

PAPER IX

REMINISCENCES OF BRISBANE YCW

IN THE 1950S AND 1960S

I was requested to speak of my experience of the YCW in the 1960s and 60s, but just to be different I thought I'd start at the beginning because in fact my experience of the YCW goes back to 1944. I was living with my mother, sister and brother in a small flat on the border of Spring Hill and the Valley opposite Villa Maria Convent. One night there was a knock at the door and a young priest was there. He said he'd particularly like to speak to my brother who's five years older than I, about the YCW. That was my first experience or knowledge or even hearing of such an organisation. The priest was Andrew Tynan and interestingly enough I think he was working out of this very building at the time that he came to extend that invitation to my brother. It was the beginning of the St Stephen's branch of the YCW, 1944. My brother accepted and remained with the YCW until his marriage many years later. Anyway that's an interesting bit of history - 1944 - St Stephen's YCW - Andrew Tynan working out of here, and I think we all know he became the Bishop Rockhampton later on.

Rather interesting to think there is another ex-Bishop of Rockhampton here tonight. listening to this address. In fact my presence here is the result of action or intervention by four people. The first of them was a fellow by the name of Joseph Cardijn; if it wasn't for his actions I wouldn't be here. And I thought it might be appropriate just to dwell on Cardijn for a little while, because without Cardijn and the appreciation of his motivation, his passion, I believe it is impossible really to grasp the vision of Church that he held and the commitment that he had. The man called Cardijn was also called the man of destiny. I think it is important that we realise that there were two specific factors that drove him, and I'm going to quote and I'm not quite sure that this is an actual quotation specifically of his, but it refers to the fact, and I recall the story very well, because it was one of the things that inspired me and drove a lot of us to a deep appreciation of what the word environment meant. He was returning from his holidays to a smoke-draped Brussels suburb and he found his former school mates changed from fresh young Christians by a few months in their

factory world to coarse and bewildered animals stripped of humanity and their eternal destiny forgotten. That obviously had a very profound effect on him because that is one of the most compelling stories I recall of Cardijn - the passion and the drive when he spoke about that origin. And the other one was when he returned home to the deathbed of his father, and sat beside his bed and held his hand; they were gnarled worker's hands, and it just made him more conscious "of the unjust conditions of the workers" and he vowed, "I'll kill myself to save the working class". And we know that he lived up to that commitment because he virtually gave his life to that goal.

I think also that passion and reaction in Cardijn are probably identifiable with some other particular historic event that happened very much in his lifetime. Cardijn was born in 1883. In 1891 Leo XIII produced the great encyclical, "Rerum Novarum", which we in our very early Latin which might only have lasted for six or seven months at school, translates "Of New Things". It was a classical interpretation of revolution and Leo XIII was suggesting the mode which was of revolution. It was the moment of the impact of the industrial revolution. It was the moment of what Leo XIII referred to as the Christian solution to the marxist revolution at that stage and also the revolution of capitalism. And an interesting thing I'm quoting from the encyclical, and bear in mind this was 1891.

So it comes about that working men are now left isolated and helpless, the traits of the inhumanity of the employers and the unbridled greed of competitors. Voracity usually makes matters worse, an evil condemned frequently by the Church but nevertheless still practised in deceptive ways by avaricious men, and in addition to all this the hiring of labour and the management of industry and trade have become concentrated into the hands of a few so that a tiny group of extravagantly rich men have been able to lay upon a great multitude of unpropertied workers a yoke, little better than slavery itself.

They are very powerful words. They are a comment about that moment and at that stage Cardijn would have been about seven years of age. So by the turn of the century he was probably a teenager experiencing this transformation of his ex-school friends as he came back from seminary life himself.

