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**Building other Towers:
Archbishop Robert Dunne in Colonial Queensland**

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Neil Byrne was born on 9 August 1950 in the small Queensland country town of Julia Creek. There he was educated by the Sisters of St. Joseph and later attended Nudgee College before entering Pius XII Seminary, Banyo in 1968. He was ordained a Priest by Archbishop Rush for the Brisbane Archdiocese in 1974. In addition to his studies at Banyo, he has been awarded the degrees of Bachelor of Divinity, Masters Qualifying and Doctor of Philosophy by the University of Queensland. Since 1979 he has taught Church History at Banyo and in the Brisbane College of Theology. He is currently the Academic Dean at Banyo, the editor of Banyo Studies and the President of the Brisbane Catholic Historical Society.

Since his days as Student Choir Director at Banyo, Neil Byrne has maintained a keen interest in church music. In 1978 he studied choral composition and conducting at the Royal School of Church Music, Croydon, England. He has been a regular lecturer on music in Catholic worship at Pius XII Seminary and in Brisbane's Liturgy Institute. His Banyo Mass was published in 1987.

From 1975 to 1977, Father Neil Byrne served as the assistant priest at Wavell Heights and for over a decade has continued to provide a regular week-end ministry in that parish.

Neil Byrne's first major literary work Robert Dunne, Archbishop of Brisbane was published by the University of Queensland Press in 1991.

"What better thing can we do than gather our books around us?" These words were written almost six hundred years ago by the Renaissance humanist Vergerio to his pupil Ubertinus. In books, he said, are recorded the great human achievements; the wonders of Nature; the works of Providence in the past, the key to her secrets of the future. Few Queenslanders of the last century understood this teaching more clearly or espoused it more passionately than did Robert Dunne, a schoolmaster, country pastor and Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane.

Dunne was born into a book-loving family on 9 September 1830 in Ardfinnan, County Tipperary. He was baptised a week later in his parents' drapery and shoe store in Lismore, County Waterford. 'We were all literary people', Dunne said although he was referring to his mother Ellen's side of the family. She was one of the Waterford Powers and belonged to the rising catholic middle class. Robert, her second son, had been named after his merchant grandfather Power, one of the moguls of the Waterford Quays. Ellen taught her children of the Power family's origins reaching back to the time of the Norman Conquest; of their proud mercantile achievements; of their unshakeable loyalties both to the catholic faith and to the English crown. She taught him always to be wary of democrats, republicans, socialists and barn burners whom she lumped together as the enemies of free trade and private property. Ellen and David Dunne were traditional Irish parents. They had two sons and two daughters. Their first born, David was promised to the priesthood. Their second son, Robert, was expected to carry on the family business. Their daughters, Ellen and Maria, were given convent school education and both chose to enter religious orders. David was sent to the monks to prepare for his career; Robert stayed in the shop. He was dressed in shoes and tailored suits; taught how to deal with customers of high and low estate, how to keep ledgers and balance books.

However, Robert possessed a mind of his own. Increasingly he had been coming under the influence of the monks at the Cistercian Abbey in the mountains beyond Lismore. When he turned fourteen, he received his first communion and the sacrament of confirmation from the Abbot and returned to inform his mother that he intended to study for the priesthood.

It was in the Irish College, Rome, in 1845, that Dunne first met James Quinn. The two would become colleagues and friends for the next 36 years. Quinn offered Dunne a position on the staff of his seminary, St Laurence's, in Dublin and nine years later, lured him out to the new Australian diocese of Brisbane.

Sailing out on the Great Victoria in 1863, Dunne preached eleven Sunday sermons, all of them based on the same theme. His congregation were the people of Israel crossing the Red Sea and soon to reach the promised land. That promised land was Queensland, or as some were beginning to suggest, 'Quinn'sland'. Dunne's readings were not taken from the Book of Exodus but from Father Patrick Dunne's Emigrant's Guide to Queensland and Other Australian Colonies. The promised land which awaited them was seven hectares on one of Queensland's rich agricultural reserves. It could be theirs even if they arrived in Australia without a sixpence.

