

Christ Church Cathedral: Educational Conference – welcome; December 1<sup>st</sup> 2017  
The Most Reverend Michael Jackson, archbishop of Dublin

## MOVING TOWARDS THE LIGHT

### STILL THE REFORMATION

I have no doubt that you have all heard – and probably said – as much as you care to do so on the topic of The Reformation 500 by this time in December 2017. For those of us who stand in The Reformed Traditions, it would be wrong to deny that being reformed, being Protestant, is part of who we are and part of the people we present to others, knowingly or unknowingly. The three proto-Tweets of Martin Luther are nothing of which to be ashamed: *sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide*: by Scripture alone, by grace alone, by faith alone. Such a clear formula with such clean lines and so little obvious baggage helps to concentrate the mind on essentials and, it could well be argued, is highly suited to engaging with today's Laptop or Tablet generation. There is plenty of scope for deepening and for developing the next stages of exploration and commitment. There is plenty of scope for that phenomenon beloved of educationalists: input. The invitation is there and remains there to fill it out with our own lived experience of what it is to be Christian today; and this further expression is derived from and informed by sacraments, prayer and community. The tripartite formula of Scripture, grace and faith puts into the hands of everyone afresh the personal response that lies at the heart of a religious life, whether it be Catholic or Reformed or, as we Anglicans like to understand it, both of these together. All of us are called to live ecumenically in a secular age; and the vast majority of us rather enjoy being secular I suggest and we also enjoy being ecumenical too. We need actively and instinctively on a regular basis to be ecumenical and also engaged in Inter Faith dialogue and understanding.

### CONTEXT AND CREATIVITY

Simplicities such as this, nonetheless, while alluring, can and do need fleshing out. We do not live in a world circumscribed by theological comfort or certainty or predictability. Open any newspaper today and it asks real theological questions, often in surprising idioms! Nor do we live in a world where we do not want to be both secular and modern. We move with our times and our ideas need to do the same. Educationalists know this more acutely than any of the rest of us. And even if we don't, our students and pupils tell us so. Those of us involved in religion are often slow to realise how important and how life-giving change is and also to accept and herald the fact that tradition was once innovation – and can be so again in each generation of clarity and hope. *Context and Creativity* therefore need to be grasped and engaged if we are to be pertinent and refreshed in the uses to which we ourselves put, and the uses to which we encourage and inspire others to put, our inheritance, our tradition, the expanding and holographic range of knowledge.

### PRIORITIES AND PREJUDICES

A recognition of the role of *Priorities and Prejudices*, in both instinct and decision-making, should also feature in any nuanced understanding of ourselves as religious and educational beings. It is all too easy for us to move, through the juggernaut of our own self-belief, to see our priority as a passion that is entitled to drive the self-belief of others. This can easily begin to

move in the direction of imposed prejudice as we pre-suppose an outcome which is *our* outcome! So much of the culture around us tries to force us in this direction. But the substitution of increasingly impetuous self-belief for engaged self-awareness, self-care and self-reflection is the point at which our priority becomes a prejudice. It seeks to over-direct and to control the entitlement of others to disagree, to be critical friends and to be protagonists. It closes down the supply of oxygen to enable a shared energy to create a new synthesis of which nobody might have thought when thinking and acting alone. The avoidance of prejudices creates a climate for interactive teaching and learning and for religious flourishing. Like the New Testament Epistles we need faith and works together: Paul and James in response to Jesus Christ.

## PLURALISM AND DIVERSITY

We are increasingly aware of a sense of narrowing nationalisms across the world today. We need equally to be aware of the temptations of narrowing self-understanding, not least in a life of overcrowded communications and easy access to information without sufficient critical attention to the source or the slant of such information or its power of suggestion. The danger for us, again, as religious beings is that, at its worst, *Selectivity and Absolutism* begin to dictate our identity and by extension our perception of others. Ironically this can be while, at the same time, we decry 'Fundamentalists,' as if Liberalism cannot have its own totalitarian manifestation and self-righteousness. In the world outside contemporary religion proper, it might be around Fake News or the genuine and genuinely under-informed matters of Brexit and its causes and repercussions – or anything else for that matter. John Paul Lederach who had such a strong influence on reconciliation in Ireland spoke pertinently of *diversity being our friend*. *Pluralism and Diversity*: this is my final pair of words for our consideration. If diversity is to be our friend, then I suggest that pluralism, with its scope for generosity and accommodation, is the context we need to create and that it contains the signs for which we need to be on the lookout. Perhaps with the inheritance of Scripture, grace and faith, along with well-attuned ecumenical antennae, we can live a Reformed Identity for the next 500 years in a world which has, in fact, always been secular. This world invites our engagement and our compassion; our criticism and our commitment; our faith in God and in our commitment to the common good of others and of all. This is why we teach and preach after all. Citizenship is our calling.