to draw attention to himself or to court praise, Kearney was honoured in a number of ways in his final years: an honorary doctorate from UKZN in 2009, and the equivalent of one from St Augustine's Catholic College in 2017; the Andrew Murray-Desmond Tutu Award for a theological book in English in 2010; the Sergio Vieira Human Rights Award in 2013, a Living Legends Award from eThekweni Municipality in 2014, and a Papal *Bene Merenti* medal in 2018. An edited collection of Kearney's own writings was published in 2017.⁵² His last great written achievement was a collaboration on an edited selection of +Hurley's letters, published in 2018 just months before his death.⁵³ Kearney died aged 76, unexpectedly on 23 November 2018 of a heart attack, having suffered from heart problems all his life (including rheumatic fever as a child).

His passing was marked (at his request) by an ecumenical/ interfaith ceremony at the Diakonia Centre, and then a Catholic Requiem Mass at Emmanuel Cathedral, followed by cremation and internment behind a very simple plaque at the columbarium in the grounds of the Cathedral. Though not his request, he was also honoured with a civic memorial at Durban City Hall initiated by the Mayor of eThekweni and the Premier of Kwa-Zulu Natal (the offer of a 'State Funeral' was made but refused, not least because it would have involved guns).⁵⁴ He had lived a materially very simple life and the bulk of his relatively small estate was left to the Denis Hurley Centre; his personal archive was entrusted by his family to this author before being placed as part of the Denis Hurley Library at St Joseph's Theological Institute Cedara near Pietermaritzburg.

⁴⁶ Tully, Stephen. Personal interview by author, 8 December 2020 in Durban (Catholic priest and co-founder of the Denis Hurley Centre)

⁴⁷ Hurley, Denis. *Vatican II: Keeping the Dream Alive* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2005)

⁴⁸ Kearney, G Paddy ed. *Memories. The memoirs of Archbishop Denis E. Hurley* (Pietermaritzburg: OMI, 2006)

⁴⁹ Kearney, G Paddy. *Guardian of the Light* (Pietermaritzburg: UKZN, 2009)

⁵⁰ Kearney, G Paddy. *Truth to Power* (Pietermaritzburg: UKZN, 2012)

⁵¹ Joseph, Hester. Personal interview by author, 17 March 2021 in Durban (co-worker at Diakonia and Denis Hurley Centre Trustee)

⁵² Kearney, G Paddy. *Faith in Action* (Pietermaritzburg: KwaZulu Natal Christian Council, 2017)

⁵³ Denis, Philippe, Kearney, Paddy & Argall, Jane eds. *A Life in Letters – selected correspondence of Denis Hurley* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2018)

⁵⁴ 'Kearney obituaries and sermons'. *Denis Hurley Centre website* <http://www.denishurleycentre.org/page/kearney-obituaries-and-sermons> (accessed 8 September 2022)

Why Kearney's life matters

While Kearney was very keen for +Hurley to be officially named a Saint, he would be most embarrassed if that word were applied to him. But it should be remembered that St Paul applies the word 'saint' (*hagios*) to all the members of the churches to which he writes.⁵⁵ (Significantly, as I will explore in Appendix B, Paul never distinguishes between grades or orders, and never uses the language that is common in the church today of clergy and lay people.) So, by that definition, Kearney is a saint. Reflecting on the way that he lived his life 'among the saints of the church in Durban' (as St Paul might have said) gives us important lessons.

That is not just because of his character but also because of the decades through which he lived.

- It was a time of great change for the world: he was born during the Second World War, lived through the Cold War and the threat of nuclear catastrophe, and died in an age in which technology appeared to offer solutions to everything while poverty and climate change were sending billions of people backwards.
- It was a tumultuous period of change for South Africa – 'Grand Apartheid' was inaugurated when he was 6 years old; he spent most of his adult life fighting against it; it was dismantled when he was 52 years old; and he then lived through 24 years in which many of the promises of Liberation failed to materialise (even while some of his fellow-activists were now in Government).
- It was also an unprecedented era of change for the Catholic Church: his childhood and education were in the final years of a Church closed to the world; the Second Vatican Council took place when he was a Marist brother and he emerged from religious life into an excitedly open Church and archdiocese; his time as an activist was through the long reign of John Paul II, and the contrasting papacies of Benedict XVI and Francis (the last five years of Kearney's life).

With such richness to choose from, my focus on Biography as Theology as it relates to Kearney will take six key themes of Vatican II and connect them with six key themes of his life:

- The universal call to holiness of all people in the Church (Chapter 2): drawing on *Lumen Gentium* and *Apostolicam Actuositatem*
- The Catholic Church's changing relationship with other Christians (Chapter 3): drawing on *Unitatis Redintegratio*
- The commitment to be a Church in the modern world and challenging injustice (Chapter 4): drawing on *Gaudium et Spes*
- The experience of suffering as a way of coming close to Christ (Chapter 5): drawing on *Gaudium et Spes*
- The unique claims of Christianity and the growing respect for other faiths (Chapter 6): drawing on *Nostra Aetate*
- The development of Kearney's Catholic identity (Chapter 7) : drawing on *Apostolicam Actuositatem* and *Lumen Gentium*

⁵⁵ Eph 1:1

To a great extent, of course, I will be looking to the past, albeit the recent past. But McClendon points out: “The saints belong to communities of the past and [yet also] shape communities of the future”.⁵⁶ A number of people close to Kearney felt that writing about him was important because of the influence that his life could have on future leaders.⁵⁷ Ironically, some of those who expressed this are ones whom Kearney might have felt had failed to learn these lessons themselves.

