

**ST LEO'S COLLEGE CENTENARY ADDRESS**  
**Archbishop Mark Coleridge**

**St Leo's College**  
**within the University of Queensland**  
**6 August 2017**

My sincere thanks to the Head of College for the welcome and introduction. Bishop McGuckin and I are the only bishops of Queensland here, but the other bishops send their greetings and their apologies. They are very much part of the life of the College and would wish to be with you to celebrate these one hundred years.

The bishops seem at times a hidden presence: I say this really to the students. You don't see much of us, but in fact we own the place! Which is one of the many reasons I am delighted to be able to say just a few words on this occasion. It sounds rather grand - the Centenary address. But I want only to offer a few humble reflections which is a good thing to do in a moment like this as we look back across a century. In other parts of the world 100 years is not a long time, but in this part of the world it is a seriously long time.

In the last twelve months I've been run ragged celebrating centenaries of one kind or another, and there is a reason for that. The story is this: the young James Duhig, who was born in Ireland and came to Australia as a teenager, was made Bishop of Rockhampton at an exceedingly young age in his early thirties. Then in 1912, in his late thirties, he was made what's called the Coadjutor Archbishop of Brisbane. In other words he would help the ageing Archbishop Dunne until he took over. Duhig was the heir designate to the See of Brisbane.

Now Archbishop Dunne had done many fine things in both Toowoomba and Brisbane, but by 1912 he was decidedly on the downhill run. Dunne had in fact run out of energy, and little was happening in the Archdiocese. When the young Duhig came to Brisbane he showed a volcanic energy, and he saw the need to do the many of the things that had been left undone in Dunne's later years.

Parishes needed to be established; schools needed to be opened. But the frustration for Duhig was that he didn't have the cheque book; Archbishop Dunne shrewdly kept control of the funds. So Duhig complained to the Apostolic Nuncio, who wrote a stern letter to Dunne saying basically, "Give him the cheque book!" – which is in fact what happened. That's why in 1917 and thereabouts we get a rash of schools, parishes, university colleges and God knows what else.

The extraordinary thing about this outburst of energy was that it happened in a time of something like national depression. It's hard for us to imagine now the impact on the national psyche that the so-called Great War had. By 1917 the full horror of the war that was supposed to end all wars had dawned upon Australia. Young men had gone off on the adventure of their life, or so they thought. But they had been slaughtered in their thousands. So the full horror of the Great War, the first modern war, broke upon this nation and it had a profound effect upon the national psyche.

I like to think, therefore, that one of the things that propelled Duhig was not just the need to act institutionally but the need to make a genuine and powerful gesture of hope at a time where hope seemed very thin and difficult. In other words, it was important to say that there *was* a future beyond the devastations of war; and all of these institutions, one of them St Leo's College, became that gesture of hope, that assertion that there *was* a future to hope in beyond the slaughter.

1917 was also a time when the profile of Catholics was changing, and this again is important for us to understand. In the early 1870s the Australian bishops made, I think, the bravest decision that Australian bishops have ever made, which was to establish our own Catholic schools. This was because the Government had insisted upon education which is free (the bishops were all for that), compulsory (they were all for that as well) and secular. And there was the problem. The bishops said yes to the free, yes to the compulsory but no to secular. Why? Because the Church has always understood education as involving the whole person. If you exclude from the mix that depth of the human person we call the spiritual, then you end up with an education that is at least inadequate and at worst destructive.

So the bishops set up their own schools, which must have looked a crazy decision. But because of the heroic contribution of the Religious - the Sisters and the Brothers - it worked. It turned out to be a triumph, and therefore schools such as St Joseph's Nudgee could produce students ready to enter the universities. This was not to be taken for granted among Catholics and certainly not in the universities of that time which were, it must be said, far more elitist institutions than universities have become in the meantime. The founding of this College was a sign of what was happening to Catholics in this country at that time. St Leo's quickly became one of the ways of ensuring that education was, for young Catholics, a way out of the ghetto. You who are young Catholics now may not understand what it was to be consigned to a ghetto; but it did happen and it is part of our story. It's part of the story of this College.

These were the times of a kind of tribal Catholicism which is now gone. In those days you were born into the Catholic tribe and, willy-nilly, by being born into a Catholic family and going to a Catholic school, you became part of the Catholic tribe. You didn't really make a decision; it just happened by a kind of cultural osmosis. But that world has gone. If you look at figures like James Duhig in Brisbane or Daniel Mannix in Melbourne (who was also Archbishop for about 50 years), they look like tribal chieftains, chieftains of the largely Irish Catholic tribe. In fact Catholic identity and Irish nationalism were a very a potent mix not only in Ireland but in this part of the world as well. So that St Leo's College was founded as part of the advance of tribal Catholicism.

In the meantime tribal Catholicism has evaporated, but as we look back across 100 years it's still in a moment like this, a hundred years on, it's worth remembering where we came from. We're no longer a tribe, and these days being born into a Catholic family and going to a Catholic school guarantees little. But even so, it's worth remembering where we once were, where we've come from, and telling something of that story.

I've long been intrigued by the name given to this College, but I've never managed to discover why it was called St Leo's. However, it seems to me a very good choice when you look at Pope Leo the First who is generally known as Leo the Great. Not all of you, I realize, are historians, so let me jog your memory. Leo was born in the fifth century which was a convulsed, not unlike 1917. The Western Roman Empire was tottering, and it fell finally in 476. So Leo was born in the period leading up to that apocalyptic moment. Later he exercised his ministry as Pope, as Bishop of Rome, when the world as it were was falling apart. So here was a College itself founded in convulsed times, and given the name of a saint, and one of the greatest of the saints, who himself had somehow to bring order out of chaos.