The other interesting side to that moment in history of Cardijn's was, it wasn't till 1925 that the YCW officially started, which made him forty-two. So this passion that was there took a while to come to fruition, in terms of concrete results, but he had been since 1911 or 1912 attempting to start something and he actually was able to found his first group with girls not young men. And we know the story that he set about starting the movement - a mass movement, a movement of transformation. A mass movement based on three basic truths - the truth of life - the truth of reality - the truth of faith. The truth of our faith, what it is meant to be in terms of life, and the truth of method that faith demands solutions to problems in situations that deny hu-

man dignity.

The revolution that he had come to start was a revolution to be based on education, service and representation. And the way that it was to happen called: see, judge and act. That sounds a terribly simple thing, to see, to judge and to act, but I believe Cardijn was the recipient of five or seven honorary doctorates from universities around the world because of that concept of mass education for a mass movement - to see, to judge and to act. And it was in that formation that I suppose if we use today's jargon we could be identifying the concept of contextual theological development. Because what Cardijn brought into action was the idea that on a daily basis people were discovering the reality of life, the theology relevant to it, and the action that should flow from them. So on a daily basis people would be informed on the quantics of theology. Understanding it was the concept of human dignity and the doctrines we recall in our own experience. Sonship of God, the real relevance of what that system was about, the idea of the mystical body, the concept of eternal destiny - all of that embraced inside the vision of the dignity and destiny of the young worker.

Cardijn was once asked when he was talking about the apostolate of light to light, and the idea of creating fishers of men, "What will you use, a net or a line?" and response was, "Neither, I would change the water". But I think in saying that he was making an unbelievably prophetic statement - the idea that it wasn't a matter of just converting people, but that people are the product of the environment that they are born into, live in and pass through, and that it's in the transformation of the environment of the person that the person is able to experience his/her own dignity and destiny or denial of it.

And his other great saying that epitomised the movement was, "We have not come to start a revolution, we are the revolution!" because what he was about was revolutionary, the moment we looked at any aspect of life and identified it in the context of faith, was a revolutionary experience. And the moment we acted upon it, that experience became an intrinsic reality, so that when he said we've not come to start a revolution, we are a revolution - the revolution is happening.

I felt it was most inappropriate to start talking about my experience in the YCW and to have not made some reference first to that great man.

Now back to myself when I actually joined the YCW in 1948. Even though it was within 1944 that I first experienced something of it, maybe I didn't join the YCW in 1948 - maybe I was pushed. I think the pushing came from my brother who was very dedicated to the movement and by this stage was the North regional President, and the more he pushed, probably the more I reacted because in 1948 the idea of

YCW wasn't nearly as attractive as the smell of liniment, the sound of a punch ball, a skipping rope and a gymnasium. And these were my great love. But anyway with his YCW training I found myself compelled to respond to the invitation when mum said, "You get down there!"

Anyway I got down there to the general meeting to start with, but I wasn't always a very dedicated member. The moment the life went out of meeting I was likely to walk out, get a few of my pals and go elsewhere.

Now in making reference to Cardijn and my brother and mother, I had in mind four people who were responsible for my presence here now, the fourth person was a crafty person - the chaplain Father Brian McMullen, because after attending these meetings without really contributing, for some reason or other I was asked to be a leader. I don't know how it was worked, I don't know if it was appealing to my ego, sense of power or what, but for whatever reason I became a member of the YCW leaders' group and I think that basically pricked my conscience because at that stage you were either encouraging lads to leave the general meeting or encouraging them to stay, and in 1949 for better or for worse I became President of that branch. Also in early 1950 I found myself going to work in a couple of assembly lines helping to assemble cars. That came about because of Ron Kelly, a member of the Kedron YCW who was moved by the idea of being present in that particular work environment. It was interesting enough in those days as society was starting to be concerned about the nature of work. Terms such as 'the dehumanising effect of work' were being addressed, and psychologists were identifying the impact of work that was not benefiting human dignity. Now I had a couple of stints on assembly lines, one with Ron and one on my own in another car shop. The interesting thing then the concern about the nature of work. Today, fifty years later, the attitude is you're lucky if you have a job.

