



Aquinas Memorial Lecture 1989

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ST STEPHEN'S RESTORED

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Father Frank Moynihan

Father Frank Moynihan was born in Ipswich in 1929 and ordained a priest for the Archdiocese in 1959. He worked as assistant priest in Nundah and Maryborough. For five years he was Director of the Catholic Missions and Immigration Office while living at Mount Olivet Hospital and doing the duties of Chaplain. After six years as Parish Priest of Ekibin and Chaplain to the Brisbane Prison, he was appointed in 1976 Administrator of St Stephen's Cathedral. Particularly since the formation of the Cathedral Restoration Committee in the early 1980s he was involved in the many committee discussions for the refurbishing of the Cathedral. He remained in the post of Administrator for eighteen months after the renewed Cathedral was opened. These were then sometimes difficult times of seeing that all was in place and working properly. Since 1972 Father Moynihan has had a close association with the Catholic Leader and he was able to keep the readers of the Leader informed at all stages of the Cathedral project. Since leaving the Cathedral he has taken charge of the Parish of Inala.

I was at Mass in St. Stephen's Cathedral on the first Sunday of January in 1953. I remember Archbishop Duhig telling the congregation that those who receive Holy Communion would no longer be asked to fast from midnight the night before. For many people this was the first and the most personal of the modern "Changes in the Church". Six weeks later I began my studies for the priesthood at Banyo Seminary. On Holy Saturday night I took part in the Revised, or Reformed, Easter Vigil. We have experienced many great moments of liturgy since then, but if your memory goes back as far as mine, you may well agree that there will always be something unforgettable about the first celebration of that Easter Vigil.

This was only the beginning. It would be into the next decade before the world would hear Bob Dylan sing his famous song, "The Times They Are A-Changein' ", but the world around us was already on the move. In the late 1950s John XXIII was the Pope and we will always associate his name with the Second Vatican Council, the great challenge to the Church to face the future positively and bravely.

How many times have we been asked what we think about the changes in the Church? I think that people are enquiring about only a few things of which they have taken particular notice. The so called changes are not a short list of alterations such as English in our liturgies, modifications in clerical dress and the greater involvement of the laity. Change goes deeper and changes are meant to bring change in us The Church who are the Christened People of God. Change can challenge us or threaten us. It is important that the changes in St. Stephen's Cathedral are seen as an event in the life of the Universal Church and do not stop

with the building itself. The Cathedral has something to say to the City of Brisbane. It has something to say to us, and it waits for our response.

As we began in earnest the task of restoring St. Stephen's Cathedral we had to face one first discipline. It was the simple sounding question, "What is St. Stephen's Cathedral doing in the City of Brisbane?", This was not a trick question. We had been asked plenty of others. When people talked about prospective changes they would have enquiries such as, "Will any changes to the sanctuary area mean a lessening of seating space?"; "Can the Blessed Sacrament be located at one of the side altars?"; "Is it possible to expand the floor space?"; and, "Can we have a hanging crucifix like the one in such-and-such a cathedral?". Architects apparently learn very early in life that enquiries like these look after themselves. They want to know what is the function of any church on which they work. It is their task to make the church function better.

In some cities there are several churches, of which the cathedral is one. Often the other churches are referred to as popular churches because they attract the crowds. The cathedral can then be kept for formal occasions, "kept for best" we might say. In other places cathedrals are built near universities or houses of parliament. Their workload and their functions are determined to some extent by their locations. A cathedral in each Australian capital city has its individual, unique role to play, so too has St. Stephen's in Brisbane.

When the Victoria Bridge was completed, we no longer had two partly built cities looking at each other across the Brisbane River. The city continued to grow

on the northern side of the winding river and St. Stephens was very favourably positioned. It stands behind the General Post Office, within walking distance of the main shopping centre near many of the principal business and government offices. Several major bus routes pass close to the Cathedral and thus many elderly people find the Cathedral easier to reach than their parish churches, particularly early in the morning. The Cathedral has two congregations, slightly overlapping, one for weekdays and one for weekends. There are also traditional ties because of St. Stephen's School, which was closed only in the 1960s; the various Cathedral Choirs and the Spring Hill community, which was much more numerous in former times. St Stephen's is and is seen to be, the central church of the Archdiocese and the obvious place for important ecclesiastical celebrations. At the same time, there remains a need to keep the outer suburban parishes aware of the life of the Cathedral; many people have little contact with the centre of the city. All this reads like an advertising brochure, but it attempts to say what St. Stephen's is doing in the city. It has helped us define the role and the needs of the Cathedral. It is saying what history and geography have done to us.

