

ADDRESS TO THOMAS MORE SOCIETY
AUCKLAND, 10 SEPTEMBER, 2008

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a great pleasure to be here with you this evening.

I am advised me that I follow in the line of some distinguished speakers addressing the Society including the Governor-General of New Zealand, Anand Satyanand. In fact my link with the Governor General goes back to the womb, so to speak, as his father Dr Mutyala Satyanand (Saty as he was known) was our family doctor and delivered me as a baby. I was born in Auckland, one of seven children, and lived in Epsom until age 14 when my father transferred to Sydney as Managing Director of Warner Brothers Movies. Four of my sisters and a large extended family still live in New Zealand.

I admire Thomas More as a prophetic individual who has a universality about him, taking a political stand within his society on an issue of conscience. I was introduced to his character in the play “A Man for All Seasons” written by Robert Bolt, later adapted to the screen as an award winning film starring Paul Scofield.

One scene that I found particularly poignant was when his daughter Margaret visits him in the Tower where he awaits execution:

“Margaret: In any state that was half good, you would be raised up high, not here, for what you’ve already done.

More: All right.

Margaret: It’s not your fault the State’s three quarters bad.

More: No.

Margaret: Then if you elect to suffer for it, you elect yourself a hero.

More: That’s very neat. But look now ... if we lived in a State where virtue was profitable, common sense would make us good, and greed would make us saintly. And we’d live like animals or angels in the happy land that needs no heroes. But since in fact we see that avarice, anger, envy, pride, sloth, lust and stupidity commonly profit far beyond humility, chastity, fortitude, justice and thought ... why then perhaps we must stand fast a little – even at the risk of being heroes.

Margaret (emotional): But in reason! Haven’t you done as much as God can reasonably want?

More: Well ... finally ... it isn't a matter of reason; finally it's a matter of love."

(Bolt R, A Man for All Seasons, Act 2)

More's insight was that his actions were ultimately motivated by love. Love is at the core of the Christian message. Jesus said: "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets also. (Matthew 22.37).

More's "matter of love" has consumed me over many years. When I left secondary school I entered the priesthood as a Franciscan. Francis of Assisi was a young man in his twenties who gave away his inherited wealth to literally follow Jesus, preaching a simple gospel and working among lepers. He attracted many followers to his popular movement of reform in the 12th Century. He remains one of my guiding lights and the town of Assisi in Umbria is a sacred site where I gain inspiration, not to mention enjoyment of its walks, wine and ambience.

In my scriptural studies I was influenced by the tradition of the prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and Micah who called the people of Israel back to the spirit of the Covenant. They were individuals with a social conscience who became involved in the political system in Israel as advocates of justice, the common good and the rights of the poor. Jesus identified his own ministry with the prophet Isaiah. In 16th century England, More played a prophetic role in confronting the King on a matter of conscience. In our own lifetime Martin Luther King Jr and Nelson Mandela have been prophetic figures. My life, spirituality and work have been inspired by these individuals in the prophetic tradition.

As a young man I found the life of a Franciscan to be very harsh with vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and a community life of prayer and study. The loneliness of celibacy and religious life had a negative impact on my health and well being and I refer to those 10 years as my "years in the desert." Nevertheless the experience changed my life and gave me a faith and resilience that has sustained me ever since.

My friendship with a Jesuit priest Fr Marion Ganey who was an international expert in establishing and running credit unions gave me a desire to establish organisations that empower people and give them the skills to participate in society. My work as a Franciscan student with Mother Teresa's nuns offered me my first experience of working with disadvantaged people and engendered in me a social conscience.

After 10 years I left the priesthood and began the task of reconstructing my life and career. I found a life of celibacy very difficult and I consider that Catholic priests should have the option of marriage or celibacy. In leaving the ministry, I also thought that I could make a greater contribution to society, as I believe that Christians should be involved in all sectors of society: government, business and community.

I would like to reflect on four key social issues facing our societies in Australia and New Zealand as well as the changing landscape for human services. It is based on my experiences as CEO of Mission Australia and also as an architect of welfare reform in Australia.

1. Welfare Reform

In Australia in the mid 1990s there were over 800,000 children living in families where the parent had no job. All the evidence shows that the life outcomes of these children were poor in terms of education, jobs and participation in society. There was also a passive income support system that placed few obligations on people who had capacity to work to look for a job.

In 1999 the Prime Minister John Howard invited me to chair the Reference Group on Welfare Reform. It was a very tough task. The government had foreshadowed welfare reform in its election campaign and there was strong reaction from the opposition and community groups that it would be harsh and punitive. The dilemma I faced was to accept or not accept the role. After seeking advice, I decided to accept the role as I considered I could bring a moderate approach to reform, based on what most Australians would consider fair and reasonable. The challenge was to find the middle path, the third way, between extremes of right and left (Aristotle's Golden Mean).

It was one of the toughest experiences of my life and involved hard, robust discussions with ministers and bureaucrats who wanted a hardline approach. At times I doubted whether we could find a way through of developing sound, balanced policy. It was a real “dark night of the soul” experience for me and the breakthrough came when we identified 5 pillars of reform which formed the basis of our report and recommendations.

