

The Time Has Come But Are We Willing?

Robert Fitzgerald AM.

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Let me commence by paying my respects to the Gadigal peoples and members of the Erora nation whose footprints are deeply embedded in the earth on which we meet and whose presence is with us today in spirit and through their elders.

It is always an enormous joy and pleasure to be included in these gatherings , where people gather to explore issues of significance to themselves, their church, and the society at large. It is an honour to be here with members of the Dominican family, especially those engaged in and committed to education as you move forward with new ambitions, governance structures and determination to live out the call of the Gospel in a contemporary yet authentic way. In addressing educators and educational leaders I am reminded of the statement from the Congregation for Catholic Education at the commencement of the third millennium *“Teaching has an extraordinary moral depth and is one of many most excellent and creative activities, for the teacher does not write on inanimate material, but on the very spirit of human beings.”*

In September of last year I was asked to present the opening keynote address at a conference of Catholic leaders called On Sacred Ground. This conference was aimed at exploring the role of Catholic lay leadership in the various ministries of the Church. The title of that address, as it is today, was ***The Time Has Come But are We Willing.***

There is no doubt that the time has come for us to reimagine the role and responsibility of lay leadership in our Church; and to ask the question: ‘Are we willing?’

Indeed Pope Benedict XVI said in May 2009 *“There should be a renewed awareness of our being Church and of the pastoral co-responsibility that, in the name of Christ, all of us are called to carry out,”* the Holy Father said. *“This co-responsibility should advance “respect for vocations and for the functions of consecrated persons and laypeople,”* he added.

The Pontiff acknowledged that this requires a "change of mentality," especially regarding laypeople, shifting from *“considering themselves collaborators of the clergy to recognizing*

themselves truly as 'co-responsible' for the being and action of the Church, favouring the consolidation of a mature and committed laity”

Heading this call are we willing?

Are we willing as lay people to embrace and re-imagine a renewed church in this nation, one that is relevant to the contemporary times of Australia and of Australians, one that can embrace, engage and excite the hearts, the minds and the spirit of the people of God. Are we willing as religious and ordained to share in the responsibility of church with the lay men and women in a relationship of mutual respect and reciprocity, created equal in all respects through our Baptism as members of Christ's faithful.

This also true for the laity within the Church in Oceania and elsewhere across the globe.

Context for Leadership

Leadership is always contextual. Leadership is contextual as to time and place, to culture and to history, and to circumstances within which it is exercised. There are few great leaders in all circumstances.. A great leader in peace time may be a poor leader in war. A great leader in periods of economic prosperity might be a poor leader in a recession. A great leader of an emerging organisation may be a poor leader as that organisation moves to maturity. A great leader in a non-profit agency may be a poor leader in a business enterprise. A great leader of one school may be a poor leader in another school or environment. And so it is in church leadership, be it lay, religious or ordained.

Today I want to talk about the context within which we find ourselves both in our nation and in our church generally - to reflect on the signs of our time . Or as Sr Sheila Flynn from South Africa said at your 2011 Symposium “*One essential quality of good government is awareness, a mindfulness that hones our attentiveness to what the Word of God would do through us, for the needs the world- as a community.....To live in reality.*”.

Leadership and Optimism

But I do so with an optimistic approach. I know in Australia today it is not fashionable to be optimistic. It is fashionable to believe that we live in a society that is incapable of dealing with the modest problems we face yet as a nation we have constantly demonstrated capacity to meet challenges whether man made or natural It is fashionable

to believe that our economy is less than robust when we in fact lead most nations on key economic performance measures. It is fashionable to believe that we have politicians without integrity yet most do, with most seeking to do good. It is fashionable to believe that Australians are not interested in the spiritual, yet we know Australians overwhelmingly believe in a god and an afterlife and quest for spiritual meaning to their lives. And it is fashionable to believe that religion has no future and yet we know the contrary is the case.

So today we need optimism. Yet is this optimism born out of a rose-coloured view of the world? No, it's not. It is founded on three observations

The first is our learning from family welfare services where support is provided based on an optimistic approach. That means we have a fundamental belief that individuals and families, and indeed communities, have the capacity within them to shape their own destiny and to impact on their own life outcomes, provided the necessary supports are provided. Allowing them to take control of their lives, to empower them to shape their futures is key to good practice for vulnerable families and individuals. It is an approach that rejects the notion that people are helpless or hopeless, or undeserving. This is also surely true of our approach to the education of young people. To build resilience, to allow them to grow to fullness, using and nurturing their gifts and talents, to believe in them and to walk with them in hope and love.