Towards the end of 1950 I started as full-time Diocesan Secretary. During that time I experienced the presidency of four people, very briefly Dave Gregg, then Pat Downey, now a Blessed Sacrament Father, then Gerry Gallagher, followed by Des Hegerty who is here now. After Des finished up as president and got married, Brian Hayes became the president. Brian and I went to St James's together, and it was one of my great claims to fame that I suggested Brian might be a fit person to fit in well on the executive when a vacancy occurred. I think the movement benefited greatly from that particular suggestion and the wisdom of the executive to support it.

The movement that I started working full time for had about 25 branches, but what was then the National Catholic Girls Movement (NCGM) had about 35, so it was very significant in terms of being part of the Church. It was very much of the

culture of the Church back in 1950, and I thought I might dwell on some of the things that it was about, because it is in what we did we started to witness Cardijn's vision. To start with we had weekly leaders' meetings, so on a weekly basis young workers all over Brisbane were putting into practice the great educational method, the formation method - to see, to judge and to act. It was those skills a formal social inquiry on occasions would happen simultaneously throughout Australia. In addition to that it was done through a personal inquiry on a weekly basis which we, in those days, called Items of Interest.

We would report on our own workplace things that were happening, problems that were arising there - then we would look at them, judge them and act upon them. That was the great genius of Cardijn formation through exercising our will as well as our income. In addition to that at the weekly meeting we would have our Gospel inquiry, wherein we were opened up to a deeper understanding of Jesus Christ and his message and life. And we were encouraged to indicate, to identify his actions in our own lives, in our own environment. So the education process is an ongoing weekly basis. In addition to that, most of the groups had a general branch, they had an educational programme going there. At the leaders' meeting the general meeting and its activities would be discussed, then add to that an annual leaders' meeting - leaders' school - where anything up to 100 young workers would live together for a week, and they would leave in the early hours of the morning to go to their places of work - factories, workshops, offices, some of them travelling long distances by train or two trams, getting back after a hard day's work to get stuck into it to about 10 o'clock at night, then up again the next morning. Some would be leaving at 5.30am - at the morning Mass some had to leave before, so the leaders' school was very much part of the preparation.

Then the presidents' school was introduced so that twenty to thirty regional presidents and executive members would be living in for a week, following the same procedure. There were regular training days and all these activities were supported and sustained through great priests. Banyo seminary itself was the source of such priests; names like Bernie Wallace, Morgan Howe, even in the earlier days Gillie Young. So the relationship between the movement and the seminary was strong and relevant. Every leaders' group had a chaplain; chaplains met to discuss their role as chaplains; the seminary taught them to be chaplains as the fundamentals of Catholic Action were studied in the seminary, so here there was all this commitment, intellectual activity, enthusiasm, mission, happening. Then the movement as part of its education had its publication, *New Youth*, its monthly paper. It was part of a national movement that produced literature and programmes. It was all about producing the theology, the spirituality of the laity based on vocation and mission. It was a movement in the truest sense of the word, and I think it is very appropriate to say that it was very much

of the Church's culture. It was of the parish culture, it was of the religious culture because it was implicated into seminary life also.

From education we move to the second prong of the strategy of the tripod, as a way of putting what Cardijn had in mind, to educate, to serve, and to represent. How did we further the YCW in Brisbane and beyond? Well part of our service was to try to meet real needs of people so we had an accommodation service, we had an employment service, we had hospital visitation. We attempted to address such needs as change of experience in life, for example National Service, so we used to have schools for people before they were involved, because National Service was regarded as one of the crises in life. YCW was built around identifying the crises in life and addressing them.