The importance of images

McClendon ends the quotation above by saying that it is “images [that] are a central means of this communication.”⁵⁸ So while each chapter, after an appropriate verse from Scripture, will look at aspects of Kearney’s life, and the activities in which he was involved, they will begin and end with striking images that help us not only to understand him but also to be inspired by him. I will attempt ‘to discover some dominant images which unlock this biography’.⁵⁹ With apologies to those co-workers of Kearney and mine who are Jewish or Muslim or from the *iconoclastic* tradition within Christianity, I am placing myself firmly within the *iconographic* tradition, which is comfortable not only for Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox Christians but also for the Hindus and Buddhists with which Kearney felt some affinity. Again, to quote McClendon:

Austin Farrer said that holy images were the very mode of the inspiration of scripture, their metaphoric force turning what would otherwise be flat narrative into the inspired prose and poetry of the Bible.⁶⁰

So the images will help tell the story. Let me begin with the one that can be seen by any visitor entering the Denis Hurley Centre. In the middle of the far wall, there is a photograph of Kearney, as winner of the Living Legends award and holding his prize-winning biography of +Hurley. But the photo is intentionally in shadow, and the shadow is cast by the life-size bronze statue of +Hurley which dominates the central atrium. In death, Kearney is best understood in the place where he chose to spend almost all his life: ‘in the shadow of +Hurley’. Not a place where he was overlooked or restricted or unable to develop as a Christian, but rather the place which best suited his ‘ethic of character’. McClendon tells: “that such an ethic can best be learned within a community which displays and evokes that character.”⁶¹ +Hurley provided the communities in which Kearney’s character flourished.

Before this sounds too hagiographical, let me also take caution from McClendon:

Christians from New Testament times have been deeply interested in character, though more correctly in character as redeemed by Christ rather than in character as a natural or personal achievement.⁶²

⁵⁶ McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 193

⁵⁷ For example, Mvambo-Dandala, Nomabelu. Personal interview by author, 26 May 2022 in Durban (Kearney’s successor as Director of Diakonia and sometime Patron of Denis Hurley Centre); Apelgren, Eric. Personal interview by author, 6 October 2020 in Durban (Volunteer at Diakonia and local Government official)

⁵⁸ McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 193

⁵⁹ McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 111

⁶⁰ McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 192

⁶¹ McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 22

⁶² McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 33

Kearney shared with me his pleasure at Pope Francis' words when asked by a journalist soon after his election how he would define himself: "I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon."⁶³

Sadly, I never asked Kearney how he would define himself but I suspect that he would connect with those words because they would define him in relation to the Lord. So while my focus will be on Kearney, and his focus was on +Hurley, the focus of all three of us must be on Christ if we are to call ourselves Christians. Because it is the way of a Christian, but also because it is the only justification that Kearney would have allowed for devoting so many words to him, I stress that in looking at Kearney's *Biography as Theology*, I do so because this is one way of reflecting on the life of the figure that Kearney and +Hurley (and I) try to follow:

For a biographical theology (though it acknowledges that the lives it attends to each incorporate convictions) the centre must be the lives themselves, or more accurately must be one life, the life of Christ. [Propositional theology on the other hand] is an abandonment of the attempt to confront, or be confronted by, Jesus of Nazareth as Christ.⁶⁴

I recall standing on my own in the vast space of the empty cathedral after Kearney's coffin had been removed, and the crowds had left, feeling very alone. I was conscious that, almost 15 years earlier, Kearney might have stood in the same spot wondering what life would be like for him now that +Hurley had gone, also feeling very alone. And in that instant, I was most conscious of the consoling presence of Christ, saying to me as I imagined he had said to +Hurley and to Kearney, "I am with you, even to the end of time."⁶⁵

Positionality of the author

The aim of this thesis is to explore the life of Kearney as an example of the living out of the Second Vatican Council, in particular by reference to key documents and those focuses of the Council which were also focuses of his life. Anyone who had access to Kearney's writings and to those who worked with him, and who was knowledgeable about Vatican II, would be in a position to conduct such an analysis. I hope that is true of me. But as well as having an academic interest in writing this, I also have a personal interest. I therefore wish to set out, from the beginning, my own positionality with regard to the subject (the man) and the subject (the argument) in order to shed light on what follows.

I first came to know Kearney around 2010 when I had moved from the UK to work for the Church in another part of South Africa (about 600 km away) but visited Durban from time to time. That means that I did not know him for almost the first 70 years of his life, the time when he was most active. I had narrowly missed meeting him a few years earlier when he was due to launch his book *Guardian of the Light* in London; he had to let someone else do it because he had injured himself and could not travel. I was invited to attend the book launch because at the time I was working for CAFOD, the Catholic development charity for England & Wales which had been great supporters (from the 1970s to the 1990s) of +Hurley, Kearney and Diakonia. I had not heard of any of them before that point

⁶³ Spadaro, Antonio. 'Interview with Pope Francis' *Vatican website*
https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html (accessed 8 September 2022)

⁶⁴ McClendon, *Biography as Theology*, 198

⁶⁵ Mt 28:20

but was keenly interested in the work of +Romero in Latin America; this was presented to me as of interest since it was a parallel that had been happening in South Africa.

My relationship with Kearney became very involved in the final four years of his life. Towards the end of 2014, he approached me to consider becoming the first director of the Denis Hurley Centre, the 'legacy project' for +Hurley which had been his focus since 2012. I accepted – discovering for myself the reputation Kearney had of getting people to agree to do things: 'being Paddied' as it is known in Durban. Thus, since soon after the opening of the building in late 2014 until Kearney's death in November 2018, he was my boss (as Director, I reported to the Trustees of which he was Chair). Moreover, he was not a distant chair and he was still actively involved in fundraising and many public events: I saw him at least two or three times a week and we probably exchanged at least 100 emails a month. He also drew me into some of his other activities (such as interfaith work).

This thesis is focused on Kearney's work as a Christian activist over five decades: I have the unusual position in having been completely distant from the first 90% of that period, and then deeply involved in the last 10%.

Shared motivation

But it is not just our working together that creates a position of common ground – it was the content of the work and what lay behind it. When asked by friends (who expected me to return to the UK) why I was staying to do this work in Durban, I replied that there were four aspects that particularly appealed: that it showed the Church as engaged in the modern world; that it was focused on social justice; that it built on established co-operation between Christians of different traditions; and that it would aim to bring together people of other faiths. Subconsciously, I was articulating my motivation in terms that echoed four documents of Vatican II. And I believe, as I will explain, that this was also Kearney's motivation.