So too, in this gathering we have the capacity to shape the Church of the future and the society in which we live. We are not helpless or hopeless bystanders in a diminishing church. We are not powerless to achieve the outcomes which we believe are necessary to sustain and invigorate our Church. And the Dominican story is a powerful reminder of how church can be different.

The second is grounded in our faith. Edmund Campion once said there may be many difficulties with being a Catholic and with the Catholic Church, but that doesn't mean that Christ did not rise from the dead. Hope, born out of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the very essence of our faith and our belief. That is in itself, a cause of great optimism. Your order is a demonstration of that truth and of that optimism. In 2016 the Dominicans will celebrate 800 years since your formation. Over that time, through all that was good and all that was not, the dedication and belief by sisters and friars in the saving mystery of Jesus Christ, has always been the true source of hope and inspiration in the quest for the Truth. Today that belief and hope is shared by the laity dedicated to serving out the vision and mission of St Dominic, especially through the education of

children and young people. It is to bring the human experience into harmony with the paschal mystery.

The third is because we know that the Church is capable of extraordinary change.

Sometimes that change takes centuries. But sometimes it can happen quite quickly.

Let me just go back a little in time, and reflect on a couple of quotes which I found profoundly interesting showing how far we have moved over the last century or so.

Pope Leo XIII around the end of the 1800s said this: *“It is beyond dispute and quite unambiguously clear that two ranks exist in the Church that are of quite different nature, the pastor and the flock, in other words the leader and the people. The first of these two ranks has the rank of teaching, governing and directing people in life and establishing the necessary rules.”* Of you and I, he said *“the other has the duty of submitting itself to the former, obeying him, carrying out his orders and paying him honour.”*

Shortly thereafter his successor Pius X, who reigned in the early part of the 1900s, said *“In the hierarchy alone reside the power and the authority necessary to move and direct all the members of the society, the church, to its end. As for the many, they have no other right than to let themselves be guided and so follow their pastor as an obedient flock.”*

Well, life does change. Whilst those concepts were fundamental to the Code of Canon Law instituted in 1917 note what happened by the time the code was rewritten in 1983 following the Second Vatican Council.

Under the heading ‘The People of God’ the new Code stated : *“The Christian faithful are those who, in as much as they have been incorporated in Christ through baptism, have been constituted as the people of God. For this reason, since they have become sharers in God's priestly, prophetic and royal office in their own manner they are called to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfil in the world, in accord with the condition proper to each one.”*

Bishop Geoffrey Robinson in the second edition of *The Mix*, which is the publication of ‘Catalyst for Renewal’ produced in 1996, said of this, *“...this gives primacy to baptism and the community of Christ's faithful; all other sacraments, roles and structures find their place in this context.”* He went on to say: *“From this perspective ‘Christ's faithful’ becomes the root term in our speaking of the church. Different groups of ‘Christ's faithful’ would be spoken of, married and unmarried, male or female, older or younger, vowed religious or not vowed religious, cleric or non-cleric.”*

Shared Responsibility

So we see in the Church today, that as lay people, as religious and as ordained, we now have, or should have, that responsibility, jointly shared, for our Church here and now and into the future. Of course, I have always believed that to be the case. It surprises me that so few Catholics believe it and even fewer in key lay leadership roles are prepared to take that permission, in fact that obligation, to its fulfilment.

Sister Annette Cunliffe rsc, who headed the Council for the Conference of Religious in Australia, said : *“The Church is the people of God worshipping in spirit and truth, living in communion and service. It is the sacrament of God's presence in the world. Each member has dignity, each has gifts to contribute, each has responsibility. These things are not by courtesy of another human being but flow from baptism into the body of Christ.”* This must be at the heart of lay leadership in our Church today.

A church – in evolution and in revolution

In the Australian context the very nature of Church has been in a state of constant change. Today we meet in Sydney the birthplace of this post-colonial nation, a modern creation compared to the Indigenous occupation of this land for over 40,000 years. Interestingly, at the beginning of this colonisation from Britain the Catholic Church did not exist because of religious orders or ordained ministers; indeed, it was a church only of the laity. In the first 20 to 30 years of this colony priests were not present or came and went very quickly. Was Church therefore not present because of that absence ? No. Church lived and breathed in the hearts, minds, spirit and practices of the lay. Of course, shortly thereafter we were to have many priests and many religious orders.