Before coming to Australia, Dunne had been working as an agent from Quinn's Immigration Society and had personally supervised the Chatsworth sailing in 1862. For seventeen years as a priest and thirty-five years as a bishop in Queensland, Dunne would maintain his interest in the welfare of migrants and be one of the colony's staunchest advocates of land settlement. Premier T.J. Ryan and Governor Sir William MacGregor would both publicly acknowledge his great contribution to Queensland's rural development.

This passion for the land was somewhat strange in an Irish city boy who had seldom got his shoes muddy at home and who had arrived in Queensland lacking one of the most fundamental prerequisites of the Australian missionary priest - the ability to ride a horse. Bishop Quinn, an old Kildare horseman himself, soon fixed that. He entrusted Dunne to the care of the Ulsterman, Father Michael Renehan, who took Dunne on bumpy canter out to Eagle Farm and German Station and then on expeditions to the farms along the Logan and Stanley Rivers. Like Richard III, Dunne was not always secure in his saddle. On 22 June 1868, he had spent the day wielding a hammer on the new catholic orphanage project at Nudgee. It grew late and he galloped home in fading light to attend the first session of the priests' annual retreat. Approaching Breakfast Creek his mount was surprised by a stray cow and Robert was catapulted headlong into the

darkness. Nursing a bruised head and a broken collar bone, Dunne explained to his superior that he feared he no longer had the strength and will for the fight. Bishop Quinn's response was to put him back on his horse and send him to another corner of his vast kingdom. He appointed him the priest in charge of the Darling Downs.

Dunne had always admired in the Cistercian saint, Stephen Harding, what he lacked in himself - the capacity to preserve one's spiritual life despite the difficulties of communal living and the distractions of day-to-day church administration. He saw in the Queensland bush an opportunity for solitude and spiritual renewal. He looked forward to spending more time with the spiritual and literary classics and less time with the diocesan account books which had become the bane of his existence. Ignoring Dunne's repeated cautions, Bishop Quinn had been buying land and erecting buildings with reckless abandon. Before the diocese was ten years old, he would have opened thirty new churches and twenty-eight schools. The bills were coming in thick and fast and were passed on to his secretary, Robert Dunne. It was his role to assure the bishop's creditors that the cheque was in the mail. Grandfather Power would have been proud of Dunne's efforts to balance books, especially during the disastrous bank crash of 1866 when the whole diocese tottered on the edge of bankruptcy.

In Toowoomba, church business would be conducted differently. There would be no building projects, no staggering parish debts and no nervous breakdowns. Dunne was happy in Toowoomba. After ten years he reflected: 'I ... live what to many would be a lonely and isolated life, but it is not the least so to me... I have never experienced loneliness. At home I read or write, outside I ride, call in at one place or another to see a sick person, to give some one the (temperance) pledge, to inquire when 'we were at our (Easter) duty' to ask if Katie or Tommy are kept to school and in the midst of all to give the Black Prince, Dick Turpin or Cosette a dashing half hour's canter'.

Riding through the stations and agricultural districts from Goombungee to Glengallen developed in Dunne what he described as an 'absurd sensitivity' to the landscape and the people, especially the barefoot bush children who stood tall and looked him straight in the eye,

who talked about the Australian birds and animals as if they were aunts and uncles. These were the children of the selections described affectionately by 'Steele Rudd' as 'quaint phenomenons of raggedness'; freckled-faces under oversized hats, the keepers of jew-lizards and koalas. It was Dunne's aim to civilise and catechise them. By 1871 he had rounded up two hundred children. But attendance was sporadic. In 1873 Sisters of Mercy arrived and the 'bush kids' knew they were 'licked'. Only young Tom Kelly held out and became the hero of all future Queensland school resisters when he took an axe and chopped down the Irishtown school - or so the legend goes.

Dunne was a frequent visitor to the classroom and always brought with him a short story or a poem. His favourite poet was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and undoubtedly one of the poems shared with the children would have been 'The Castle-Builder'.