This shared motivation was evident (in retrospect) if I recall my first conscious awareness of Kearney. This was when the organisation I was running in Johannesburg (the Jesuit Institute) created an initiative called the 'Hope & Joy Network' to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the start of Vatican II in 2012. One of the activities was to bring together different parts of the Catholic network in each city to explore what were the key themes to celebrate and what means would be most effective. These workshops intentionally aimed to capture the spirit of Vatican II: so they involved bishops, theologians, religious sisters, lay men and women side by side; included people involved in parishes, education, welfare, training, liturgy and spirituality; and were certainly open to involvement by Christians of other traditions and people of other faiths. I facilitated such a workshop in Durban in April 2011 which was attended by about 30 people including the then Archbishop (Wilfrid, Cardinal Napier) and Kearney. I was aware that Kearney had written about +Hurley and was actively promoting a progressive reading of Vatican II; I was also aware of Napier's pride in having helped elect Ratzinger as Pope seven years earlier and his reputation for sharing Benedict XVI's reticence about aspects of the post-Vatican II Church. Thus, in this one room, I had examples of the hermeneutics of continuity and discontinuity.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Faggioli, Massimo. *Vatican II - the Battle for meaning* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist, 2012) 8

The workshop did not end in a brawl or a major argument but instead a commitment by all present to engage people across each diocese with the anniversary. And at the end, Kearney took me to one side and simply said: “Denis Hurley would be so pleased with what you are doing in this initiative.”

Thus, I cannot disguise that I shared Kearney’s commitment to promoting Vatican II and to a belief that the work of the Council, far from being completed, still had a long way to go. This was clear in the Hope & Joy initiative of which he was a part, the Denis Hurley Centre project that we led together for almost four years, and my choice of Vatican II as the lens through which to understand his life and mission. I believe that this lens will say a lot about him; the choice of lens already says a lot about me.

My own book of reflections (written while I was holidaying in Durban, though without specific input from Kearney) reflects on my life as a Vatican II Catholic:

When the Council ended on 8 December 1965, I had been 6 weeks in the womb. I am, thus, literally a child of Vatican II, being born into a Church that was beginning to enact the changes of that monumental Council. In the almost 50 years I have spent practicing and growing as a human, I have also been practicing and growing as a Catholic – sometimes devout, sometimes wavering, hopefully well-informed, often loyal, mostly proud, always tied umbilically to this Holy Mother.⁶⁷

Similarity in elements of background

In addition to the above, I note that there are some unexpected similarities in the lives of me as author and Kearney as subject. This is despite the separation of distance of 13,000 km and the separation of age of about a quarter of a century (which is also, more or less, the age gap between Kearney the author and +Hurley the subject).

Both us were born into staunchly Catholic families: we each have memories of reciting the rosary with our grandmothers. If my exposure to non-Catholics happened earlier than Kearney’s (in my early teens not in my mid-20s), it was still a shock that I had to learn to process until I found the positive. Both of us were consciously part of a Catholic minority in a wider political society that was at the very least suspicious of Papist tendencies. 1970s Britain did not name it as *die Roomse gevaar* (‘the Roman threat’) but, when I was a child, the IRA in Northern Ireland were regularly referred as ‘Catholic terrorists’. Both of us had a complex relationship with an ethnic identity: Kearney was clearly (because of his name) from an Irish family though he was at pains to stress his allegiance to South Africa, while campaigning to change it to a better South Africa; I was clearly (because of my skin colour) from an Indian family though I was also at pains to stress pride in my British nationality.

I make all these points because, when I comment on issues of identity in Kearney’s life, I am inevitably influenced by my own sense of identity. The parallels between us give me, I believe, some privileged insight into my subject.⁶⁸

Both us have chosen to work in the area of social justice, but not primarily from a personal experience of injustice. Both of us were born into well-off middle-class families and were educated at good schools whose aim was to prepare their boys (single-sex education for both us) for

⁶⁷ Correia, Frances & Perrier, Raymond. *Pilgrims the Modern World – daily reflections for Lent* (Johannesburg: Jesuit Institute, 2015) iii

⁶⁸ For more on this see Appendix A: “Kearney’s racial identity”.

professional lives that would be sheltered and comfortable. Kearney, as I shall explore, chose almost as soon as he could, to sacrifice himself to help others (and, even during the few years he spent in a respectable profession as teacher and lecturer, he was already operating at the cutting edge). Thus, almost all of his working life was devoted to the fight for justice. I was much further along the road to Damascus when I was thrown from my horse – in fact I spent 14 years working in advertising in London and New York: as far as one could get from ‘the cry of the poor’.⁶⁹ But I did change direction and have also made some sacrifices, working for the last twenty-one years in various social justice organisations and, like Kearney, all of them connected to the Church.

This is also the context for possibly the most important similarity in our lives. Though when we met we were both lay men, we had both spent a period of our lives in Catholic men’s religious orders. I shall explore how Kearney, having been taught by the Marist Brothers, joined that same congregation straight from school. He spent 10 years as a Marist, taking both simple and final vows, before leaving at the age of 27. My journey as a religious started later in my life (I was 35 when I joined the Jesuits), was shorter (only six years) and was a journey towards being a priest (which Kearney’s never was). But, because of our vocational journeys, we share three profoundly important experiences: the decision to respond to a call from God and thus prioritise that over other ways of life; an intense period of formation within a religious congregation involving immersion in a strong sense of mission and also the opportunity to see what was being achieved in reality; and the hugely disruptive decision to leave the religious congregation and find a new path and a new relationship with God and with the Church.

There are, of course, major differences between us as well. Kearney was married for almost 20 years (at time of writing, I have never been married); though Kearney travelled overseas he never lived further than 80km from where he was born (I have lived on three different continents); Kearney grew up (albeit involuntarily) as a member of a privileged white minority in an institutionally racist country (my own personal experience of racism has been much more nuanced).

