

Proceedings on the Occasion of Award  
*Doctor Honoris Causa Australian Catholic University*

Professor Peter W. Sheehan, Vice-Chancellor of the Australian Catholic University, addressed the Chancellor, Brother Julian McDonald cfc, as follows: be it known that Thomas Patrick Boland being distinguished by eminent service to Catholic education, has this day been admitted by the Senate to the degree of Doctor of the Univeristy Honoris Causa. To which the academic seal of the Senate of the University was affixed on the tenth of May, 2006.



CITATION

*The Reverend Thomas Boland is an eminent Australian church historian. As a priest, a teacher and an historian, Fr Boland's life and ministry have been devoted to the Australian Catholic Church and its people, helping them always to understand their past, place the present in historical perspective, and draw wisdom and courage for the future.*

*Thomas Patrick Boland was born in Brisbane in 1929. He was educated by the Sisters of St Joseph at the Mary Immaculate Convent in Annerley, before attending the Christian Brothers' St Laurence's College in South Brisbane and St Joseph's College in Nudgee. He studied for the priesthood at the Pius XII Seminary at Banyo, now the McAuley campus of Australian Catholic University. On 29 June 1953, at the age of 24, he was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Brisbane.*

*Archbishop James Duhig sent the young Fr Boland to the Gregorian University in Rome in 1956 to continue his studies and in 1960 he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Ecclesiastical History. His doctoral thesis dealt with the Queensland Immigration Society. Fr Boland returned from Rome to teach church history on the Brisbane seminary staff from 1960, whilst also teaching part-time at the University of Queensland. He was Rector of the Banyo seminary in 1978.*

*In the more than 40 years since Fr Boland returned from Rome he has been a teacher, educational administrator and author, a man of distinguished scholarship and remarkable energy. He has also been patron and mentor to the generations of church historians who have followed him. In 1974 Fr Boland published 'Quiet Women', a history of the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and their founder, Fr Julian Tenison Woods. In 1979 he delivered in Brisbane the first of the revived series of Aquinas Lectures, on James Quinn, the first Bishop of Brisbane.*

*It was in 1986, however, with his seminal biography of the legendary Archbishop Duhig, that Fr Boland became a truly acknowledged leader of Australian church history. That work received wide critical praise and was awarded three prestigious literary prizes: the John Hetherington Prize for Biography, the Victorian Fellowship of Australian Writers Award, and the Foundation for Australian Literary studies award. It is considered today to be the prototype for the quality writing of Australian church biography. The legendary Church historian, Patrick O'Farrell, described the Duhig work as 'admirably researched, written with candour, insight and charity, and informed by a blend of honesty and sympathy that compel respect and admiration' for Fr Boland.*

*Fr Boland has published a number of other books, including two works in 1997, a biography of Melbourne's second Archbishop Thomas Joseph Carr, and a history of St Patrick's Cathedral, for its centenary celebrations in that year. He has also written multiple*

*articles and essays in Australia and abroad, and has a number of very significant entries in the Australian Dictionary of Biography.*

*Delivering his second Aquinas Lecture in 1986 on Archbishop Duhig, Fr Boland said, 'the sun that radiated from his experience illuminated his people as well. His story is that of the Irish-Australian Church of Brisbane. He was one of them, he led them, he communicated to them the vision of the city, the nation and the Church, that shaped the days to come, our days.' Today, the same could be said with equal application to Fr Boland. His scholarship, his writing and his teaching have illuminated not only the Australian Church but Australian society as well. Throughout his life Fr Thomas Boland has communicated to us a vision of nation and of Church that has indeed come to shape our days. His has been a precious ministry, helping Australians to know and to understand the tradition of their Church, in which, together with sacred scripture, we find the fullness of God's revelation.*

Reverend Doctor Thomas Patrick Boland responded with the following address.