*A gentle boy, with soft and silken locks.
A dreamy boy, with brown and tender eyes,
A castle-builder, with his wooden blocks,
And towers that touch imaginary skies.
A fearless rider on his father's knee,
An eager listener unto stories told
At the Round Table of the nursery,
Of heroes and adventures manifold.
There will be other towers for thee to build;
There will be other steeds for thee to ride;
There will be other legends, and all filled
With greater. marvels and more glorified.
Build on, and make thy castles high and fair,
Rising and reaching upward to the skies;
Listen to voices in the upper air,
Nor lose thy simple faith in mysteries.*

As Dunne came to know the people on the Downs, he began to discover what others thought did not exist - a genuine outback spirituality. Bishop Quinn had spoken of the spiritual destitution of the bush people. Henry Lawson would recognise an alternative creed of mateship.

No Church-bell rings them from the Track

No pulpit lights their blindness

'Tis hardship, drought and homelessness

That teach those Bushmen kindness. ('The Shearers')

Yet this was not Dunne's experience. When Michael McGlynn became ill and died working on the St George telegraph line, his mates gathered instinctively at St Patrick's in Toowoomba for a memorial mass. The church was filled to capacity, the church grounds with horses and drays; the porch cluttered with axes, wedges and other carpentry tools. Dunne had prepared a sermon but when he looked at that assembly, united in fervent prayer for their comrade, he realised his words would be an unnecessary intrusion. Each face was an eloquent homily on the Resurrection and he was the one being consoled.

The Christian faith of the selectors and pastoral workers was living proof of those words in Augustine's Confessions:

"The unknown and unknowing are rising up and taking heaven to themselves, and we with our knowledge are still grovelling in flesh and blood".

Dunne accurately predicted that from these country families one day would come Queensland's priests, brothers and nuns. They would possess a faith purified by their bush experience, a catholicity stripped of its European incidentals. When his sister in Ireland wrote excitedly of the Marian apparition at Knock in 1879, he replied that a natural Australian scepticism now made him wary of such things. He said: 'Here we fall back on the substantials of religion - the sacraments, mass, rosary... and benediction, but especially the first two'.

Just as Mt Melleray Abbey was providing a purified model of Christian commitment for the people of Ireland, Dunne believed a monastery on the Darling Downs would become the symbol of a distinctively Australian spirituality, a tower rising above colonial materialism and a constant reminder of other-worldly values. One day he believed he would hear his school boys, Joe Herbert, Cecil Boland and Charlie MacGroarty chanting the psalms of King David to the tones of Saint Bernard. Those same chants were beckoning Dunne too, but it was a mitre and not a cowl that fate would have him wear. He was appointed James Quinn's successor in 1882.

Dunne was troubled by the news. This responsibility, he said gloomily, would weigh heavily on him till the last hour of his life. He could not help thinking of Bishop Quinn's monumental debts and the still unfinished cathedral. Bishops in new dioceses began building their cathedrals too early, he maintained. The people were generous but they lacked the means to support such ambitious projects. All the denominations were in the same boat. Dunne regarded Brisbane's Anglican bishop, William Webber, as a brilliant man and potentially a great church leader yet he saw him sacrifice his life to a single project - building St John's Cathedral. Dunne's episcopal colleagues and a number of his priests would find his opposition to building unusual but it was not a unique view in the Queensland churches. William George Taylor, a Yorkshire Methodist, whose ministry on the Darling Downs had coincided with that of Dunne, complained: 'We are... putting more energy into the erection of elaborate ecclesiastical scaffolding than we are into the infinitely more important work of building the spiritual temple'. In 1884 he moved to the inner suburbs of Sydney to begin a more people- oriented ministry - the Central Methodist Mission.

Dunne shared a similar vision. The first question in christian ministry always must be: 'What is becoming of the people?' Their spiritual and material welfare had to be the sole determinant of all ecclesiastical initiatives. When Dunne had been a student in Rome in the late 1840s, his brother had introduced him to the works of the controversial catholic philosopher Antonio Rosmini. Rosmini had identified the principal evils to be addressed by the nineteenth century church: the poor education of the laity, the inadequate training of priests, the remoteness of bishops from their people and the scandalous wealth of the church reflected in its land and buildings. Dunne was sensitive to these criticisms. He was determined to redirect the limited financial resources of his people away from church building and into securing for themselves homes and a settled family life. He wanted to provide the best possible education for their children and to see them develop an attitude of tolerance and openness towards their protestant fellow colonists. He wanted to know them by name and to ensure that their social advancement did not conflict with their catholic faith. If this could be achieved first, then his people could outdo the Americans in church building if they desired.

