

'Be the change you want to see...'

Vin and Trish Hindmarsh, Parliament House, 10th June, 2016.

Vin:

My sharing today is a story of two churches. Many of you will know both of these churches because you have lived in them. One is the old Church before Vatican 11, or what Anthony Padavano calls the Church of the Counter Reformation; the other is the pilgrim Church of Catholic renewal as focussed by the Second Vatican Council. Hopefully, in understanding the difference between the two Churches, one can learn not only to survive and serve, but to breathe a measure of freedom and peace; or as Rosemary Radford Reuther would describe 'a dream of a modest hope for the future'.



Trish and Vin Hindmarsh

We might date the emergence of the first church from the Counter Reformation beginning in 1517 when Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on the door of the Church at Wittenburg. It came to an end in 1959 when Pope John XX111 called the Second Vatican Council. As a timeframe, it covers a little over 440 years.

What can we remember from this period some of us grew up in? One feature would certainly be its institutions. In the early and middle twentieth century we built everywhere and we built big. I can remember Cardinal Agagianian one of the inner circle at the Vatican coming out to open Glen Waverley seminary in Melbourne in the early 1960's. No doubt carried away by the occasion, he likened the new College to a "Rock of the Ages" and predicted it would stand for a "thousand years." In fact, after a mere 25 years, due to the decline in priestly vocations, the seminary was closed down and sold off to become a police academy for the training of law enforcement officers.

Not only did we build with pride, we built with great prejudice. Who can forget the antipathy we had for non-Catholic schools in those sectarian times; they were almost dens of iniquity and as kids we eyed one another off from different sides of the street corner. The ditties we threw at one another were legendary. We thought we were squaring off out of strength, but it was fear. Fear was everywhere. One misstep you were gone. What if a member of your family had a marriage breakdown? What if you fell in love with a non-Catholic? What about leaving the priesthood or religious life? How about dying before we got to Confession? The power of the church to determine whether you could be damned for all eternity was arguably the rock bottom in a church that had sunk into a mire of guilt and judgmentalism.

This is not to say that there were not happy moments in the church of the Counter Reformation. We can give thanks that God pays no heed to walls and brings grace wherever we are.

One of most imposing walls ever built in the Catholic Church was the doctrine of infallibility declared at Vatican Council 1 in 1870. Its impact on the Church was monumental and went on to embolden Pius XII in 1950 to call a Council he named "a Council in writing", specifically to declare the Assumption of Mary an infallible belief. This was a death nail for general Councils in the Church. Never again, it seemed, would there be a need for another general Council again.

Some of us recall the exhilaration then, when John XXIII in 1959, called for an Ecumenical Council. The metaphors came flying out the windows and people felt they could dream again. There was resistance from the old Roman system of course and protagonists like Cardinal Ottaviani drew up the battlelines. Born and bred for the good fight, the first draft drawn up by Ottaviani and the Holy Office was called "The Church Militant." It was later changed to "Lumen Gentium," a 'light for the world', signalling a new engagement between the Church and the modern world. The old system used military metaphors readily. As Cardinal Agagianian said at the opening of Glen Waverley seminary, this College would train a new wave of shock troops for Christ. It was language we were brought up with. We were 'soldiers of Christ' at Confirmation. Marian apparitions at Fatima led to the creation of 'the Blue Army'. We were Catholics 'flying the banner' of truth; and the language we used against Communists was the language we once used to justify wars against Jews and Muslims, even against other Christians and the scientific establishment.

One of the lasting insights of John XXIII was his statement that the Church did not need to be a fortress or a temple. It was to be God's people. His Vatican Council pulled down the old temple in three years. A new dream had emerged: that God's truth and grace could now be found not within the temple precincts but wherever the Spirit led us. It would be difficult to leave the security of the Temple and become a pilgrim, but for all those who chose the journey, there would be no turning back. This is not to say that Vatican II abandoned all links with the past. It clearly affirmed what was best in the Catholic tradition, its capacity to endure, its sacramental imagination, its impressive social doctrine, its soaring spiritual and mystical theology, its liturgical creativity and, when it's at its best, its wonderful inclusiveness. (I might add there on the latter, its best is yet to come!) The Vatican Council also celebrated missionary outreach, healers and prophets, martyrs and saints, noble women and mystic revolutionaries such as Catherine of Siena, Theresa of Avila and Julian of Norwich. Towering figures such as these reminded the Church that it must respect the *sensus fidelium* of the whole community, rather than infallibility being vested in our popes as individuals.

