

VALE

ARCHBISHOP JOHN ALEXIUS BATHERSBY

Tribute by Dr Chris Hanlon

The former Patron of the Brisbane Catholic Historical Society, Archbishop John Alexius Bathersby, died on 9 March 2020.

John Alexius Bathersby was born in Stanthorpe, Queensland on 26 July 1936, the second child of Grace Maud Conquest and John Thomas Bathersby. Siblings were Carmel (Mahoney), Michael, Suzanne (Nolan) and Anne (Johnson). His father was the publican of the Country Club Hotel as well as an ‘S.P. Bookie’ in Stanthorpe.

John Bathersby received his primary education at St. Joseph’s Stanthorpe (1941-1950), from where he went on to Nudgee College as a boarder (1951-1954).

Seminary studies were undertaken at Pius XII Seminary, Banyo, and on their completion, he was ordained priest on 30 June 1961, by Bishop William Brennan at St Joseph’s, Stanthorpe.

He spent the next 7 years as assistant priest, then administrator, of Goondiwindi, before being sent to Rome in 1969 to study for a licentiate in Theology at the Gregorian University and a Diploma in Spirituality at the

Teresianum University. He was then appointed Spiritual Director, Pius XII Seminary, Banyo (7 years), before returning to Rome to complete a Doctorate in Theology / Spirituality in 1979. His thesis was a study of the theology of Bernard Lonergan, S.J. He returned once more to Pius XII Seminary where he continued as a member of the seminary staff.

On 17 January 1986, he was ordained Bishop of Cairns, by Archbishop Francis Rush, whom he succeeded as Archbishop of Brisbane on 3 December 1991.

As a bishop, he was involved in ecumenical affairs on both national and international levels. He was a member of the International Catholic-Methodist Dialogue (1969-1995); served as Co-Chairman of the Australian Catholic-Uniting Church Dialogue (until 2009); President of the National Council of Churches in Australia (July 1997-July 2000); and as Co-Chair of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission Working Group (January 2001-2010).

With the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference he served as its Deputy President ((2000-2006); Chairman of the Committee for Justice, Development, Ecology and Peace (2000-2006); Chairman of Catholic Earthcare Australia (2000-2004); Chairman of the Commission for Mission and Faith Formation and also a member of the executive of the Confederation of Bishops' Conferences of Oceania (1991-May 1994).

He presided over the second Brisbane Archdiocesan Synod, the first to include the participation of lay people. The theme of the Synod was “Jesus-Communion-Mission”.

He contracted Alzheimer’s disease and retired in 2012, a shadow of his former self, first to his beloved Stanthorpe and then to Holy Spirit Home, Carseldine. He suffered a stroke and was admitted to Brisbane’s Wesley Hospital, where he died on 9 March 2020. His Funeral Mass was held in St Stephen’s Cathedral, on Monday 16 March. Archbishop Coleridge presided and preached. The Bishops of Queensland were also present. At the end of Mass, his coffin was interred with his predecessors in the cathedral crypt.

Lockdown for COVID 19 virus began in the State that day, and numbers within the cathedral were limited. May he rest in peace.