I declare the similarities (and dissimilarities) between our lives since they inevitably affect the way in which I write about him. I believe that I have the advantage of being both insider and outsider.⁷⁰ I have lived in South Africa for 12 years but am not South African. I knew Kearney but was not involved in a large part of his life. I share his Catholic heritage while retaining his ability to look honestly at the Church. Like him, I was a member of a religious order but then chose to operate as a lay leader within the Church.

While there are some risks in being an insider, I suspect that there are equally significant risks in being a total outsider – lack of empathy with the subject, poor familiarity with the background, difficulty in gaining the trust of those who knew the subject. I would suggest that in my position as a partial insider, the advantages have outweighed the disadvantages especially when I am keenly aware of this position.

The use of the documents of Vatican II as an organising principle

This thesis looks at various social and ecclesial challenges faced by Kearney, and by many other activists operating in South Africa in the last 60 years. My approach will be to examine those issues with specific reference to certain documents. But the choice of these documents might seem

⁶⁹ Prov 21:13

⁷⁰ Merriam, Sharan et al. “Power and positionality: negotiating insider/outsider status within and across cultures”. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*. (2010, 20:5) 405-416

curious since they were written by a group of celibate male clerics meeting in Rome right at the beginning of this period: they are documents promulgated by the Second Vatican Council meeting between 1962 and 1965. I will also be drawing on some of the extensive writings about Vatican II that explore developments before, during and after the four years of the Council itself.⁷¹ The reader might wonder why such attention is given to these documents when reflecting on the life of an activist like Kearney.⁷²

In deciding how to respond to the challenges that they face, people draw on their education, the leaders they admire, and a reflection on the situation they are in. But many also turn to texts for inspiration and for guidance. A number of religions have writings that they hold as paramount; though 'Sacred Scripture' is written at a place and a time in history, adherents regard it as transcending the particular and having application to every time and every place. All Christians (to a greater or lesser extent) thus draw on the Bible – the Hebrew Testament and the 'New' Testament – as a source of guidance.

But for Catholics there is another set of documents which, while not approaching the sacredness of the Bible, nevertheless are of significant influence: these are the documents of the Church. There are hundreds of these and it can be hard to navigate them. But there is a clear hierarchy of documents which places those that come from a Pope (and with grades within that set) above those that come from a Vatican Congregation (even if 'signed off' by the Pope), in turn above those that come from local or regional groups of bishops or even individual bishops. The general principle is that lower level documents can amplify and clarify but cannot contradict higher level ones.⁷³

At the top of this hierarchy are the documents produced by an Ecumenical Council (of which there have only been 21, according to the accepted counting, over the past 20 centuries).⁷⁴ The last Ecumenical Council was Vatican II and so these documents have pre-eminence in establishing the teaching of the Church at the end of the 20th century.

The 2,500 bishops at Vatican II probably hoped that all Catholics would be guided by the teaching of the Church and in particular by the documents of a Council. I think that is what is termed 'a pious hope'. But I do believe that in the case of the life and mission of Kearney focusing on the Vatican II documents is especially relevant for four reasons:

- *Vatican II is a key hinge in the life of Kearney.* Vatican II was clearly a hinge which defined a change in the Church's understanding of itself and of the world. Even if people debate what happened at Vatican II, there is no doubt that something momentous did happen (O'Malley questions this and then answers his own question).⁷⁵ But the period was also a hinge in the life of the young Kearney. From his birth in 1942, he was growing up in a Church which followed Catholic customs that we would now call 'pre-Conciliar': he would have attended

⁷¹ To mention a few examples: Alberigo, Giuseppe, Jossua, Jean-Pierre & Komonchak, Joseph A eds. *The Reception of Vatican II* (Washington DC: CUA Press, 1987); Cassidy, Edward I. *Rediscovering Vatican II – Ecumenism and Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 2005); Faggioli, Massimo. *Vatican II - the Battle for meaning* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist, 2012); Stacpoole, Alberic ed. *Vatican II Revisited: by those who were there* (London: G Chapman, 1986); O'Malley, John W. *What happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge MA: Harvard, 2010); Orsy, Ladislav. *Receiving the Council* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2009)

⁷² See Appendices D and E for more detailed analysis of some of the most relevant documents, *Lumen Gentium*, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* and *Gaudium et Spes*.

⁷³ Sullivan, Francis. *Creative Fidelity – weighing and interpreting documents of the Magisterium*. (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1996) 12-27

⁷⁴ O'Collins, Gerald. *Living Vatican II - the 21st Council for the 21st Century* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist, 2006)

⁷⁵ O'Malley, John. *Vatican II: did anything happen?* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2007); O'Malley, John. *What happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge MA: Harvard, 2010)

services in Latin and presumably never questioned why this was so or if this would ever change. In 1960, he began formation in a religious order and was with them for the whole of the decade which included Vatican II. When he left the Marist Brothers in 1970, he emerged in to a Church which had changed in many visible and invisible ways. Just as the life of the Church can be considered in terms of before and after the 1960s (because of Vatican II), so Kearney's life as a Catholic can be considered in terms of before and after the 1960s (because of Vatican II and also his time as a Marist).

- *The influence of Denis Hurley, Archbishop of Durban.* Since he was so young when he became a bishop in 1947 (at 31, the youngest bishop in the world at the time), +Hurley was still relatively young when he attended Vatican II (he only turned 50 in the final weeks of the Council). Thanks to his formation as a member of a French religious order (the Oblates of Mary Immaculate), +Hurley was one of the few English-speaking bishops at the Council who could also move easily in the highly influential circles of francophone bishops and theologians. For example, he was elected by his fellow bishops to the Commission for Seminaries and Universities of Studies, a clear indication that he was known internationally. His importance at Vatican II is confirmed, for example, by the journalist who covered the Council for *Time Magazine*.⁷⁶ Partly at Kearney's encouragement, +Hurley was writing his memoirs when he died (in 2004) and the part that was published were his reflections on the Council under the title 'Vatican II: Keeping the Dream Alive'.⁷⁷ There is no doubt of the importance of the Council to +Hurley and we can deduce from that the importance of the Council to Kearney. The statue of +Hurley commissioned by Kearney for the Denis Hurley Centre has him holding a book – not the Bible but the documents of Vatican II. This reflects what Kearney saw as important to +Hurley and also, I believe, reflects what Kearney saw as important to his own life.

