

ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY
THE RIGHT REVEREND DR PETER HOLLINGWORTH, AC, OBE,
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
FOR THE OPENING OF THE
TOWARDS OPPORTUNITY AND PROSPERITY CONFERENCE
4 APRIL 2002

Thank you Professor Peter Dawkins and the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research for inviting Ann and me to take part in this opening session of the ***Towards Opportunity and Prosperity Conference***.

My thanks also to David Armstrong, Editor-in-Chief of *The Australian* newspaper which is co-hosting the conference.

As Professor Dawkins has mentioned, my association with the Melbourne Institute has been a long and happy one. From its inception, it helped us at the Brotherhood of St Laurence to integrate social and economic policy formulation, a legacy for which I am deeply grateful.

This year's 40th anniversary is worth celebrating, not only for the many concrete things the Institute has achieved over the years but for the crucial nature of the cause – to help steer a policy course for Australia which balances economic, environmental and social welfare policy objectives for the benefit of all.

It was just two years after the establishment of the Melbourne Institute that the modern version of *The Australian* newspaper first hit the stands, and over those 38 years developments in media and communications in this country, and around the world, have been mind-boggling.

But some things have remained the same. Among them, the commitment of successive managers, albeit with differing individual styles, to ensure that *The Australian* takes its role seriously as the national news daily. And, in so doing, to ensure that it maintains a keen interest not only in what happened yesterday but in the nation's broad history and identity, and in how they might shape its future.

The joint commitment of the *Melbourne Institute* and *The Australian* to this important conference reflects an acknowledgement that we make choices, we decide to follow certain paths – as individuals, as organisations and institutions, and as a nation – and that the future ramifications of those choices can be broad and far-reaching.

The conference will try to forge a consensus that will chart a course “towards opportunity and prosperity”.

It will find direction through the contributions of prominent Australians in a range of fields – their ideas, expert opinions and views on essential principles that might constitute national values. Values which might underpin policy development – on population and health, immigration, employment, the environment and education which in turn will serve to drive down the present levels of poverty (however they may be measured).

In exploring what these values might be, I have regularly quoted the man now viewed as Victoria's first “modern” Premier, Sir Rupert Hamer, a man who always understood the need to develop a balance between social, economic and environmental considerations.

Because he did not see these forces as being inherently in conflict.

As Premier, he said in 1973:

“Economists gave us the concept of Gross National Product and interest has centred on the rate at which it grows.

“Is it time that our proper concern with growth should be tempered with a greater emphasis on the very essence of the quality and purpose of life itself?”

“Is it time”, asked Hamer, “to think about Gross National Well-being?”

Notwithstanding this time of international uncertainty that has followed the events of September 11, I am finding that Australians are more inclined than ever to define something deeper, something like the core values that underpin national life.

This is by no means straightforward. They are not obvious or universal, particularly when you are looking to find words to describe them in specific terms.

And so I tend to come back to four axioms from past reflection and experience. An axiom being a self-evident truth that points a society along the road to the future.

A “middle level axiom” stands between broad moral generalisation and specific policy formulation, pointing us forward in general directions that will eventually produce a “good society” for the greatest number of people.

And I think there are four main concepts that come into play: justice; sustainability; participation; and efficiency.

I will quickly go through them.

Justice – this is a value deeply embodied in each of the three Abrahamic faiths – Jewish, Christian and Muslim. And in most of the other world faiths, as well. It involves fair treatment for all, with a special commitment to the vulnerable and weak.

Sustainability – a concept which, for some, comes from the doctrine of Creation but is also based on derivative principles which recognise that the human race carries the responsibility of stewardship over the natural environment we inherit.

But in more recent times, the word “ecology”, of course, has taken on a particular meaning relating to the earth and the planet and the need to preserve it, while we use and enjoy its fruits.

Third, participation – a concept that really came to the fore during the civil rights movement in the 1960s, in the US, where you had a well-established tradition of “representative” democracy, but very little by way of “participatory” democracy.

“Participation”, as a value, sees people playing an active role in society, owning their responsibility, feeling that they genuinely belong to it and able to contribute to its decision-making processes.

And the fourth - efficiency.

Though efficiency is not a core value in the same way as the other three, nonetheless, it has to be there as an essential “instrumental value”. For if we simply talk about social and environmental objectives – which is what the first three are about – we are not taking seriously the need for the effective creation of wealth which is essential to the well being of a modern society.

I think that was one of the great lessons I learnt through my contact with the Melbourne Institute and other organisations I worked with during my time at the Brotherhood.

A few years ago, many business people felt that the social welfare sector did not take seriously enough the need to foster wealth creation, and issues like competition and marketplace efficiency, especially at the time of deregulation and globalisation.

Today, most of us recognise only too well that you can't distribute what you have not got.

You have to be an effective participant in a global economy. It is not an either/or proposition, there is no choice.

And you have to find an appropriate dynamic and balanced interaction between social, environmental and economic objectives.

This conference is taking place at a crucial time early in the 21st century - the issues we face as a nation today are as important as any we have faced in the past fifty years.

They go to the heart of the society we wish to build, the nature of the community we would like to be and to our national identity.

Globalisation presents many opportunities and many challenges, some of them not easily reconcilable, but we have no choice but to address them.

And it is in this context that the concepts of social corporate responsibility and social entrepreneurship are gathering momentum around the world. Because they provide a platform for all of us – people from different sectors and with different skills and interests – to join forces with a view towards opportunity and prosperity.

Social entrepreneurship combines a passion for social justice with a hard-headed, business-like discipline. It is based on practices that are not new, but what is new is a certain coordinated momentum that is gathering, a process of cross fertilisation between people throughout Australia and around the world who are ready to give this approach a proper go.

This is, it seems, an idea whose time has come.

Social corporate responsibility is also challenging the more traditional approach to corporate philanthropy by demonstrating that the connection with community and social development can no longer be seen as an “add-on” – something companies do on the side to appease their critics – but must become fundamental to the way they do business overall.

And underlying these new ideas is the essential principle of “inclusiveness” - engagement between sectors and a sense of responsibility for individuals, organisations and institutions to each play their role.

We need to ensure that the whole community not only benefits from the outcomes of a globalised world but contributes and is committed to the shaping of that world and Australia's place in it.

In particular, we will need to empower young Australians - who will live with the consequences of the choices being made today - to be stakeholders in this process.

In this regard, I have been encouraged by the development of citizens' groups such as the Global Foundation, which seeks to encourage the participation of all

Australians, from right across the community, in shaping Australia's future, in a global context.

In your deliberations, I ask you to consider carefully the importance of encouraging and finding pathways for all Australians, particularly young Australians, to feel inspired to contribute vigorously and positively to the shaping of the future of Australia.

May I conclude by quoting from this morning's editorial in *The Australian*, which describes the task ahead rather well.

“The challenge for Australia's future today is to forge new opportunities to build a new prosperity. Our hope is that the discussions over the next two days will help form a broad new consensus for a new economic and social agenda. This new agenda, we believe, ought to marry old fashioned virtues of reward for effort, initiative of smart thinking with traditional Australian concerns for the less privileged and less able.”

I wish you well and take great pleasure now in officially opening the Social Outlook Conference for 2002: **Towards Opportunity and Prosperity.**