Dunne was overwhelmed by the poverty of the urban catholics when he returned to Brisbane in 1882. His conservative Victorian outlook prevented him from looking to social structures for the cause of human misery. He would see only the symptoms and by far the greatest symptom of the day was alcohol abuse. In 1883 over 2000 Brisbane catholics had been arrested for being drunk and disorderly. This number almost equalled the total number of protestants of all denominations on the same charge. Dunne acted quickly. At his first confirmation ceremony in St Stephen's he administered a temperance pledge to 611 candidates swearing them off the grog until the age of 25. Dissenting parents had the right to exempt their child but only one request was received. Heady with success, Dunne tried to make the temperance pledge a national cause for catholics at the 1885 Plenary Council but was defeated - to the enormous relief of at least two of his subjects, Patrick Perkins and G.W. Gray, the colony's leading brewers.

Despite his hard line on drinking, Dunne established himself quickly as a people's bishop - accessible, compassionate and supportive. He never forgot a name and in Brisbane alone he had fourteen thousand to remember. Morning and evening they came to his house, Dara, opposite All Hallows Convent. 'I am utterly worn out', he once said after a marathon session in which he had christened the baby of a teenage single mother; arranged temporary asylum for a victim of domestic violence and counselled another young woman on how best to break the news to her parents that she had been married in a protestant church. It was not in Dunne's nature to thunder condemnations. The people, branded by some as 'lost causes' were his Hebrew children - wandering in the desert, perhaps, but never abandoned. His role was to lead them out of the land of bondage and back to the rightful home of their ancestors. Dunne's special concern was saved for the single mothers and their babies at Holy Cross Home, Woolloowin, and for the prisoners of death row in the Boggo Road gaol. To the end of his life, Archbishop Dunne chose to perform his pastoral work in the simple black suit of a priest and was happiest when people referred to him as 'Father'.

Dunne's episcopal colleagues found his simplicity and self- depreciation a bit excessive. He found them wordy and self- important. Once he witnessed a young New South Wales country

bishop deliver thirteen speeches in a single session of a Plenary Council. After that he never cared much for bishops' meetings or for Sydney where they were held. In 1884 he had ruffled more than a few feathers by declining an invitation to Archbishop Moran's installation and sending him a note saying he hoped he would have the sense to do nothing for six months except preach and say Mass. Moran, about to become a prince of the church, thought he might have been entitled to a little more deference. In 1895, the Cardinal, accompanied by Archbishop Carr of Melbourne and five other southern bishops, prevailed on Dunne's hospitality on their way to laying the foundation stone of the Rockhampton Cathedral. Dunne observed with some cynicism that had it been three centuries earlier, he would have been saddled with their knights and equerries as well.

Most of all, Dunne did not like the ardent Irish nationalism of the Australian bishops. James Quinn had been a nationalist and had stirred up great anti-catholic sentiment in Brisbane when he changed his name to O'Quinn during the O'Connell Centenary celebrations in 1875. In Toowoomba, Dunne had warned his parishioners that there were to be no Irish shenanigans and boasted afterwards that not so much as a glass of beer had been drunk in O'Connell's honour. If this were true, Toowoomba must have been the only dry Irish community in the world during that celebration. Dunne was annoyed with the bishops for encouraging the seemingly endless procession of eloquent fund-raising Irish politicians who came to the colonies - the Redmonds, John Dillon, Sir Thomas Esmonde and Michael Davitt. They were little more than eloquent robbers in Dunne's book although he was careful not to say that too loudly in Irish company. He was amazed in 1885 when Brisbane's most successful catholic doctor, Kevin Izod O'Doherty, abandoned his practice and a seat on the Legislative Council to pursue an uncertain political career in Ireland. Dunne warned that his family ultimately would be the victims of the lunacy and he was proved right. The family fortune evaporated. In 1906 a dejected Joseph Devlin reported that the Brisbane well had dried up. The Home Rule cause no longer attracted the big individual contributions it once had even though the rank and file Irishman was as loyal as ever. Dunne would have allowed himself a quiet chuckle to see the money staying at home.