After nine long months, the Reference Group developed a blueprint for reform known as the McClure Report which was launched in 2000. It received enormous publicity, generally very positive, and the consensus was that it found a balance between on the one hand obligations on individuals to find work; and on the other, financial incentives and opportunities for them to access jobs. It was a major paradigm shift: from a passive welfare system to a system which provided obligations and incentives on individuals who had the capacity to be involved in training or job search. The difficulty then was in its implementation by bureaucrats and some of the subsequent welfare to work initiatives were not balanced in contrast to what I had recommended. However the relatively low levels of unemployment and the high participation rates in the workforce in Australia today are evidence that the policies have been generally effective.

2. Privatisation of Human Services

A major policy change across OECD nations including Australia and New Zealand has been the privatisation of human services that were formerly run by government, churches or non profit organisations. Examples are employment and training services, aged care, health and hospitals.

In 1998 the Howard Government in Australia privatised employment services. \$3 billion of employment and training services which were previously run by government were open to competitive tender. At the time it was highly controversial and generated a great deal of publicity. The new Job Network was opposed by unions and some community groups.

Together with my executive team and board in Mission Australia we had to decide whether to enter the Job Network or not. We considered that if we did not enter the Job Network as a Christian agency it would be left to commercial organisations who would not

have the same values and skills that we had. Our mission was to empower disadvantaged people and there was no better way of doing that than training them and placing them into jobs. We also did our financial modelling which showed that after an initial upfront investment, over the course of the contract we would make a very good return on our investment which we could use to build cash reserves and invest in new programs for other disadvantaged groups.

We tendered for the Job Network against national and international commercial competitors. We were successful. Our first contract was for \$150 million over 3 years. Importantly it meant that we would place 20,000 unemployed people into jobs each year. We employed staff and opened new offices in various states across Australia. It was extraordinarily hard work but very satisfying. Over the next eight years we grew in confidence and skill. By 2006 we had 3000 staff in 300 locations in all states of Australia. Most importantly in 2006 we provided training and work experience to 200,000 unemployed and disadvantaged job seekers and placed 60,000 people into full-time jobs. Our annual revenue had also risen to \$250 million and we were able to build \$15 million in reserves and for investment in community programs.

There were also other benefits: we went from being a state to national organisation. We developed a new name Mission Australia. We built a strong executive team and the board introduced ASX corporate governance principles. We developed national IT and finance systems, HR and training programs for staff. On balance, we were efficient, relevant and still maintained a strong advocacy role.

3. Homelessness

There are 100,000 homeless people in Australia. The average age of a homeless man is 32 years and a woman 28 years. The causes of homelessness are complex: drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse during childhood, unemployment and family breakdown, and often a cocktail of all of these.

One of the best examples of an innovative housing program was the Mission Australia Centre in inner Sydney opened in 2005. In order to meet the needs of a generation of young homeless men, we developed a new model of specialised care, rather than the

traditional food and accommodation shelter. Within the centre are separate accommodation facilities, each with private bedrooms and complete with kitchen, bathrooms and lounge. The clients, assisted by staff, shop for their food, cook and provide for themselves. In addition each individual has a support worker who assists him with training and work experience. On site is a GP, chiropractor and dental clinic; as well as gambling counselling, legal advice, budgeting and Catalyst, a university education program in humanities designed for homeless people. The centre is an open, attractive design that is integrated into the local community of Surry Hills.

The \$7 million funding was a good example of government, business and community working together: \$2 million from government, \$3 million from corporates and high net worth individuals from a campaign led by Peter Hunt of Caliburn, and \$2 million from Mission Australia reserves. I am pleased to see Auckland City Mission has unveiled plans to accommodate homeless people in a 170 unit apartment development next to St Matthew in the City Church in Auckland.

4. Corporate responsibility

Over the past decade the concept of Corporate Responsibility (CR) reporting has entered the mainstream of OECD nations. CR is the commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development, implement sound governance and management practises and work with the community and society to improve quality of life. CR has its critics who claim that it is a campaign to improve corporate image and public relations and that it can be costly and diminish shareholder value. Certainly it has less attraction during times of economic downturn and recession.

In 2005 KPMG completed a survey of the top 250 global companies. They found that CR reporting has increased substantially over the past 5 years. The business case is that businesses perform best when they play a strong role in the communities in which they operate. The drivers for corporate responsibility for companies are:

- To have a good brand and reputation
- To be an employer of choice
- To maintain a strong market position

- To have the trust of the financial markets and increase shareholder value
- To be innovative in developing new products and services

The KPMG report states that corporate responsibility is easier said than done. The real challenge is to ensure it is not a marginal activity and is integrated into strategy, management and operations of organisations that are competing in global markets.

The nature of philanthropy is also changing. I was a member of the Prime Ministers Community Business Partnership Board. One of the initiatives we developed in 2001 was in partnership with the ATO to introduce legislation to enable the establishment of Prescribed Private Funds (PPFs). These are trusts to which businesses, families and individuals can make tax deductible donations for the purpose of making grants to tax-exempt charities. This has led to a new phase of growth in private philanthropy. 610 PPFs have been established with funds approaching \$1 billion.

I would like to finish with a quotation from a speech by Robert Kennedy. His sentiments reflect the spirit of Thomas More, the “matter of love” and the prophetic role each of us is called to:

“Few of us will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation. It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time an individual stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centres of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

Few are willing to brave the disapproval of their fellows, the censure of their colleagues and the wrath of their society. Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence. Yet it is the one essential, vital quality for those who seek to change a world that yields most painfully to change ...”

Kennedy finished his speech with a favourite quotation of mine:

“Some people see things as they are and ask why.
I dream things that never were and say why not.”