- *Reception of the Council by Kearney.* Even if others debate the degree to which Vatican II was 'received' by parts of the Church, I shall show plenty of evidence that Kearney personally received and implemented its teachings; moreover, he also worked with +Hurley and others in the Archdiocese of Durban to ensure a wider reception among clergy and laity. Reception is described as the assimilation and 'making one's own' of another's reality.⁷⁸ Some theologians argue that while a Council is the ultimate legislative body of the Church, its work is only complete once it is received by the whole Church. Many would go further and say a document (even if approved by the bishops) only become authoritative teaching once it is received by the people.⁷⁹ This concept of 'reception' has a long history. For example, the Council of Florence in the mid-15th century produced a document that would have enabled reunion between the Western and Eastern Churches but it was never 'received' by the Orthodox Christians who felt betrayed by it and so it was never implemented. Reception has been especially debated in the decades since Vatican II because of *Humanae Vitae* (1968) since it is one of the church documents in history most ignored by the faithful. Kearney's life gives every indication that the teachings of Vatican II were received by him and, he believed, should be received by the wider Church.

⁷⁶ Kaiser, Robert Blair. "Understanding the implications of Pope John's *aggiornamento*". *Denis Hurley – a portrait by friends*. Anthony Gamley ed. (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2001) 42-48

⁷⁷ Hurley, Denis. *Vatican II: Keeping the Dream Alive* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2005)

⁷⁸ Rush, Ormond. *Still Interpreting Vatican II – some Hermeneutical Principles* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 2004) 3

⁷⁹ "Technically speaking, the reception of ecumenical councils refers to 'what the Church made of them, what in their work the Church tested and found good and retained, or wanting and discarded' (quoting Komonchak). The study of the reception of Vatican II thus amounts to a critical study of what it has contributed and is contributing to our understanding of what the Spirit is saying to the Churches in our context today." Langefeld, Chris. "The Reception of Vatican II in South Africa". *Bulletin for Contextual Theology* (1997, 4:1) 40

- *The overlap of the Council's concerns and Kearney's concerns.* If Kearney was primarily an academic, then documents would be a typical way of understanding his life. But Church documents are perhaps a strange choice for reflecting on the life of an activist, albeit a Christian activist. However, the ease with which one can map the concerns of the Vatican II documents with the issues on which Kearney focused suggests more than a coincidence. If one were to take an overview of what pre-occupied Kearney the list would readily be: the role and mission of the Church in the world, the fight for justice and human rights, the role of lay people within the Church, relations between Catholics and other Christians, relations between Christians and other faiths, the importance of public liturgy, the importance of the right kind of education. Each of these are the specific focus of at least one document of Vatican II and indeed between them cover 80% of the concerns of the Council. It is almost as if Kearney took the list of documents when he left the Marists in 1970 and used them to construct an agenda for his life.

I also think that the Council documents can be used in this way because they are inherently inspiring. O'Malley – who stresses that to understand the documents we need to be aware of the literary genre in which they are written – calls the style of language 'panegyric-epideictic':

It raises appreciation, it creates or fosters among those it addresses a realisation that they all share or should share the same ideals and need to work together to achieve them.⁸⁰

This is worth stressing since it is not the style of documents from many previous councils. And it was very nearly not the style used by this Council. One particularly famous challenge to improve the quality of the documents came from the Bishop of Umtali (then in Rhodesia), Donal Lamont.⁸¹ He was appalled at the original draft of the decree on the Missions, and in the presence of Paul VI, urged the bishops to reject it, making a vivid comparison with the dry bones of Ezekiel (37:1-14).⁸²

Not only the redrafted *Ad Gentes* but all the Vatican II documents in the end live up to the challenge that John XXIII made to the bishops when he opened the Council:

The Church in every age has opposed errors and often has even condemned them and indeed with the greatest severity. But at the present time, the spouse of Christ prefers to use the medicine of mercy rather than the weapons of severity.⁸³

Spirit and Letter

In focusing on documents, I am not placing myself on this side of the line that distinguishes between 'the letter of the Council' and 'the spirit of the Council'.⁸⁴ Sometimes this distinction is used to place theologians favouring a narrow, restrictive, reading of Vatican II under the heading of 'letter' and those favouring a broader, expansive reading under 'spirit'. The former group say: "the conciliar documents, nothing more, nothing less"; the latter group suggest that we look not just at what the

⁸⁰ O'Malley, *What happened at Vatican II*, 48

⁸¹ It is interesting to note the similarities between +Lamont and +Hurley, both of Irish origin, with superb oratorical skills, devoted to Southern Africa, and a thorn in the side of oppressive Governments. +Lamont was later ready to appear at +Hurley's side during his 1985 trial.

⁸² Lamont, Donal. "Ad Gentes: a missionary bishop remembers". *Vatican II Revisited: by those who were there*. Alberic Stacpoole ed. (London: G Chapman, 1986) 279

⁸³ *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* 16

⁸⁴ O'Malley, *Vatican II: did anything happen?*, 21

bishops wrote but what they intended. The former stress continuity; the latter are accepting of discontinuity.⁸⁵

Faggioli points out that this is a later reading of what was happening.