Most of Dunne's priests were Home Rulers and this might account for a certain tension which existed between bishop and priests. When Dunne became a bishop, there were 21 priests to help him serve a rapidly expanding catholic population of fifty thousand. These priests were rough hewn sons of Irish country folk, generous and well- intentioned, but lacking Dunne's sophistication. The pioneering era was quickly passing and the laity were becoming less tolerant of pastoral ineptitude. In 1884 'Katie' complained to her pastor about the new curate at St Patrick's, Fortitude Valley: 'I say, Paddy,', she said, 'I wish you would tell Dorrigan that he ought not to give us a sermon every Sunday. It is awful to have to listen to him'. Outback catholics were beginning to voice similar concerns. A country school teacher wrote to Dunne informing him that, after the last visit of the priest, she had begun praying a thirty day novena to Our Lady in order that her district be spared any further ministrations on his part. Dunne blamed the seminaries. They were not equipping priests with the spirituality, scholarly taste and gentlemanly manners expected of a minister of religion in the colonies. Seminaries gave students a taste for cards, tobacco and whiskey but rarely for literature or theology. He had feared the worst when one young priest reported for duty with nothing more than a handful of seminary text books, a map of Queensland and four volumes of Bamum's Humbug of the World. Dunne conceded that theological expertise was not necessarily the most important quality in a priest. 'Learning without the earnest love of God in one's heart is more noxious than any ignorance', he said. Yet the effective minister must integrate both elements - a deep spirituality with varied and elegant scholarship.

'Learn a bit of Church music'. Dunne told his priests. He was aware that the Greeks refused the title of 'educated' to anyone who could not sing or play music. Apologising to Mother Vincent Whitty for being unable to sing a High Mass, he said: 'How many have voices and ears and set no value on them; what would I not... give for one tenth part of their gift'. Like Socrates, Dunne understood the importance of good music for the inner harmony of soul. His taste had been formed on his mother's piano repertoire, the Cistercian chants and the choirs of the Roman basilicas. As a young priest he had secreted himself off stage at Dublin's Theatre Royal during opera and concert rehearsals. In those days Canon law forbade priests to attend public entertainments. As a bishop, he looked forward to the musical items at the All Hallows and St

Joseph's Gregory Terrace speech nights. Many of the pieces played he had suggested himself. Dunne had an ear for talent. In 1891 he was in Dublin and on one occasion heard a Mercy novice sing the 'Adoro Te'. He found it an almost painfully exquisite experience. 'What will it be when she stops', he thought, 'life won't be worth living one moment longer'. Good Church music should not to be the sole province of city congregations. Dunne actively promoted juvenile and adult choirs in the country. He sent choral pieces and his copies of the Musical Times to musicians in the most remote districts, even to the Wambillalla Railway Camp where Michael Byrne conducted his choir under canvas.

Dunne was a lover of art, especially the book illustrations of Gustave Dore. In London in 1881, he had spent a whole day viewing an exhibition of his work and returned with friends the following day for more. When he learnt that copies of Dore's works were to be exhibited in Brisbane in 1887, he urged Mother Mary Patrick Potter to take her All Hallows girls along - 'they are worth walking a hundred miles to see'. Dore subjects may have been too realistic for some - especially his striking studies of London's slums and the conditions of the industrial poor.