## ***JOHN PAUL II AND HISTORY***

Shortly before his death John Paul II published his last book, *Memory and Identity, Personal Reflections*<sup>1</sup>. These reflections were based on answers to questions posed by two Polish philosophers in 1993. They concerned firstly Polish history and culture, but the views expressed were universally applicable. John Paul spoke in his characteristic way of a mystery – *mysterium iniquitatis* – the coexistence of good and evil in the human story<sup>2</sup> and he saw these in the account of the Church's impact on humankind.

To the question:

The history of all nations is called to take its place in the history of salvation. How would you describe this very important aspect in more detail?

The pope replied:

The history of every individual, and therefore of every people, possesses a markedly eschatological dimension. Vatican II in *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* saw this eschatological dimension. It is an important way of reading human history in the light of the Gospel.<sup>3</sup>

He quoted one of his own convoluted poems:

Over the struggle of conscience, history places a layer of events,  
Brimming with victories and defeats.  
History does not conceal them; it proclaims them.<sup>4</sup>

From this he sees the point of Church history:

This allows us, on the one hand, to acknowledge the full extent of the mistakes and failures ...; but it encourages us, on the other hand, to note the beginning of renewal.<sup>5</sup>

In this view John Paul greeted the new millennium with his apologies for the Church's mistakes in the past and urged us on to a more evangelical future.

What is the eschatological dimension he saw in Christian history? How does he see the layers of events history places over the struggle of conscience (consciousness)?

Another Church leader, Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, delivered the Sarum Lecture in May 2003 on the study of the past.<sup>6</sup> He looked to the first Christians as the first to face the question of the Gospel in the world. He says they saw themselves as 'resident aliens' in the Roman Empire. They were Roman people, citizens or subjects; but they could not accept the fundamental demand of Roman civil religion, worship of the emperor. In this, willy-nilly, they were seen as aliens. The empire, so tolerant, even accepting, of contemporary beliefs and practices, could not allow them to be aliens in their own society. When it came to the crunch, Christians accepted death rather than conform to Roman civil religion. The Gospel imposed a standard not accepted in Roman society. Christian history was the account of the Christian response, Gospel or empire?

Williams considers one of the major writings of the second century Apologists, the so-called Letter to Diognetus. The Apologists tried to explain to the emperor and the empire that they were Romans like their neighbours. They accepted Roman law and customs, but they went beyond them. They lived in the same streets, they did the same work, they ate the same food and they wore the same clothes. However, they lived by other laws as well, not against the Roman, but beyond it. They shared their board with others but not their beds; they nurtured their children but did not expose them to death. They were the ecclesia, those gathered by the Gospel. They were inescapably engaged with Roman civic standards, but they marched to a different drum. They would always have to measure themselves up to two laws and choose which they followed. History was the account of the struggle.<sup>7</sup>

When the empire became Christian, it might be expected that the residents were no longer alien; but the question still remained of who determined the laws and customs, and how they conformed to the Gospel. Even the Reformation did not change the situation. Christians on either side of the divide had to face the same question about conformity with the Gospel. Whether or not the right answers were given, the question remained and the mistakes or successes had to be recorded. The Age of Enlightenment saw the balance moving back in the direction of the residents in the Roman Empire. Christians were more and more alien. The Roman Catholic Church in particular receded into a defensive position in the face of the philosophy of the age. An updating Council was needed in the eighteenth or the early nineteenth century. It did not occur, and the industrial era overtook the Church in an alien ghetto.

Pope John XXIII chose to break out and update the Church's relationship in the contemporary world. He had an interest in history, both as a scholar and as a writer. He understood that the Church lives in history, renewing itself as it senses the rhythms of time.<sup>8</sup> John and his Council were able to recognize the autonomy of the secular in its sphere and face again the question of relationship. Principally it was debated in Schema 13, which became the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, known as *Gaudium et Spes*. The famous opening of the document was an optimistic dive into the experience of contemporary men and women and contemporary institutions.