In the very first years after the Council, the ideological spectrum of Catholic theologians on Vatican II seemed to be unanimous in their enthusiastic acceptance of the final documents. The tensions between the letter and the spirit of Vatican II did not play much of a role at that time and neither did the supposed tension between the hermeneutic of continuity and the awareness of discontinuity.⁸⁶

Certainly, those who would position themselves on the side of the spirit of the Council would not see this as being in opposition to the documents produced by the Council. Rush sees the concept of 'the spirit of the Council' in the context of 'the Holy Spirit of the Council' and points out that John XXIII had prayed for the Council to be a 'new Pentecost'.⁸⁷ This reference to the Holy Spirit provides a useful echo with +Hurley's own episcopal motto *Ubi Spiritus, ibi Libertas* ('Where the Spirit is, there is Freedom').⁸⁸

Writing soon after the closing of the Council, McKenzie points out that one of the issues that Vatican II had opened up (that had been closed for many years) was the very question of authority in the Church. He points out that Church authorities had had a defensive posture since the Protestant reformation in the 16th century, further hardened by the intellectual and political revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries, and the Modernist controversy at the turn of the 20th. Although John XXIII was still greatly venerated, McKenzie argues that his very act of calling the Council undermined the traditional prestige in which Church authority was held. He concludes that there is now an inevitable – and creative – tension in the Church between authority and freedom.⁸⁹ That very tension was already captured in the choice of the word 'freedom' in +Hurley's episcopal motto in 1947. And it is the tension that lies behind the battle for spirit and letter.

Rush concurs with Pottmeyer in seeing spirit and letter not as alternatives but rather part of a virtuous hermeneutical circle.

Despite the limitation of the conciliar texts, the 'spirit' of the Council is tied to them, because without them it would lack any direction. The 'spirit' of the Council makes itself known from the direction given in the texts. Conversely, of course, it is only in this 'spirit' that the texts are properly understood.⁹⁰

So I am drawing on the documents of Vatican II in order to examine both the letter *and* the spirit of the Council because I believe they help us to understand Kearney: a life and mission shaped by the Council and influenced by its documents, directly and also indirectly through +Hurley, consciously and also subconsciously through his work.

⁸⁵ For more on this, especially in relation to teachings that impact on the life of Kearney see Appendix B: "Vatican II and the Laity" and Appendix C: "Interpreting *Gaudium et Spes*."

⁸⁶ Faggioli, *Vatican II - the Battle for meaning*, 8

⁸⁷ Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II*, 26

⁸⁸ 2 Cor 3:17

⁸⁹ McKenzie, John. *Authority in the Church*. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966) 162ff

⁹⁰ Pottmeyer, Hermann J. "A new Phase in the Reception of Vatican II: Twenty Years of Interpretation of the Council". *The Reception of Vatican II*. Giuseppe Alberigo, Jean-Pierre Jossua & Joseph A Komonchak eds. (Washington DC: CUA Press, 1987) 42

Explanation of the range of Sources

This dissertation thus draws on four main groups of material which are explained in more detail below:

- A. Documents of Vatican II (and a few other Vatican documents)
- B. Archives of papers and press clippings, principally Kearney's own personal archives supplemented by those of +Hurley and the organisations with which they were associated
- C. Personal interviews with people who knew Kearney at different stages in his life
- D. Relevant books and papers that explore these themes (including some that Kearney wrote and some that he is known to have read)

A. Vatican Documents

Reference is made throughout to a range of Vatican documents all of which are accessible from the Vatican website.⁹¹ As explained above, the principal documents used are those of the Second Vatican Council which, following convention are referenced by their Latin titles. They are as follows (listed in order of date of promulgation):

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*)

Decree on the Instruments of Social Communication (*Inter Mirifica*)

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*)

Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*)

Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*)

Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church (*Christus Dominus*)

Decree on Priestly Formation (*Optatam Totius*)

Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life (*Perfectae Caritatis*)

Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*)

Declaration on Christian Education (*Gravissimum Educationis*)

Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*)

⁹¹ 'Archive', Vatican website <https://www.vatican.va/archive/index.htm> (accessed 12 November 2022). In addition, there are various published translations of Vatican II documents (though sadly all with gendered language) e.g. Abbot, Walter. *The Documents of Vatican II, with Notes and Commentaries By Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Authorities* (Freiburg: Herder and Herder, 1966)

Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*)

Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*)

Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*)

Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (*Ad Gentes*)

Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*)

In addition, other Papal encyclicals and addresses are referenced.⁹²

Since my aim is to explore the impact of the documents of the Council on the life of Kearney, it would have been wonderful to have his personal printed set of Vatican II documents, with notes in the margin in his neat handwriting: but that does not exist. We can be sure that he read the documents; we also know, from Kearney's own books and articles, of the influence of the Council on +Hurley. For example, Kearney clearly defines the Archbishop in the context of Vatican II ('a father and a son of the Council').⁹³ This, coupled with the record of Kearney's life, and the testimony of those who worked with him, justify me in using the documents of Vatican II as a key lens through which to explore Kearney's life.

B. Archives

Though we do not have any clear written statement by Kearney about how Vatican II shaped his life, my research has been informed by the large amount of relevant material that I have been able to access from archives. This is fortunate and not always guaranteed.

Commenting specifically on religious archives in South Africa, Francis Garaba writes:

It is important to note that much of our national heritage is recorded in the archives of our religious institutions, hence the need to ensure that a continuum of care is provided for this Christian heritage from the point of creation to the retirement of those records with enduring value.⁹⁴

Garaba warns that the lack of professionalism and disconnectedness of religious archives in South Africa is a great risk for future researchers. Thankfully, in my case, this was not true.

The principal archive materials used are the papers found in Kearney's home after his death in November 2018; what I have termed his 'personal archive'. To give a sense of scale there was the equivalent of about 100 A4 archive boxes containing personal papers, letters, press cuttings, reports, tapes and photographs. It was clear that, up to his death, Kearney had been preparing his papers and that this task was largely complete. He had worked on his own (and also with his niece Sarah

⁹² See Appendix for more details.

⁹³ Kearney, *Guardian of the Light*, 144; also: "The Archbishop of Durban was, and still is, a son of the Council. But he is also one of its fathers – if one may be forgiven for using this politically incorrect term." Denis, Philippe. "Archbishop Hurley's contribution to the Second Vatican Council". *Bulletin for Contextual Theology* (1997, 4:1) 15

⁹⁴ Garaba, Francis. 'Disembodied archives: The disconnectedness of records and archives management practices within the Pietermaritzburg Cluster of Theological Libraries, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa', *Verbum et Ecclesia* (36:1, 2015) 1

Kearney who mentions this in her interview⁹⁵) to filter through his papers, discard some, and collect them together thematically and tidily into archive boxes and lever arch files. Having worked extensively with the +Hurley archive (see below), Kearney would have had a keen understanding of the importance of good archiving. The way in which he prepared the archive and organised the filing indicates clearly to me that he intended them to be accessible for someone else to read.