In our own time, the Spirit might have chosen anyone to be reformers. At the beginning of the 21st century, it is ourselves. Anthony Padavano revisits the process of change in the Church and expresses it this way: "It took four centuries for Martin Luther to be vindicated by the Church at the Second Vatican Council. In spite of his shortcomings, was Luther not right to insist that the Papal states were a danger to the spiritual mission of the church? Did Luther deserve excommunication because he called for liturgy to be in the language of the people or for Scripture to have a central place in the life of the Church? Was Luther a bad monk because he begged the Pope to stop selling indulgences or when he asked for more collegiality in the Church? Who would we have supported in 1521 when Luther said to the Pope: *'I am bound by*

the Scriptures...and...my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. God help me. Amen". Martin Luther was courageous in living the change his time needed to see.

That courage is still necessary because although almost all of Luther's teaching became doctrine at Vatican 11, the spirit of the Council still needs to take wings in the Church. The struggle is worth it. Every step of the way. Who would ever go back to a church of the past? We left behind a church system and an institution that gave precedence to codes of law and rigid adherence to practices that at times denied people the sacraments, not just for years but sometimes for decades. The reforms of Vatican 11 put the Incarnation back into human life, where God makes a covenant with people, not institutions. Vatican 11 left behind a church triumphant, freeing us to reach out and include the wider human family, those who had never found a home in the church, to become a family composed of friends but also those regarded formerly as 'outsiders'..... people of other faiths, those we once excluded and those who embarrassed us and sometimes made our institutional life difficult. We might say we have fewer certitudes but now have deeper loyalties, where bread is broken, needs are diverse, inclusiveness is made real, and loyalty to and love for one another count for more than being in agreement with one another. We acknowledge today that WATAC has lived for the past thirty years by the belief that we can be the change we need to see.

It seems to me that three values have emerged from that struggle:

One has been our faith and unwavering conviction regarding Church renewal, which has been informed by our scriptural, pastoral and theological reflections. I always take great heart from reading the Newsletter and noting what books and articles are providing inspiration to WATAC groups.

Two, our survival has been sustained by finding a home in WATAC. Reform groups such as ours are the seedbeds of renewal, where belonging is our baptismal and sacramental right, and where we gather to give life and strength to one another.

And third, our survival has been sustained by our communion with one another. By communion I mean a relationship to the gospel and the Christian tradition. The tradition is what we enter into and the way we struggle together to preserve the gospel. In doing so, we hear the words spoken to Francis of Assisi, "Rebuild my Church." Likewise, we hear the words of Martin Luther, "My conscience is the Word of God."

Today we invoke this same testimony, and bear witness that the message to Francis of Assisi has not been lost, and that Luther's call for the urgency of reform must be continued, in spite of reverses and setbacks, sometimes against our will and inclinations, but called by a Spirit nonetheless, who summons and fortifies us with a strength not from our own resources.

I'll finish with these two quotations: The first is from John Carmody who wrote in National Catholic Reporter: "*The Church is not about laws, doctrines, morals or politics. These are secondary, as are our rubrics, popes, priests. The Church is about life: ours and God's, as focussed in Jesus. It is about what terrifies us at three o'clock in the morning when we are alone with death, and what delights us at seven in the morning when we laugh with our children and friends...*"

How true...in the midst of family challenges and piecemeal lives, our hopes and dreams will determine whether we have a fortress set in stone or a community of life that constantly renews itself. \Let me finish with this quote from The Women's Creed written in preparation

for the Fourth U.N. World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Bernice herself was there representing WATAC. Its dream for humanity still rings true today:

*“Bread. A clean sky. Active peace.
A woman’s voice singing somewhere.
The army disbanded. The harvest abundant.
The wound healed, the child wanted,
the prisoner freed, the body’s integrity honoured,
the lover returned....
Labour equal, fair and valued.
No hand raised in any gesture but greeting.
Secure interiors of heart, home, land, so firm
as to make secure borders irrelevant at last.”*

Trish:

Now that Vin has laid the historical foundations that lie behind our dreams, I offer a different starting point. For me, there is another saying I’d like to share with you that complements Mahatma Ghandi’s challenge to ‘be the change you want to see’. Ghandi’s was a tough clarion call he faithfully followed, modelling the change he passionately believed in for the South African and Indian societies of his time. The saying, the proverb I have in mind is a gentler one, poetic, but powerful, and suited to a time when ecology is recognised to be the heart of everything... we now realise the beautiful earth is ‘our life, our sweetness and our hope’.

I first came across this little proverb in the early 1970’s and, excited, shared it with a Year 10 RE class in a small NW Victorian wheat town. The class suggested, much to my amazement, that it would look good on a banner. Naturally I was thrilled by such sparks of interest! It seemed perfect for a group of young people, who, like these beautiful students we have with us here today in parliament 45 years later, were on the threshold of life, drinking in ideas, full of passion, stocking their minds and hearts with learning of all kinds. Young people in Bangladesh or Pakistan struggling for human freedoms we take for granted, teenagers on boats or in detention centres desperate to reach freedom all have *their* hopes and dreams.... I’ll keep you in suspense no longer, except to say I can still imagine the tall stalks of brown and green bamboo the students painted on the banner with a dainty, shy bird perched on one of the stalks. And beside the bird on the stalk, the words of the proverb, **‘If you keep a green bough in your heart, the singing bird will come’**.

The green bough is alive, vibrant, transforming sun and soil into new life. What a miracle of nature! We too are alive and can transform our dreams into fruitfulness. The ground of our being is our heart, our deepest self, our capacity to feel, to choose, to love. If we keep that passion, that green bough alive in us, the ‘singing bird’ of love, hope, joy and fulfilment can come alive in us, singing with joy to the world. Our song may be a gentle chirruping or a raucous burst of kooka-like laughter, but that love, that song each one of us can sing, is transformative, and will energise and warm all we come into contact with. It will inspire us to bring about the change we want to see in the world through our positivity, our passion and our belief in the reign of God.

Jesus had other sayings to explain this: ‘I am the vine, you are the branches’. You are to be ‘the leaven in the dough’, the ‘lamp’ on the lampstand for all to see’. You are the ‘salt of the earth’. The early disciples, women and men, went about being the change they wanted to see. They

had the sap of Life coursing in their veins. The citizens of the time, as the historian Josephus tells us, commented, 'See how those Christians love one another'. That was Jesus' dream. To do good to all, to love all. He couldn't help himself as he went around among the downtrodden Galilean peasants; they were his own people. He had seen them suffering incurable disease without a physician, fleeced of their crops and taxed into grinding poverty to fund the great Roman playground city of Sepphoris being built not far from Nazareth on the Galilean seaboard as a Roman pleasure resort. ... He reached out and healed them, reassured them that they mattered to God, told them they were 'Blessed'. The Spanish scripture scholar, José Pagola, can move my heart as he writes in such a scholarly but accessible way describing how Jesus, 'went about doing good', behaving as an itinerant, with women in his inner circle of followers, living among those who were considered the dregs of society. Pope Francis seems to have met the same Jesus Pagola describes. I dream that everyone could meet this Jesus and be affected by him.

Phillip Adams, the grandfather of Australian journalism and brilliant commentator, wrote recently, with his usual wit, in his weekly column in *The Australian* that Jesus' promise, 'Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth' was a lie, a mistake because 'they aren't (blessed) and they haven't' (inherited the earth). Rather he quipped it is the 'geeks' who have inherited the earth! (or even the 'Greeks' as some listeners at the sermon on the mount in *Life of Brian* heard it). After all, said Adams, we have had more and worse wars this and last century that at any time in history, poverty still dogs the lives of so many. 'Thou shalt not kill' is honoured more in the breach than the observance.