In addition to that we had the service of accommodating the leisure and social needs of people. We had a marvellous annual debutante ball where up to 800 young workers of both sexes would descend upon Cloudland. I forget the number of debutantes, but quite a few of us would line up a few times to fill the odd gap. There was a sporting aspect of our social life, including football, a competition that on occasion saw the odd dedicated chaplain almost coming to fisticuffs on the side of the field, particularly when the likes of Valley ran in an almost international rugby league team, but then with the influence of Father Mick Egan anything could happen. We also had one of the largest basketball competitions, we had cricket, we had a swimming carnival for some years; and all that activity which generated part of the social life of the movement - but in addition to that we also had locked in a finance dimension, because interestingly enough during my time of seven years full time service the YCW was self funding. Prior to that I know there had been an extension committee that no doubt helped setting up the YCW financially. But in my time it didn't. When I came on full time nineteen other people and myself funded me to the tune of 50 cents or five shillings each a week. And I know some people in this room who made up that twenty. But in addition to that we had a marvellous finance committee develop, and that reflected the beginning I think in what some regard as a close collaboration between YCW and NCGM because the finance committee was a joint committee. A lot of the events were joint events and a lot of them were fund raising events. But that idea of collaboration wasn't only encouraged at the level of finance, but it was encouraged at other levels as well. I can recall one of the great chaplains of the movement who sadly died this year - Barney O'Shea - going to great lengths to ensure that on a fishing trip on one occasion Des Hegerty and Pat Hotham were left alone in their own little boat. I can also recall on another occasion that as part of the collaboration we would call for nominations for people beyond the central finance committee. And out of courtesy I would show the people who nominated from the boys' side to Maureen Bowl (now Maureen Buckley) and she would show me who had nominated from the

girls' side. I can remember running my eye down the list and seeing one name I thought could be a most appropriate member to the finance committee. I mentioned to Maureen that this lass who had also become a propagandist for Rosalie, was a very active, diligent and capable member of the Rosalie committee, but their finance committee had another name. Anyway the long and short of it was she made it to the Central Diocesan finance committee and I married her four years later.

After service came representation, and I think this was the area of the movement that we really hadn't developed particularly well. It was mainly at a diocesan level the representation happened by a YCW on behalf of another person, maybe in a work environment, but a lot of representative action I think were times that might have happened but didn't. But some did. And a couple of the structural types of things that happened we had some tie in with the establishment of the Queensland Literature Board. The legislation that was enacted to set that up was very much influenced by the activity of the YCW. Probably our greatest claim to fame was the action of the YCW in the Commonwealth State apprentice inquiry, under the chairmanship of Justice Wright from Adelaide. Our representation was the result of YCW members visiting the Technical College at the bottom of George Street during the week with our questionnaire to get answers from the young workers who were doing their apprenticeships, bearing in mind that often these fellows were rushing from the outer suburbs into town, stopping at a cafe for a cold pie, then going in and studying till 9 o'clock at night. More or less the leading line I feel in hindsight, was once again in the construction of the questionnaire and the final preparation of our case. Anyway Justice Wright came to us and congratulated us and said the presentation had been the finest made in Australia. I think we were the last port of call, starting in Adelaide and working up to Queensland. Maybe they had gone to W.A., I'm not sure, but that was the comment. Later on the findings of the inquiry resulted in much improved conditions for young workers and naturally because we had our national paper, we produced headlines something like, "YCW Wins for the Workers", making a great point of how successful we'd been.

This leads me to another little interesting bit of history. One morning I was sitting in YCW headquarters (then situated at 117 Queen Street) when out of the lift came a stocky young fellow who walked in, gave me his name and said he'd come to congratulate the YCW on what it had done. I thanked him. He sat down and said he thought it would be most appropriate if the YCW and his organisation were to join in a coalition of actions. Regrettably I had to say no - his name was Hugh Hamilton, he was secretary of the Eureka Youth League, and at that time in history it just wasn't possible. But one of the things I'm proud to be able to say that from that day on, Hugh Hamilton has been one of my best friends. Over the years I've found myself in the odd demonstration with him, even as late as a few Wednesdays back, when about

4,000 people marched here in Brisbane in relation to not only a death in custody but many deaths in custody. Dear old Hughy was there, and he's been there many times over the years and I believe he was justly treated last year when he received the Order of Australia. But that was an aside.