The existence of these papers, and the fact that they were prepared by Kearney himself, is very significant. We can, with confidence, deduce that these were the papers that Kearney himself thought were most important (at least out of those that he still had in his possession). We can also assume that he would be happy for someone who was doing research (about him or organisations he was linked to) to read this material (which is especially relevant when, as I indicate, some more sensitive material is discovered).

Verne Harris, reflecting specifically on the use of archives in South Africa history, challenges the usual view that an archive is a mirror that reflects reality. He instead suggests that we are wiser to regard an archive as ‘the sliver of a window’ and one that is shaped by many forces, no less true in liberated South Africa than during the days of Apartheid.⁹⁶ Given that all archives are shaped, the fact that in this case the sliver is the one that the subject himself wanted to bequeath does not make it authoritative but certainly makes it significant.

Soon after his death, Kearney’s younger brother Brian entrusted the archive to me and it has now been placed as part of the Archive of the Denis E Hurley Library at St Joseph’s Theological Institute (SJTI) based at Cedara near Pietermaritzburg. I kept the papers in the files and sets that Kearney had used. But, to make them more easily accessible to future researchers, I have created archive references that are in line with the system used by SJTI so that can be more readily integrated into that archive.

Since most of the material is related to Paddy Kearney, it has the primary reference ‘SJTI Archive: BIO-496’. The section on Printed Sources contains a fuller overview of the various sections of this part of the archive. Note that most of these are papers collected by Kearney, or written by Kearney about others; there is very little that Kearney wrote about his own life.

In the SJTI archive, materials that are referenced ‘SJTI Archive: BIO-11’ are related to +Denis Hurley. The +Hurley material in the SJTI archive is the result of at least four main sources:

- +Hurley’s own personal archive which, on his death, was left to the library that is named after him, at the institution that he himself has founded
- Papers related to +Hurley from the archive of the (then) Natal Province of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (+Hurley was a member of the OMIs, and SJTI is an OMI institution)
- Some papers related to +Hurley from the archive of the Archdiocese of Durban (though the majority of papers from his time as Archbishop remain in the Archdiocesan archive – see below)
- Papers collected by Kearney during the preparation of his biography of +Hurley which were then donated to the SJTI archive

Note that Kearney drew substantially on this archive when preparing his various books about +Hurley and also supplemented it.

⁹⁵ Kearney, Sarah. Personal interview by author, 17 September 2020 (niece of Kearney)

⁹⁶ Harris, Verne. “The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory and Archives in South Africa”, *Archival Science*. (2, 2002), 63-86

At SJTI's request, Kearney papers about the Denis Hurley Centre have been coded under +Hurley with the reference 'SJTI Archive: BIO-11/W/3' (alongside other institutions named after +Hurley). This covers minutes of meetings, press clippings and correspondence.

In addition, I have had permission to access the archives of the Archdiocese of Durban, of Diakonia, and of the Marist Brothers of South Africa. As Director of the Denis Hurley Centre, I also have direct access to the archives of this organisation.

One general archive resource that has also been used is the *South African History Archive* which I have accessed on line (<https://www.saha.org.za>) and also at their reading room at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

It might be helpful to give an overview of the archival materials that I have used in terms of their (descending) order of importance:

- The relatively few comments that Kearney made about his own life, in written interviews with others and one radio interview and one television interview
- 'Morning Papers', a daily journal that Kearney kept when travelling to the UK and USA (mid-2005) and the UK and Ireland (mid-2006)
- Personal letters from Kearney to his parents when travelling overseas at three periods of his life: pilgrimage to Europe (1958), travelling in USA, Mexico and UK (1972-1973), studying in the US (1991-1992)
- Kearney's dissertations for his B.Ed.⁹⁷ and M.Ed.⁹⁸
- Kearney's own selection of his papers that were published in an anthology⁹⁹
- Kearney's extensive writings about +Hurley, speeches, articles and books, which often refer to Vatican II and to Conciliar themes
- Kearney's personal archives of papers which includes speeches, newspaper articles, reports and minutes
- General archives of +Hurley, Diakonia and the Denis Hurley Centre and those parts that are most relevant to Kearney
- Tributes about Kearney on the granting of awards and honorary doctorates; and obituaries and tributes after his death

C. Interviews

I have also been able to draw extensively on reflections on Kearney's life gleaned from 70 interviews with people who knew him well.¹⁰⁰ The template of the interview shows how I was especially keen to probe for opinions about what people felt motivated Kearney, who and what inspired him, and why they felt that he should be remembered.

The number of interviews was higher than originally planned because of the ease of interviewing people and also the keen-ness of early interviewees to recommend me to others. In most cases, the interviews were conducted in person though, in a few cases, via Zoom (because of distance or COVID

⁹⁷ Kearney, G Paddy. "A Study of School Leavers from a High School for African Girls", B.Ed. dissertation (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1972)

⁹⁸ Kearney, G Paddy. "Towards a Critical Analysis of Ivan D Illich's *Deschooling Society*", M.Ed. dissertation (University of Toledo, 1973)

⁹⁹ Kearney, G Paddy. *Faith in Action* (Pietermaritzburg: KwaZulu Natal Christian Council, 2017)

¹⁰⁰ See "Oral Sources: List of Interviewees" for a list of names, dates and back-up documentation.

restrictions). Consent forms and contemporaneous notes from the interviews (plus, in most cases, live recordings) have been archived.