In Queensland Dunne had warned the government to address the neglect of the industrial classes before they rose up in revolt as they had done in other countries. In 1891 the shearers went out on strike and began to arm themselves. After the crisis had passed, Dunne visited the western gaols. He had expected the unionists to be communists and infidels bent on the destruction of the social order. Instead, they were 'good fellows', he said. The catholics among them came to him for confession and communion; some even took the temperance pledge. Perhaps then Dunne had the grace to be embarrassed about his panicky enquiries concerning the transference of archdiocesan funds into Irish banks until the revolution had run its course. Neither Rerum Novarum nor Cardinal Moran's sanctioning of the workers' cause could change Dunne's conservative politics. He would not have been amused to see the most catholic quarters of Brisbane - South Brisbane, Woolloongabba and Fortitude Valley - elect Labour candidates, among them a leading catholic merchant, Frank McDonnell.

Dunne did not like to involve himself in politics yet one of his greatest achievements was in the political arena - an amendment to the Education Act in 1900 to allow grammar school scholarships to be taken out at the catholic colleges. Dunne was a great supporter of higher education. In 1885 he had established a scholarship fund and raised seven hundred pounds so that more catholic boys might complete their secondary studies with the Christian Brothers. In 1894 he discovered that only 16.25% of Queensland's catholic boys were receiving a catholic education. The Sisters of Mercy had established an extensive and effective system of convent schools and were catering for 60%, that is over six thousand of Queensland's catholic girls and infants. However, these schools were designed primarily for the education of girls who, unless they were to become teachers, were not proceeding beyond the primary grades. Brother Joseph Barrett informed Dunne that, without access to the grammar school scholarships, the situation for boys was unlikely to improve.

Dunne summoned catholic politicians from both sides of the house and called for action. It was a strange alliance, especially considering the heightened feelings of the time, but it proved to be an effective one. After 1900 the catholic schools began to receive a form of indirect state aid through the reception of state scholarship winners. Students and even education itself may have suffered under this relentless payment-by-results system, but the scholarships became the life blood of the catholic secondary school system and in turn opened the way to professional training for catholic boys. Dunne had always believed that the lack of a university in Queensland was the principal reason for problems at the secondary school level. Even after completing high school, very few matriculants from either the grammar or church schools had the means to attend the University of Sydney. Therefore parents saw no purpose in keeping their children in schools beyond the elementary grades. Dunne's advocacy of a local university to solve this dilemma brought him into contact with like minds in the parliament - Charles Lilley, John Douglas, John Macrossan and Samuel Griffith. All of them would have to wait a long time for their university, but when it did come in 1910 the support of the catholic community was acknowledged. Frank McDonnell and solicitor Andrew Thynne were appointed to the first university senate with the latter being promoted to vice-chancellor in 1915.

Thynne was Dunne's model of the successful catholic colonist. His politics also happened to be the same as Dunne's. Thynne had arrived from County Clare as a seventeen year old in the 1860s. Dunne had signed him up for his Catholic Young Men's Society at St Stephen's and coached him to sit for the civil service examination. From there he progressed to a career as a solicitor and cabinet minister. Dunne's Andrew Thynne story became a feature of every Gregory Terrace and Nudgee College speech night address and must have occasioned more than the occasional yawn. Still the influence of successful catholics like Thynne, Virgil Power, Thomas Flood Plunkett, T.J. Byrne, T.C. Beirne, D.C. M'Groarty and Frank McDonnell was beginning to be felt in society. In his own lifetime, Dunne would see his people make their way from the lowest to the very highest runs of society. He had brought them to what he termed the 'flood-tide' of their catholic aspiration.

As his health began to fail, Dunne retired increasingly to the books which had been his lifelong companions: Byron, Scott, Manzoni, Schiller, Newman but also Patterson and Lawson. His books were leading him home. In his Lenten Pastoral of 1913 Dunne wrote: 'Look down, old man... and see in admiration what a treasure house you have been dwelling in, and what helps you have passed through, and much as you are amazed at the magnificence and greatness of God, you will cry out with the prophet that 'His mercies are far above all His works'. Dunne had become an aged and weary prophet but he had reached Mt Tabor. He died at Dara in 1917 confident that his young successor James Duhig and new generations of Queensland catholics would take up where he had left off. They would build on, making their castles high and fair. He hoped, too, that they might listen, as he had, to the voices in the upper air and maintain their simple faith in mysteries.

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