So much for representation ; maybe a little more now about some of the ideological development. Sometimes, being a human movement, the development didn't come without pain, without disagreement, sometimes with confrontation. One person walked into our lives in Brisbane in 1951 or 52, by the name of John Dawmer. He was a rather remarkable person, an English aristocrat; a past student of Downside College and a product of Sandhurst Military College. After World War II he was doing social work in London and met a fellow by the name of Pat Keegan who obviously had a significant impact on his life. John came to Australia and took up a position in his family business, Toohey's Brewery.

John was a thinker and he got us in the YCW thinking. When he asked me, "What is the problem?" I knew he was talking about the movement and how we were meant to respond to the problem of the young worker in Australia. He took me and a few of the executive on an indepth journey and I think he contributed in a very significant way to heightening the debate in terms of our understanding of mass movement. Cardijn's idea of a movement of young workers for young workers, was an idea of mass movement. The more deeply we plunged into the question the more we realised I believe with better understanding what Cardijn was talking about when he said, "I will change the water". Even though our porting activities provided social activity and some form of service and an area of contact, the more deeply we penetrated the problem, the more we felt maybe our priorities were **not** to be running a football competition, but more to joining existing football clubs. So that was part of Dawmer's impact. I think it heightened our awareness and helped us get a better sense of direction. But it wasn't an awareness or sense of direction that Dawmer accepted or agreed with - we can't claim we were right; all I know is we felt fairly strongly and fairly convinced about the direction it took.

It did have some interesting effects. I remember in 1955 I was to go to New Zealand to tour the North and south Islands. In those days there was no YCW there, but I had struck a very strong friendship with John Curnow who was chaplain of the youth movement they had in Christchurch. He was instrumental in an invitation coming from the New Zealand bishops. That trip was a very rewarding one and sometime later the youth movement over there did become the YCW. I met a priest who became the Cardinal of New Zealand. Some seventeen years later he rang me up and I picked him up the following morning and took him to Greenbank to a little church for a First Communion. There was the Cardinal of New Zealand and all these little children.

The parents saw it as a great moment for their children and themselves. That was the beginning of a very good friendship.

Dawmer also achieved some remarkable things in terms of establishing a very strong contact with the Newman Society of the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne, and was instrumental I believe in identifying a very strong relationship with people like Father Roger Kriek, chaplain of Sydney University and Father Gerry Golden, rector of Newman College, and a lot of the people who emerged at that time, e.g. Vincent Buckley and Max Charlesworth and others. That was the beginning in some regard of what we liked to identify with the interdependence of the worker intellectual apostolate.

I think it is probably time to move to where we were then. It was a very different world in the late forties, early fifties with the population about half of what it is today. Vatican II hadn't happened, ecumenism hadn't descended upon the Church; in fact we were very parochial. There wasn't a lot of indication in fact that the other Churches were highly regarded by us. I can still recall asking the questions, "But what about non-Catholics?" and concerned about no salvation outside the Church. It was something of the mentality that existed pre-Vatican II. I think it is important that we remember it was a very different world. Yet, the YCW and the mind of the YCW - your Cardijn - your YCW bishops - your YCW priests - your YCW leaders - were all part of the energy that led to Vatican II. Actually I believe up to the Council, the YCW was part of the parish culture, part of the national Church culture and part of the international Church culture that was relevant in the terms of the great historical moment that was Vatican II.