There were a few noticeable gaps: in particular, Kearney's older brother (Jack) was too sick to be interviewed (and indeed has now passed away); Kearney's younger brother (Brian) and Kearney's wife (Carmel Rickard) both declined to be interviewed. Nevertheless, the interviewees between them cover every aspect of Kearney's life: his childhood; his time as a Marist Brother; working at the University of Natal, Diakonia, the Denis Hurley Centre and some of his other projects. Importantly, the list includes people who knew him professionally and also personally. A few people were contacted and did not reply but, when this happened, there were other people interviewed who knew Kearney at that same period in his life and so there are no noticeable gaps.

Oral history makes a critical contribution, especially when exploring the story of those, like Kearney, who were active within living memory. But I am also conscious of some of the challenges that oral history can pose and especially the dangers of relying on people's memories.¹⁰¹ I think that the quality of the accounts that I received was enhanced by the fact that, without exception, interviewees were very pleased to be contacted, delighted to talk and often spoke more widely and at greater length than had been requested. This reflects the high degree of affection that they held for Kearney – many of them explicitly said this – and thus their desire to ensure that his story was told.

I think that this is also indicative of a group of people mostly now in their 60s, 70s and 80s who realise that time is running out to share their own stories. Though many of the interviewees have made significant personal contributions to South African history, with only one or two exceptions none of them has published versions of their own stories (written by them or someone else). It also helped that in 90% of cases I was contacting people whom I already knew to some degree.¹⁰² Age did have an impact for a few on their ability to recall details, especially dates, though where possible I have been able to verify through cross-referencing to other interviewees or to archives. I also recognise that – again conscious of their own legacies – interviewees may have depicted events in ways which were likely to show them more favourably in retrospect.¹⁰³ Where I feel that this has skewed what was shared, I make a comment to this effect.

D Printed Literature

The final source is of course printed literature – books and journal articles – and this is detailed in the Bibliography. I hope that I have covered the major authors that deal with the themes that I am discussing. Of course, some of these are books that Kearney is unlikely to have read and so we cannot attribute any direct influence from these authors. I cite them instead because they demonstrate themes that emerge in looking at his life and demonstrate that these themes are part of a wider theological reflection on the Council.

But there are some situations in which the links between Kearney and the authors are more distinguishable:

- Reviews of books by Kearney (often about Vatican II figures or on Conciliar themes)

¹⁰¹ Abrams, Lynne. *Oral History Theory* (London: Routledge, 2010) 78-105

¹⁰² See the comments earlier in Chapter 1 on my own positionality with respect to Kearney.

¹⁰³ Grele, Ronald. *Envelopes of Sound – the art of oral history*. (Chicago: Precedent, 1985) 216-221

- The reviewed books themselves since we know that Kearney read them (and in a few cases, his own copies of those books with a few notes in the margins)
- Other books that he is very likely to have read since they are by theologians that he knew well and admired
- Books on conciliar themes that he may well have read and which would have been influential on him since they were significant books at the time

We do know that Kearney had access to +Hurley's own extensive theological library, that he created a library at Diakonia (which, to some degree, still persists), and that he borrowed books from the library at SJTI and also donated books. Sadly, SJTI does not have a record of the books taken out by individual lenders, nor even a record of who donated certain books, and so – apart from the books that were donated on his death – we cannot know for certain which books he read (apart from the very few, serendipitous examples when I found his handwriting in pencil in the margins).

Conclusion

All biography, even of someone recently deceased, is inevitably skewed by what information can be found, which may or may not be what is most important.

Bonk warns of 'the streetlight effect': we are looking for our keys in the place where we can see, even if it is not the place where we actually lost them. He also warns against the danger of the *Mappa Mundi* effect: we exaggerate what we do know and then put dragons to cover up the bits that we do not; we locate ourselves in the *Terra Firma* to try and survey the *Terra Incognita*.¹⁰⁴ There is, thankfully, a lot of *Terra Firma* (positions supported by Kearney's own writings, the interviews and surrounding literature); but I have also had to make some informed guesses to avoid too much *Terra Incognita*. The reader will have to decide if I have been successful.

In the same book, the editor Robert Dana re-tells a famous admonition (variously attributed to Francis Bacon, Roger Bacon and Aristotle):

In the year of our Lord 1432, there arose a grievous quarrel among the brethren over the number of teeth in the mouth of a horse. For thirteen days, the disputation raged without ceasing. All the ancient books and chronicles were fetched out, and wonderful and ponderous erudition, such as was never before heard of in this region, was made manifest.

At the end of the fourteenth day, a youthful friar of goodly bearing asked his learned superiors for permission to add a word, and straightway, to the wonderment of the disputants, whose deep wisdom he sore vexed, he beseeched them to unbend in a manner coarse and unheard of, and to look in the open mouth of a horse and find answer to their questionings.¹⁰⁵

I hope that I have consulted a sufficient number of the 'ancient books and chronicles' and that I have applied some 'wonderful and ponderous erudition'. And while I am far from youthful and, even when a friar, was not of goodly bearing, I hope that alongside the extensive sources that I have

¹⁰⁴ Bonk, Jonathan. 'Modern African Church History and the Streetlight Effect: Biography as a Lost Key' in *African Christian Biography*. Robert Dana ed. (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2018) 2

¹⁰⁵ Robert, Dana. *African Christian Biography* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2018) 11-12

mentioned, my own proximity to the subject gives me permission to express opinions. I have opened the mouth (metaphorically rather than literally) and so present my case having counted the teeth for myself.

But I should therefore comment, in closing, on while I feel entitled to present this material and, in particular, to access Kearney's personal archive (including some family letters). Kearney was a famously private man – a comment repeatedly made by interviewees. But occasionally, in the last four years of his life when I was working closely with him, he would share some story about his own experiences. Given that he had written such an eloquent biography of +Hurley, I asked him why he did not now write his own life story. With characteristic humility, he said he would not do that. I replied that if he would not write his story, would he let me write it for him? And his exact words of reply were: "For as long as I am alive, you cannot write my story." I am confident that, from a better place, Kearney – even if embarrassed by the attention that this work focuses on him – is prepared to smile benignly on my efforts to share his inspiring story.