The choice of name for the College harmonizes nicely with the decision to entrust the College to the Society of Jesus. There was no accident in that, for the Jesuits had been long involved in higher education, and they were in a sense a natural choice. The Society of Jesus was founded in the time of crisis that came with the trauma of the Reformation. Again it is hard for us to imagine what the sundering of Western Christianity meant for the Church. It was traumatic; and out of that trauma came the great creativity of St Ignatius Loyola and the Society of Jesus – just as St Leo had appeared in an earlier time of crisis. So it was right that this College be entrusted, in a convulsed time, to a community of priests who themselves were born of a convulsed time.

Of course a great deal has changed since 1917. I have suggested already that one element of the change is the demise of tribal Catholicism. The Church

is passing through a time of deep, painful and permanent change. As Pope Francis has said: “This is not an era of change, it is a change of era”.

So there can be no thought of putting up a sign saying “Business as Usual”, which is why here in Australia the bishops have taken another bold decision to move to what we call a Plenary Council of the Church in this country in 2020. Plenary councils matter because they aren’t just a talkfest. They make decisions; and we will have some big decisions to make about the future of the Catholic Church in this country. We have the past all around us, and rightly we celebrated today as we look back across a century. But it’s the future that must now engage our deepest energies, and that’s what the Plenary Council is all about.

So what’s changed? Universities have certainly changed. I was an undergraduate back in the late 1960s, and the university I knew then was very different from the university that you know now here. Just as universities have changed, so too university colleges have changed. St Leo’s College is not the same place it was 100 years ago or 50 years ago or even 20 years ago, because inevitably as the environment of the university changes, so too do colleges and college life.

The Church has also changed – extraordinarily in my 43 years as a priest and bishop. The culture has also changed in ways we didn’t see coming. We keep waiting for things to settle down but they only ever settle up. This is true of the Western world but it’s also true of the world as a whole: change is the one thing that doesn’t change. So in a time of deep flux like this and as we celebrate the Centenary we ask the question, What endures? What really will take us into a future that is worth having? It’s a crucial question in a moment like a Centenary which looks back and tells the story but also has to look forward. Reminiscence has to give birth to prophecy.

In the nineteenth century Cardinal John Henry Newman wrote a little book about universities. He called it *The Idea of a University*. When you read Newman’s book now it seems very dated in some ways. The universities he knew were utterly different from anything familiar to us. Newman was an Oxford man and had Oxbridge in mind; but he was also involved in the Catholic University in Ireland that came to grief. Yet given all that, there are certain things that Newman wrote about universities long ago that may serve us well in a time like ours.

In the book Newman argues that the university’s primary role was to give students “perfection of the intellect, the clear, calm, accurate vision and comprehension of all things” that allows the individual to make good judgments. This is perhaps the language of another time, and it might seem a

little overstated. Yet it has its validity: “a perfection of the intellect, the clear calm accurate vision and comprehension of all things,” that allows the individual to make good judgments. That seems to me the goal of a university even now, and it is the task of this College to assist its members to reach that goal.

Speaking of the perfection of the intellect, Newman continued: “It is almost prophetic from its knowledge of history, it is almost heart searching from its knowledge of human nature, it has almost supernatural charity from its freedom from littleness and prejudice, it has almost the repose of faith because nothing can startle it, it has almost the beauty and harmony of heavenly contemplation.” Here he speaks of the soul of a university, and I ask the question here today, Does it make sense now to speak of the soul of the university? If Newman’s words have any truth and I think they do, then it still makes sense to speak of the soul of a university; and it still makes sense to say that a Catholic university college exists to enable students to discover and enter more deeply into the soul of the university in the way that Newman suggests.

The motto of the College itself is intriguing - *Dominus illuminatio mea*. These are the opening words of Psalm 27. Your motto, then, sets the life of this College in a large, deep and old context. The College may only be 100 years old but this College takes its place within a tradition reaching back into what we call the Old Testament. “The Lord is my light and my help, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life, before whom shall I shrink?” That’s the Psalm from which the motto is taken. Fear is very powerful, and there is always the tendency to shrink. But in choosing that motto this College is saying: we will teach the young not to shrink and to live a life beyond fear –in other words to live a life that knows there is light in the darkness.

The motto of this University is *Scientia ac labore*, which is fair enough I suppose, though a bit pedestrian. It means “By knowledge and hard work”. I have nothing against knowledge: on the contrary. Nor do I have anything against hard work. But you need something more, and it’s the something more that St Leo’s seeks to offer. You do need *Scientia ac labore* in a university. But you also need that something more announced in the motto of St Leo’s College, *Dominus illuminatio mea*. You need a university which is not just a degree factory, but a university that has a soul.

So as we look back across 100 years we tell an extraordinary story, and pay tribute to all of those who have been part of it. The Society of Jesus I have mentioned, but also the Christian Brothers who have also been a crucial part of the story; and they in turn have passed responsibility for the College to lay administration where we have leaders such as Stephen Foley and Daryl Hanly whom I congratulate and thank. I pay tribute to all of those – even my

predecessor James Duhig – who took the bold decision to establish the College and to sow the seed which will ensure, in the future as in the past, that young men can come here and enter not only into the life of each other but enter into the soul of the university and discover the great truth enshrined in the College motto, a truth understood so well by the man whose name this College bears: “The Lord is my light and my help whom should I fear?” May God bless each of you and bless St Leo’s College into the future as he has in the past.