Edmund Campion, in his book ‘Australian Catholics’, described the change: *“Throughout the 19th Century this rich, living, popular religion was transformed by the priests so that it became the Catholicism most of us knew until just the other day - parochial, disciplined, observant, dutiful, obedient, fearful, guilty and sin-obsessed, and also celebratory, colourful, comforting, heart-stirring, intelligent, pastoral and, in the best sense, sacramental.”*

The Church in Australia has continued to change and evolve. You and the Dominican family have been a vital part of that evolution. The question for us today is what phase are we in now, and what do we want the future to be.

Strangely enough, the Church touches the lives of more people, than at any other time in its history. Through our work in education and community services, in health and overseas aid, in the dioceses and in the parishes, today the Australian Church touches the lives of more people than ever. Yet herein lies the dilemma. Fewer Australian Catholics, at least in percentage terms, regularly participate in Sunday worship than ever before and fewer believe or have faith in the institution called church.

If there has been a revolution in the Church, it is a revolution in two parts. One part is a silent revolution. It is the revolution that is seen in the silent withdrawal from church life by the majority of Catholics. Their silent withdrawal goes almost unnoticed and yet it should clap like thunder in our thinking about the Church today. We see that the faithful have in fact withdrawn, not in protest, not in loud anger, - they just walk out and walk away. In the Australian context it is masked to a degree by newly arrived migrants without whom the Church's silent revolution would be even greater and clearer than it is today. It is not seen to be relevant in the lives of so many, most of whom have not lost faith in their Creator God but have lost faith in their religion .

Yet, equally and at the same time there is another revolution and it is the revolution of the Catholic Church through its social ministries that you represent here today. It is a church almost of a radical nature. It is transformative in the way that it adapts to the circumstances of its times. It is transformative in the lives of those who are touched by it as clients, students, carers, volunteers and employees. It treats men and women with genuine equality. It looks to and reflects on what it is doing , it is forced to respond to criticism. It is willing to change its structures and find new forms. It is open to the Spirit in a genuine way. It is responsive and it is relevant. And it is the Dominican way.

Yet these are both church - two parts of the one. Church is both.

Its effectiveness cannot be judged by only looking at one part. Rather we must look at the whole. We have to bring these two together, the sacramental life of the church, which is its very essence and foundation, together with its mission and ministries, the light and life of the Church in the world.

If I look at these two parts what is it that underpins their difference and accounts for the vitality of one and the diminishment of the other? It is trust. Or the lack thereof.

Trust in the Laity

It is unquestionably true that in so many ways the Catholic faithful believe they have been betrayed. They believe that the promises of the Second Vatican Council remain unfulfilled. These unfulfilled promises and the unfulfilled hopes remain elusive. More simply from the viewpoint of the lay, the Church leadership preaches that the Church is the People of God, yet its leadership so often will not trust its own people- unresponsive to the cries for genuine engagement and shared responsibility- unresponsive to the silent pleas of its departing faithful.

Yet , in the areas you represent often regarded as the key ministries of the Church that is not the case. What was fundamental to the growth of this educational and human services mission and ministries? It was the courageous and extraordinary leadership of our religious congregations, especially since the mid-1960s, as they recognised through necessity and foresight that they had to embrace new ways if their works were to continue. Since the late 1980s the Dominican order in this country has actively pursued new ways of embracing lay leadership in education and that journey continues today. Australia is blessed beyond all comprehension by the leadership of the religious congregations in this Church.

But fundamentally they had to do one thing, they had to place their trust in the laity. They had to believe that their ethos and charisms, their reason for existence, could in fact not only be carried on but strengthened and enlivened by the laity. They embraced it, some more so than others, some more successfully than others. Some are still in that process. Much work has been done on ensuring good and sound governance arrangements and yes, safeguards do need to exist. But fundamentally they trusted and believed in the men and women of the church and they believed that their heritage and their integrity, could live on in and through the laity, together with the religious and ordained.

Contrast that with many of our parishes and dioceses. Some parish and diocesan leaders in our church have embraced the laity, increased lay led services, explored new parish leadership arrangements, increased lay participation on councils, commissions and committees and searched for answers based in the reality of our times. They have sought and valued the wisdom of the laity.

But not so for many others. They cut services, close churches, search for overseas priests on the internet, maintain power and control, seek unquestioning obedience, pay lip service to consultation, criticise other churches and approaches, question the laity's

commitment, are ambivalent about our catholic schools and their successesand then are surprised when nothing changes for the better.