We begin with the first Church of St. Stephen, often now referred to as the Pugin Chapel, which will not be refurbished completely at this stage. It is an expense all to itself and much thought and research has to go into such a task. The front porch has been restored and is back in use, the windows with their frames and fittings will be renewed and some of the timber ceiling has been replaced. Much detective work remains to be done. When we look for the secrets of the Pugin Chapel, we get some idea of how much work must be done to discover the original features of churches, which are many centuries old. Even

after one hundred and forty years there are still some unsolved problems with the first Church of St. Stephen. Was the sanctuary area always quite as high as it is today? Sometimes we suspect it was not, but if it were lower, it would present us with problems with the celebrant's seat on the side wall and contradict the evidence of dust levels under the floor. There are niches in the walls that were probably Holy Water fonts, but we still have to discover what type of font they contained. Was the cavity in the wall of the sanctuary a repository for Holy Oils? What was the origin and purpose of the louvred window on the other side of the sanctuary? What kind of statue occupied the wall space near the door of the sacristy? When were the doors cut in the sides of the church? The search for the original St. Stephens is only one of the restraints on its reconditioning, the greatest problem is the conservation of the sandstone from which the church is constructed.

Sandstone mined in the 1840s in the Goodna district would have been taken from the top of the deposit. The men who study stone tell us that the lower down the stone the more it has been compacted and toughened by the passage of time. The stone from which the original St. Stephen's was constructed has just-visible seams of coal in it, and this carbon content attracts small quantities of water, which brings with it chemicals from the atmosphere and from the smoke of the city. Quietly within the stone, chemical activity produces minute crystals which expand the space and can cause cracking in the stone and the relentless entry of water, very slowly, but surely. Care of the stone cannot envisage locking this water inside it, though it is always hoped that further water can be prevented from entering. It seems that the internal walls of the Pugin Chapel were treated from

the beginning. How many incongruities were covered up is one of the questions that remains for the restorers. The detective work goes on.

My introduction seems long, but now we can look at the Cathedral itself. We could journey from the Pugin Chapel beneath the walkway that links the old church with the side door of the nave. There is evidence on the external nave wall that in 1874 architect Benjamin Backhouse expected the two churches to be linked.

It is better for now, I think, if we imagine ourselves standing on the footpath in front of St. Stephen's just before the workers moved on site. We would have been confronted with a stone wall, worn in parts and patched here and there with cement render. Entrance to the cathedral yard was through two gates, one rarely used and up semicircular flights of steps. We can say that the wall and the iron railings on the top of it, was a natural development when Elizabeth Street was cut down to make the journeys of traffic easier, but I think we should look at this wall as it stands in our memories. Did it make the Cathedral remote to some people? Did it give the Cathedral a kind of body language that we agreed with?

Happily we can say that World War II brought an end to much of the fear and suspicion that we came to identify as religious bigotry. We can, I hope, laugh now at some of the absurd stories that were told in those days and how we were misunderstood, but all this left its effect on us. We might have been happy to attend to our religious duties behind the safety of a wall, even if all gates and doors were open. We went cautiously into religious discussion, defending the faith against those who challenged it and our replies to questions were too often terse

and blunt as if we expected any minute that someone would object to what we said. Certainly many of the truths of our faith were matters of difficult theology and we may have felt inadequate to explain them fully, but did we sometimes offend by our manner of conversation? We were shy of the newspapers fearing that we might be wrongly represented. Perhaps it was understandable that we felt in some kind of a ghetto, but did we feel inadequate in speaking about, explaining and discussing the faith with the community at large and was the body language of the wall and the fence something that gave us security?

Often when liturgical matters are discussed, we use the word "function". Whether our interest be in the precision of ceremonies, the music, the singing, the preaching or the standard of readers, we are not to adopt a "this and nothing else" approach to any aspect of our worship. Everything has its function. The organ, or any other musical instrument, has a liturgical function, so too has the architecture of the church and all its furnishings. The Cathedral has its own message for us as we enter it, helping, even compelling us, to be part of the message.

From the footpath to the main door and looking up and into the Cathedral the view to the choir loft is no longer impeded. One becomes part of the excitement of the Gothic building that lifts the viewer, eyes and heart, upwards to God away from petty things. The steps encourage the viewer to look further up and see the spires that certainly direct attention heavenwards. This is all deliberate. No matter what commentators say about the "sunburnt soul" of contemporary Australia, the Cathedral makes its own declaration about the human need to worship God.

When architecture performs its proper function, the stones, the colour and design often speak more eloquently than words.