And yet we all yearn for world peace, the unity of all humans as a family, justice for the women of Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia, a home for the couple living on a mattress under the Cahill Expressway, a decent and upright head of state for Australia and the US, a place of peace for the millions escaping oppression in Africa and the Middle East. We all have hopes. These are the green boughs in our hearts. We must never allow our dreams and hopes to wither. And the singing bird is carolling within us. As Thomas Merton, the monk and mystic of the twentieth century put it, whether we realise it or not, we are all 'walking around shining like the sun' because we are made in God's image, with human dignity, as loving beings capable of dreaming, choosing and responding to God's love that makes the 'sun shine equally on the just and the unjust'.

Speaking of the sun, I think of Alexie Sellar, young Sydney engineer and entrepreneur, who co-founded Pollinate Energy in 2012 to bring small solar panels equipped with a light into the slums of India's biggest cities, doing away with kerosene lamps that created toxic fumes and allowing children to do their homework and parents to prepare for the next day's work. Tim Flannery tells how the 'most common choice of dowry gift' for a young couple is now a solar powered lighting kit! When the Abbott government disbanded the Climate Commission as its first act in power, Flannery decided to go to the Australian people who raised \$1.75m a year through crowd funding, enough to found the Climate Council and continue vital climate research. A group of young Catholics started the Global Catholic Climate Movement eighteen months ago, and gathered the 1,000,000 signatures sent to Pope Francis in 2015 and to Paris for COP21, demanding climate change action. These are examples of people busy being the change they want to see. And in most cases they are young.

That same Phillip Adams, self-proclaimed atheist, also wrote a column, 'Standing up for the Sisters', admiring the religious women, the 'nuns' as he called them, the 'only lefties left in

Australia', who were 'ticked off', as he put it, by Rome for being too interested in the 'social gospel' in a Church 'intent on dismantling the modernisation of Vatican 2'. I think Phillip would be quite at home in WATAC, initially conceived in the 1980's by those very women who wanted to be prophetic and sing the songs of liberation for the poor and oppressed, and have remained faithful to that dream.

John Marsden, whose influential novels so beloved of English students and now appearing on the big screen, wrote a *Prayer for the 21st Century*. It expresses something of the vision we all want to see realised:

*May the road be free for the journey
May it lead where it promised it would
May the stars that gave ancient bearings
Be seen, be still understood.
May every aircraft fly safely
May every traveller be found,
May sailors in crossing the seas
Not hear the cries of the drowned.

May gardens be wild, like jungles,
May nature never be tamed.
May dangers create of us heroes,
May fears always have names.
May the mountains stand to remind us
Of what it means to be young.
May we be outlived by our daughters,
May we be outlived by our sons.

May the bombs rust away in the bunkers;
And the doomsday clock be rewound,
May the solitary scientists, working,
Remember the holes in the ground.
May the knife remain in the holder,
May the bullet stay in the gun,
May those who live in the shadows
Be seen by those in the sun.*

Being the change you want to see takes all the energy, imagination and love we can muster. It engages us in realising a positive vision for ourselves, our sisters and brothers near and far, and for continuing life to flourish and nourish on this planet. It is the vision the Church enunciated in 1965 in *Gaudium et Spes*. It is the explanation for the foundation and continued dynamism of WATAC.

Jesus' summary of his mission.....*to bring Good News to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken, to give sight to the blind, and freedom to captives.....* has the power to move heaven and earth if we allow it to sing in our own hearts, calling us again to be the change we want to see. WATAC has always kept that vision alive, its members growing together in wisdom, age and grace over 30 years. I thank and congratulate each of you and all who have been part of WATAC, for tending the green bough so lovingly, in all our hearts, and leading us in singing our joyous song of freedom and justice to the world. Long live the song!