The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men [sic] of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men [sic] who, united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, press onwards towards the Kingdom of the Father, and are bearers of a message of salvation intended for all men [sic]. This is why Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history.<sup>9</sup>

It continued:

Therefore, the world that the Council has in mind is the whole human family seen in the context of everything which envelops it; it is the world as the theatre of human history.<sup>10</sup>

This document seems to present an optimistic view of human history and the Church's place in it. However, the roseate glow had shadows on it. Schema 13 went through a long and complicated development at the Council.

Commissions and sub-commissions and mixed commissions discussed its drafts, and debates in the Council hall went on from year to year. One continuing criticism was that it was too optimistic about the 'world' and the Church's ability to synchronise with the rhythms of its time. One prominent critic was the young Archbishop of Cracow in Poland, Karol Wojtyla. He pointed out that the draft read as though evil did not exist in the world. This was not the experience of the Church in the Iron Curtain countries; nor was it true of Western nations where materialism and consumerism prevailed.<sup>11</sup> In the 1963-1964 inter-session he prepared a new draft for the Schema. It was not accepted as an alternative to the French paper presented to the Council; but his intervention in the debate on 21 October 1964 was so impressive that he was appointed to a reviewing commission that met at Ariccia 1-6 February 1965. He had tabled his Polish draft in the Council; so now it had to be considered. The French text remained the basis for the final study in the fourth session of the Council, but it was modified to accommodate Wojtyla's objection.

Karol Wojtyla may have lost the argument at Ariccia, but the position of Pope John Paul II was amply demonstrated. His view of the history of the Church was that of the Letter of Diognetus. He accepted the autonomy of the secular, and that Christians live by its legitimate laws and customs. However, they live by laws of the Gospel.

As the Council eventually put it:

[The Church] has a saving and eschatological purpose, which can be attained fully only in the next life. But it is now present here on earth and is composed of men [sic]; they, the members of the earthly city, are called to form the family of the children of God even in this present history of mankind [sic] and to increase continually until the Lord comes...<sup>12</sup>

They are willing residents but necessary aliens.

John Paul's American biographer, George Weigel, says of his worldview:

*In Wojtyla's interpretation of Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes was the theological linchpin of the entire Council. It is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man [sic] truly becomes clear...And all this holds true, not for Christians only, but for all men [sic] of good will, where grace is actively present.*<sup>13</sup>

John Paul is often accused of being a revisionist, of wanting to reverse the direction of Vatican II. Benedict XVI is associated with him in the charge. The accusation is made mostly by those who are captivated by the romantic optimism of the opening lines of *Gaudium et Spes*. John Paul did not reject the call to embrace the world. He did insist that his experience of the philosophies and politics of the day, both before and after his elevation to the papacy, confirmed the alien status of the Church while enthusiastically claiming to be a resident of the modern world.



## ENDNOTES:

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- <sup>1</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Memory and Identity, Personal Reflections*, (Milano: RCS, 2005). Eng. Trans. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 2005.
- <sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Memory and Identity, Personal Reflections*, 3.
- <sup>3</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Memory and Identity, Personal Reflections*, 85.
- <sup>4</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Memory and Identity, Personal Reflections*, 84-5. Karol Wojtyła, *Poezse – Poems*, Krakov 1998.
- <sup>5</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Memory and Identity, Personal Reflections*, 158.
- <sup>6</sup> Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past? The Quest for the Historical Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004).
- <sup>7</sup> Williams, *Why Study the Past?* p37, citing *A New Eusebius*, 'SPCK London, 1960 No. 36.
- <sup>8</sup> John Thornhill sm, 'Historians Bring to Light the Achievement of Vatican II', *Australasian Catholic Record* 82, no.3 (July 2005): 261.
- <sup>9</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 1.
- <sup>10</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 2.
- <sup>11</sup> Guiseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (eds), *History of Vatican II*, 4:pp524-5.
- <sup>12</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 40.
- <sup>13</sup> George Weigel, *Witness to Hope, The Biography of John Paul II*, (New York: Harper and Collins, 1999), 165.