I must confess that I was somewhat incredulous when the first brief spoke about the floor that should be laid in a refurbished cathedral. Was it playing with words to suggest that because of the floor every person in the Cathedral should have a sense of being one with the whole congregation, that even a person alone in St. Stephen's should have the impression of belonging to the Universal Church? We have all sat at lectures and followed the journeys of bricks and stones and colours around the walls. The lines on St. Stephen's floor do not confront us, but if we look we can see quickly that there are two sets of lines imposed on each other. The granite tiles are square and parallel to the walls of nave and transept, which gives a sense of security, a confirmation of the neatness of the walls that were put in place so long ago. Another set of lines crosses all these right angles at forty-five degrees. Now the far corners of the transept are joined back to the nave and as they come back to the centre of the building they are neatly parallel to the base pattern of the pillars. The building is being pulled together by the geometry of the floor. It seemed a very difficult task to plan the floor of the raised area around the altar and the Sanctuary, but the pattern of the floor dictates every one of its lines. Even the altar, the lectern and the Archbishop's chair conform with this design, so, too, do the candlesticks and sacred vessels. Carpet that is often laid in big reception areas creates by its different pattern, an illusion of space where one might stand alone and not seem isolated from the other guests. The Cathedral floor is different. Subtly it keeps us moving. It assures us that the Reconciliation Chapel is a part, a living part, of the whole. Then from both the long aisles we are

brought to the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, the Tabernacle and the constant reminder of our baptism.

How large it looms in the overall plan I do not know, but there is an interesting agreement of colour inside and outside the Cathedral. Inside, the walls, floor and the leadlight windows gather the pinkish-purple of the external stone and paving. The symbols, express with colours the hope that we will be one with the world at large; that what is said in the heart may be spoken from the housetops.

I have to leave you to make your own examination and investigation of the works of various artists in the Cathedral. The stained glass windows; the Stations of the Cross; the harmony of altar, lectern and Archbishop's chair; the screens in the Reconciliation Chapel; the Tabernacle; the intricate glass of the apse window and the baptismal sculpture; the cupboard for the Holy Oils, vestments and sacred vessels; the seating; and, lest we forget, the granite sculptures on the Holy Name Cathedral foundation stones are an incomplete list of the works of art which I have not put in order of importance. Others will appraise them, but I am sure that these adornments of the Cathedral are vital elements in the modern Church's conversation with the world.

We still register the shock of the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima in 1945. For many people it was a declaration that life is for living here and now, that history has nothing to teach us and that we are altogether insecure about the future. When the first Sputnik went hurtling into space in the late 1950s it seemed to tell the world that salvation was in the hands of science and that meant natural science

alone. In Church circles this produced a reaction against all publicly-venerated authority. Young people seemed to walk away from religious faith, but the more thoughtful among them were to know something of a desert experience. This age of ever-accelerating "future shock" left many people bewildered. St Stephen's Cathedral is only one place, but I think it can be an important place where people may seek again for what they lost.

The Cathedral stained glass is mainly the work of Louis Gille of France (1880s); Franz Xavier Zettler (1880s and the large transept windows of the 1920s): Hardi-nans of Birmingham; and, of course, the family of Harry Clark, of Dublin. There are also some interesting works from Brisbane. Many of the glass craftsmen do not sign their works and we still have to wait for a complete and accurate identification of all the windows. Stained glass like this does not arrive in one decade, it is part of a living heritage, a witness to that robust curiosity about the saga of christianity that the artists of the world have continually kept before us. I hope visitors to St. Stephen's will marvel at the grace that drives the artist always to tell the story better. I hope that those who seek to regain a lost faith will see in the story of Salvation a mighty epic greater than any of the pagan legends. I hope also that, despite all the complaints about the intense heat of the Queensland sunshine, we can now celebrate that sunshine as never before in the windows of the Cathedral.

It is interesting, too, that we have been able to work with so many men and women, who do not share fully the Catholic Faith. We must give them credit that they learned our vocabulary and were determined to listen to all we told them.

There is more than that, however, in the meeting of art and theology and once again we can celebrate that meeting of two disciplines. It is all built on the conviction that there is more to this world than we see in a casual glance. The theologians will tell us and people of ordinary faith will know already, that "because of Christ Our Lord" there is more in a word of forgiveness than an empty reassurance that a quarrel is over. Christ will remember forever a cup of water given in his name. There is more than appears when Christians gather in the name of Christ. Our faith sees more than the eye can see in the pouring of baptismal water, the Eucharistic Bread and Wine, the Holy Oils and even the simplest prayers. Yet, we are not the only ones who look beyond appearances and it is most important that we realize this. The artist sees more in a landscape than the know-alls will ever see. The soaring beauty of a Gothic building speaks volumes to those who are prepared to understand it. Artists see more in words, colours, glass and marble and have their own way of understanding us when we describe the sacraments as outward signs of invisible grace. In the beauty deep down in things, we discover a vast arena in which to announce the "Good News" of God.