It is right to ask - Do they trust the laity? Do they truly believe that the life of the Church could be enriched and carried on with and through the lay members of church? Are they willing to share responsibility? Have they changed the structures and systems of church, the way it is governed, the way in which power is used and privilege granted to recognise the lay, as trustworthy faithful, equal in the eyes of God and each other? Are they willing to trust in God and the People of God?

We know that the Church can flourish if trust is given. Trust is not about a radical democratising of the Church-that I have never proclaimed,(at least not in a secular sense, although Dominican democracy is worth a good look) - but it is about understanding that as the people, the faithful, we have a collective responsibility and we also have a collective wisdom. That wisdom needs to be used and shared. So in a sense, going forward, are we as church ready to trust ourselves? Are leaders of Church, willing to genuinely trust those that make up the whole fraternity of the Catholic Church? For without trust there will be no change. Without trust there will be no future.

Christ entrusted his kingdom to the disciples. He entrusted his Church to Peter, a flawed character by all accounts. He trusted..... and yet we will not trust ourselves and many in leadership of the Church cannot bring themselves to believe and trust in their fellow Catholics, their fellow faithful.

That is what needs to change.

Your model of church

For you as leaders , what is the model of church you practice ? What is the model of church in your educational facilities? What is the model of church you wish to shape? For it is easy to look at” them,” but it is in fact, us. It is our responsibility.

This responsibility is even greater for leaders of schools, which have become the centre point of the faith experience for students and their parents. For many the only connection to the institutional Church is through their interaction with the school. How the school models church, how it’s members give witness to Christ has a profound impact on the way the Church is encountered in the daily lives of so many. .

What therefore should be the principles that would guide you in shaping church in your schools and educational services?

The first principle must be a commitment to a leadership that trusts, in the way that I have described. A leadership that nurtures trusting relationships embraces the notions of shared responsibility and wisdom and exercises genuine equality amongst men and women, lay and ordained

The second principle must be a commitment to reciprocity. Trust and reciprocity go hand in hand. The notion of reciprocity goes beyond just mutual respect: It is the genuine belief that each of us has something to contribute; that in the relationships that we form there is a giving and taking. It is one that believes that we each gain from the other. Reciprocity is fundamental to the practice of community engagement that, for example, the Institute for Advancing Community Engagement at Australian Catholic University under Br Jude Butcher's leadership promotes. It is fundamental to the notion of community development. and person centred care where we see community members or clients as being valuable contributors to their own wellbeing, valuable to society's wellbeing, valuable to our wellbeing and not just the passive recipients of care or services..

The third principle is that of leadership committed to love. Recently I was privileged in my day job , which is the work with the Productivity Commission, to conduct the inquiry into Australia's aged care system. I was visiting a homeless person service for aged men run by St Vincent de Paul Society. The manager was speaking to me about the recent death of an older resident

He started off by talking about the heroic nature of this man's life, a life lived mostly on the streets of Sydney He then spoke about the way in which that life had inspired him and then he said, "And I have grown to love him". Of course, it is at that moment that I actually understood what this is all about. It was the genuine belief that this man, a man of the street, gave much more than this manager or this service could ever provide. But more than that, the relationship was one of love - love in action. The greatest gift shared in schools is the gift and interchange of love, experienced in intense relationships, centred in and sourced from the love of Jesus Christ. That is the defining element of our Catholic schools, wherever they are and whatever their nature. How is love truly expressed in your schools and services?

Where to from here?

Today I have sought to put forward the possibility of a revitalised church. Some would say that I have painted an unrealistic picture of the virtues of the laity. Having been in many faith based lay organisations I am acutely aware of the failings and flaws in such institutions and in the laity themselves. They are no more nor less flawed or fallible than religious or ordained. But the future of church increasingly rests in their willingness to be co- sharers in the leadership of the church and its ministries. This is about all of us creating a renewed and revitalised church in the Australian and Oceania context.

It is essential that the lay people within the Church continue to offer to the Church as a whole their wisdom, their passion, their commitment and their love. It is equally essential that other Church leaders reciprocate by genuinely allowing shared responsibility for the Church based on trust, reciprocity and love.

The time has come but are we willing?

This challenge does mean new structures for dialogue and decision making, new forms of accountability and changes to the culture within Church. These are complex and difficult issues but nevertheless they need to be addressed for the Church as a whole to flourish.

