



Opening of new buildings at St Thomas More College

HOMILY

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St Thomas More College
48 Mounts Bay Road, Crawley**

As all of you here would be aware, I think, the Catholic Church is heavily involved in the work of education. This is true at all levels: pre-school, primary, secondary and of course tertiary. Even though St Thomas More College is a residential College rather than a university campus, it is nevertheless a vital part of the commitment of the Church to education in this city and in this state. I am absolutely thrilled to be here this afternoon to bless these new facilities which will ensure that the College remains a living and thriving symbol of the Church's commitment to the education and formation of young people.

While the nature of the education offered in Catholic institutions will vary, depending on the specific role which each institution plays there is something absolutely foundational which gives life, structure and meaning to every Catholic educational institution without exception. To put a very complex thing into simple words I would say that the foundation upon which every Catholic educational endeavor rests is a particular response to what we might call the "God question".

There was a very interesting letter in this morning's paper which offered some reflections on the recent death of Stephen Hawking. Because the letter is in the public domain I think it is fair enough for me to quote from it. The writer refers to Stephen Hawking's answer to the God question and suggests that his answer was an emphatic "no". I am not sure if this adequately reflects Professor Hawking's beliefs but, in any event, the letter writer goes on to make clear his own point of view. The world's religions, he says, offer a mythical gift of eternal life, but in reality, the main objective and purpose of the human race is no more and no less than *"to reproduce more of our own kind"*. *"Seeking some idealised nirvana is just a human construct"*, he insists. The conclusion he draws is that *"we are of no more importance in the scheme of things than any other life form"*. His final comments are very striking. *"World War III"* he says, *"which seems to be getting more likely each year, could wipe out the human race forever. Please do not worry about it. It would be a waste of three billion years of evolution. But it won't matter to the universe"*.

At least to me this seems to be a very bleak vision of what human life is all about. It is certainly the absolute antithesis of the Christian understanding. Christians do not believe, as the writer or the letter does, that *"we are just a chance mutation derived from the great ape lineage"*. Christians instead believe that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and therefore, far from having no more importance than any other living being, we are God's masterpiece, created out of love and destined for a life of love, both here in this imperfect world and forever with God after we die.



Not everyone shares these beliefs, of course, but they are foundational for the Christian faith and therefore foundational to the motivation and inspiration of those who first founded this College and those who have continued to support it and believe in the deeply humanising and uplifting role it is called to play in the lives of all who live here.

As well as reading the West Australian this morning I also read some of the writings of Cardinal John Henry Newman, a famous English Catholic intellectual of the 19th century. One of his great works was his gathered reflections entitled “*On the Idea for a University*”. Writing about what I have called the “*God Question*” Newman doesn’t discuss whether or not God exists – he addresses this question in other places – but he makes a very significant point which many of us who believe in God perhaps have not fully considered.

Admit (the existence of) a God and you introduce among the subjects of your knowledge a fact encompassing, closing in upon, absorbing, every other fact conceivable. How can we investigate any party of any order of knowledge, and stop short of that which enters into every order? All true principles run over with it, all phenomena converge to it; it is truly the first and the last” (Newman, *The Idea for a University*, Discourse 11).

For many decades now St Thomas More College has been a place which is built on the conviction and the determination that we must not stop short of that which enters into every order. Just as not believing in God leads to many conclusions, some of which are set out in the letter I referred to a few moments ago, so belief in God also leads to many conclusions, the most basic of which, perhaps, is that life will never be fully grasped, or understood, or even entered into, if we exclude the God question from our consideration, or if we decide to marginalize the question so that it doesn’t trouble us with its challenging, and confronting , and – so Christians would say – life-affirming and life enhancing implications.

St Thomas More College exists as a living testament to the commitment of the Church to continue to proclaim belief in the God who is made known to us in Jesus Christ and who encounters us through the life, teachings and witness of the Church. I am grateful and proud to have this College in our archdiocese as a major contributor to the Church’s work of education. I thank all those who have been involved in bringing this ambitious program of rebuilding to a conclusion and I look forward to the continued growth and development of the College into the future.

Thank you.