Lawrence Daws has produced fourteen paintings of the suffering, death and resurrection of Our Divine Lord. We are indebted to his skill, patience and curiosity. At the same time, we are indebted to the scripture scholars, historians and archaeologists who continue to refine the story of the passion in the holy city of Jerusalem. There will be others who will emulate the work of Lawrence Daws.

The same is true of Peter Schipperheyn's work. It was, of course, the bishops at the Vatican Council who gave us the revised liturgy of the Church. They called us to an "ever-increasing vigour in our Christian life", but they were quick to acknowledge the work of all the scholars who had gone before them. The new Sanctuary is a tribute to the great liturgical scholarship from the beginning of the century that brought to life the earliest traditions, and the earliest understandings of the Christian mysteries. As we admire the beautiful baptismal font, we recall that a new investigation of the sacrament of Baptism has been one of the most important movements in the modern Church. It has been the theological basis of the Ecumenical Movement. Pope St. Leo the Great is given credit for a tribute to the sublime nature of the sacrament of Baptism. There is an inscription in the fifth-century baptistry in the Church of John Lateran, the "Mother Church of the World": "The Church, Virgin Mother, brings forth from the water the children she has conceived by the Holy Spirit". We were delighted to realize how enthusiastically Peter Schipperheyn had discovered a similar theme as he planned his sculpture for the Cathedral's baptistry.

It is not wise nor worthwhile for any of us to "advertise" the Cathedral. It is the people who must choose to make it their place of worship. We hope that they will respond to the Reconciliation Chapel. We hope that it will impress them as a quiet place, not shut off mysteriously from the rest of the Cathedral worship, but an integral part of it. We hope that it can have the appearance of familiarity, of something well-worn like life itself and at the same time, be a place where we can take heart to live the resolutions that we make.

We hope, too, that the Blessed Sacrament Chapel will be a place where we will want to pray, a place that is alive and yet away from noise and distraction. Just as the front door offers welcome to the city, so the glass window behind the Tabernacle leaves us in the midst of life. The Cathedral that once ended abruptly at the straight back wall has now a future dimension. The long hours of discussion have tried to achieve a religious function in every detail.

Permit me to return to the shrines in the back wall. It will be some months yet before John Elliott will complete the statue of the Blessed Virgin. We could have purchased an old statue to be the focal point of this shrine, or we could have found carvers and sculptors in many different parts of the world. I think we will be happy to have given this task to a local artist. How many churches in the world are remembered for their shrines to honour the Mother of God! In commissioning our own statue, we want to make our own statement to embody our own tribute to the Blessed Virgin. It is appropriate that, no matter how many praises are sung of Mary, the Brisbane Church should sing her praises too.

The shrine on the other side will not be completed in time for the Rite of Dedication. I hope, however, that the plan for one part of this shrine will come to fruition - that there will be an etching representing the people of the Cathedral who have come to St. Stephen's for more than a hundred years. We need not become sentimental, but, rather, realistically record the fact that many thousands of men, women and children have brought their joys, sorrows, hopes, fears and good resolutions to the Cathedral. Countless people have done all manner of tasks about the Cathedral, and they have considered it a joy to be part of the church in

the city. In the long months and years of planning, we have had many difficult decisions to make and it is the prayers of all these people, living and dead, that have been a great resource. I hope we can honour them.

Every Saturday I see an elderly Russian lady in a home on Gregory Terrace. She came from China after World War II, and worked for many years in one of the stores in Queen Street. She has kept a great pride in her dress. On the weekend of Warana procession she was wearing one of her best dresses with a pearl necklace to set it off. I asked her whether she was dressed up for Warana. She answered my question quickly and peacefully. "For an old lady", she said, "It's always Warana". She reminded me of G.K. Chesterton pulling his metaphors out of the air, and speaking of the Church as ever old and ever new.

I want to leave the last word to Father Lucien Deiss who has found so much beauty in the Faith and written it into his hymns:

The Church, the ageless Bride of Christ, has never ceased growing in the beauty of her youth. This is why her prayer, which expresses her dialogue with the Lord, has never stopped conceiving new forms to show her lover each new day.

A young girl who refuses to change her style of dress or hairdo will very quickly and quite literally become an "old lady". In refusing to grow up she will quickly grow old. Likewise a Church that refuses to wear her new spring robes will quickly become old before her time, and her face

will be ugly and wrinkled, a face which should be the world's constant reflection of the beauty of Christ himself. For her then (as with the Russian lady,) it must always be springtime, a time of renewal, and her face must always have the face of a young girl "holy and without blemish".

All participants in a great project can only do their best. In the long run, it is the people themselves who must feel at home in their church. We live in hope.