In this regard we have much to learn from the Dominican forms of democracy and governance that have evolved. You have so much wisdom to share, so many insights to help shape a revitalised church. As Bishop Anthony Fisher OP highlighted in his keynote address to this Symposium in 2010, the Dominicans have forged a very different model of governance from many other parts of Church. He said that the Order runs *'precisely because of the democratic and communitarian legacy inherited from our founder'*. He went on to stress the characteristics of collegiality, subsidiarity, representation and accountability. If only those were lived characteristics of our Church today. Or if the Dominican notion of authority was embraced as articulated by Sr Flynn, what potential could be realised *'How authority is exercised depends on the depth of spirituality that undergirds it. In the Dominican tradition everyone has authority, everyone is called to be accountable and responsible in a democracy of constant dialogue.'*

How is this Dominican form of democracy and authority present in the governance and operation of your schools? How might the wider church embrace such approaches and what difference would it make to church?

Preferential option for the poor

Can I conclude, however, with one particular plea. Consistent with the social teachings of the Church and the clarion call of the Gospels, we the Church, have a specific obligation to the most vulnerable and marginalised in our community. I believe this deeply and yet, despite the continual call to this commitment by successive Pontiffs and renewed social teachings, I see a church that in some senses and in some ways is moving away from that commitment . Today, there are parts of the Church for which this is now only a tangential issue. The 'preferential option for the poor' does not sit at the centre of their mission and if it does in name , it is in rationalised away in practice by boards or leaders who do not understand nor are committed to this particular goal. Some see it as a burden or even a risk.

Fr Peter Maher, who was the parish priest of St Joseph's Newtown on the occasion of his jubilee, said this of his work in the parish: *“For me it has been working with raw honesty and integrity, about what matters in the world, with clarity of thought about who is at the heart of the struggle for justice; with courage to act in decisive ways in response to present realities; with sheer determination to live life to the full; and with spontaneity to live in the now without too much worry for times we are not in - either before now or after now.”* He says, *“My dream for the future is a church that is daring and caring, one that includes, and risks its own life for the sake of the suffering.”*

Are we willing to risk our Church and our institutions for the sake of the most marginalised and the most vulnerable in our community? Are we prepared to put at the centre of our decision-making and our governance and stewardship the welfare and wellbeing of the most marginalised ? Are we as board members and senior executives, as principals and educators, as parents and volunteers, truly prepared to put our self and our institutions at the service of those who are most in need of our love and support?

The Church in Australia can no longer answer that question with certainty that it will, for the examples are many where it doesn't. Too often we have sought comfort rather than discomfort. We have sought certainty rather than uncertainty. We have sought to work with those who cause little grief and ignored those who are in greatest need.

For Catholic educators and leaders this is a pressing and most significant issue. We are in danger of responding brilliantly to the needs of the emerging educational market place, but risk the very things that matter if we are to be truly catholic and truly educational. As Fr Chris Gleeson formerly of St Ignatius College Riverview said in 1999 *“A school*

confronts a never to be resolved contradiction; it must fulfil the expectations of those it serves if it is to survive, but it must change those expectations if it is to be truly educational."

Embracing those most vulnerable must be part of the transformative experience of our institutions and of those engaged with them. I know many here today are dedicated to the care of the most vulnerable. I know many schools embrace children from disadvantaged circumstances and many who have significant disabilities. Often religious orders have championed these causes. Indeed the very foundations of Catholic education in this nation were built out of a commitment to the support and empowerment of the poor. Lay leaders, board members, parent leaders and staff, must also embrace this commitment with real zeal. A zeal borne out in practice and action, not just words in glossy brochures and inflated mission statements.

Concluding with optimism founded in unity

In conclusion returning the notion of optimism, US Archbishop Weakland, in a book called 'Faith and the Human Enterprise', said *"...but there are also signs of the living Spirit amongst us. We know that God loves us now, no less than God loved previous generations of believers."* He goes on to say, *"We must remember that the kingdom belongs to God and that God has more at stake in bringing about the kingdom than we do."*

That should give us the ultimate reason for optimism. One with each other, one in Christ. And it is only when we are united with and in Christ that such optimism can be realised.

Let me end by again quoting the Holy Father when he spoke of both the People of God and the Body of Christ in 2009

"While 'People of God' expresses the continuity of the history of the Church, 'Body of Christ' expresses the universality inaugurated on the cross and with the resurrection of the Lord."

"In Christ, we become really the People of God ,from the Pope to the last child."

"The Church, therefore, is not the result of a sum of individuals, but a unity among those who are nourished by the Word of God and the Bread of Life,"

Thank you and may God be ever present with you on your journey

Robert Fitzgerald AM

Adjunct Professor

Australian Catholic University.