I do have some question marks about post-Vatican II - great documents came out of it - some great new direction came from it - but in some regards I feel that a lot of the energy that the Church expended in terms of the new vision, pastoral and liturgical, consumed a lot of the resources of the Church. I'm not critical of them but I feel that maybe the other vision - the other documents of the Church - probably suffered a little in terms of energy and concentration. I suppose in a sense it's understandable - that the things that could more easily be achieved, tend to dominate. I'm inclined to think that the great vision that Cardijn held - mass movement - of changing the water - found itself competing with that other dimension of Church. In a sense I suppose there was always a conflict, a priority in energy, between the prophetic and the pastoral. It isn't always easy for one to complement the other. I'm inclined to think the YCW's relationship in the Church was much clearer and simpler in the pre-Vatican II period. I think also with regard to Vatican II, the dynamic change in the world itself was so more profound - bearing in mind that these last fifty years have seen more change than in the whole history of humankind prior to this, and it has

been accelerating and expanding. It doesn't matter what area we look at - communication, travel, information - they are all an exploding dimension and the Church has had to cope with that. Yet the YCW of its very nature was still there, living with and dealing with that world.

There was a sad moment in Australian YCW and that was when the mandate was withdrawn. I know there were many contributing factors, but I think one of them would have been because the YCW was doing what it knew how to do -addressing the moments in history in terms of protests, in terms of marches, in terms of the Vietnam war, in terms of protesting against the priority of highways and freeways over human accommodation - things like these, and we probably came from the earlier model of Church and mightn't have identified so easily. Nevertheless, they did it, and maybe as a sign of hope, I like to think that at that march I referred to when I met Hughy Hamilton a few weeks ago among a group of fairly significant number of Christians, including Bishop Gerry and the Moderator of the Uniting Church, the prophets of the 70s made this possible in the 90s. As a father I was very happy to have a son who is a member of the YCW here in Brisbane when the mandate was restored, and I also know one other very pleased person when that happened, Archbishop Rush.

Just a few quick comments, which I think might be seen as a sign of hope. Last week I was at a church group meeting on work and unemployment and we met the Federal Member, Wayne Swan who is chairman of the committee to address unemployment that had produced the white paper, that will lead up to the green paper that will be released next week. I'm not sure what the next colour will be, but anyway - that's the rainbow running at the moment. The interesting thing was that on that committee were three generations of YCW - myself, Sean in the second row, present from Collingwood YCW, and the in between generation was Wilma Bowman. Wilma was a member of the national executive when the National Catholic Girls' Movement decided to become the YCW. So YCW people bob up. A few weeks back there was Bill Armstrong who was full time in Melbourne, a little after my time. Bill is now Executive Director with the Overseas Service Bureau. His role has taken him into many of the corners of the world, particularly the third world. More recently he has become the president of ACFOA, which is the Australian Council for overseas aid. It's a very relevant body in terms of dealing with the government, particularly the Department of Foreign Affairs, and it is quite common for Bill to be in another country dealing with and meeting heads of state, foreign affairs' ministers and so forth. Bill, in a modest way, explained that during the last of the native Title issue, he'd been in Canberra for two days, contacting members of cabinet and meeting with them individually, explaining how incorrect legislation would impact and how we would be judged as a nation in the eyes of the world, particularly the developing world.

At this end we ourselves, through our commissions, through ecumenical groups and some other community groups, launched the national campaign to reinforce the Prime Minister in his commitment to native title justice, because we had been led to believe that the members of the cabinet were very much under the influence of their state Premiers and the state parties.

Last Friday week I had the opportunity to address an international conference. It was the Pacific Oceanic Trade Unions' Conference, and I felt very proud to be able to say that I had worked for an International Young Workers' Movement - YCW - as part of the introduction to the subject of my paper. Anyway at the end of my address three Polynesian women came up to speak to me. One was ex-YCW, two were out of Justice and Peace groups - the Church is alive and well.

These are typical examples of the effectiveness of YCW and are signs of hope. The presence of a group of today's YCW here tonight as part of their living training week is another. Nevertheless the challenge still exists I believe, for the Church to respond to Cardijn's vision of Church

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