

Strictly Confidential

Dr Bruce Mitchell,

History Department,

University of New England,

ARMIDALE, NSW, 2351.

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History Department,
Faculty of Arts,
University of New England,
ARMIDALE, NSW, 2351.

Dear Bruce,

Let us take as our text:

He who has a secret to keep
must keep it a secret
that he has a secret to keep.

It is a good passage to reflect on, because I have a secret!

I feel obliged to share it with you, in your capacity as my PhD Supervisor. My wish is that, as far as possible, it would remain a secret.

It has been my experience over the years that the sharing of secrets by people has been most unwise. Those people with whom secrets have been shared, often have not been able to cope with the *matter* of the secret and have felt compelled to share the stress with others, who in turn have shared with others. Thus, the failure of trust can often be attributed not to malice but to other factors. When a person chooses to share, even with professionals such as doctors, psychologists or clergymen, the risk is run that the stress evoked by the secret will cause the fact of having a secret, if not the content, to be shared.

On the other hand, sometimes if information is not known, then assistance cannot be given. Having given a lot of thought to the matter, I have decided that the importance of you being in the know exceeds the need to keep a secret.

I believe I can trust you to keep my secret. During the years we have known each other, our relationship has grown from one of Teacher to Student, to one which we could describe as friends. Indeed, in your professional life, as you have told me, you have been enriched by a variety of Church people sharing friendship with you: eg. John Molony, Sister Xavier (Margaret) Compton. One of the reasons for such friendships beginning is that you deport yourself as a friendly person, and you are.

Not every member of a faculty staff has the ability to be friendly. One of the reasons why you have been successful, I believe, is that you have a humanity which is obvious, real and vital. By that I mean that you acknowledge your human qualities, and during your life you have grown as an academic and as a person. When I first met you in 1988, I was impressed by the fact you were human. I guess divorce and all that has left its mark on your life, and sad as such events are, the process of coping enriches a person. It is my opinion that you have been enriched, and now you are compassionate and understanding of the human failings of others, and are not adversely judgmental. Thus, I believe I

can share with you something about myself, confident of receiving a compassionate response and that the matter can remain a secret.

Several years ago I became involved in a scandal, and it resulted in me being an embarrassment to the Church. The opportunity for me to do further education has not been a privilege, but an attempt to hide me.

The previous Bishop, Henry Kennedy, had no solution, and suggested I go elsewhere until his successor was appointed, and he could find his solution. Accordingly, I moved from Armidale to Merrylands, and awaited Kennedy's resignation and the appointment of his successor. After a great delay, the two events co-incided, and Kevin Manning arrived as Bishop of Armidale. He wasted no time in summoning me to Armidale to discuss my situation.

In Kevin Manning I have found the embodiment of what Bishop James Quinn wrote about Archbishop Vaughan:

He sets great value on being consistent in following up a course once adopted or an opinion formed.

Just as Vaughan had adopted the course of inducing Timothy O'Mahony to go to Rome, and formed the opinion that he *would* not be allowed to return, and moreover, that he *ought* not to be allowed back, so too Manning has formed a similar opinion about me and my situation, and 'sets great value on being consistent in following up' the course he has adopted and the opinion he has formed.

He made it clear that there was no future for me in this diocese, so any future Church ministry would have to be elsewhere. A recent decision by the Catholic Bishops, however, has made my going elsewhere very difficult, so I am left with no where to go.

I have gummed up the works with my claim that since I have no qualifications for other work, I must get some qualifications before I leave the active ministry. Anything less than a PhD would be inadequate as a qualification for future job-finding and long term job security.

The current proposal is that I qualify as a PhD and then leave the ministry. Manning has many reservations about my being in Armidale.

The Bishop is in a situation of having a request from me to undertake a PhD about a diocese in which he wants me to have absolutely no involvement. On the other hand, the only topic for a PhD for which I have 'fire in the belly' is something about the Diocese of Armidale.

You see then that the situation is extremely delicate.

Your description of Bishop Manning's letter to you: 'it seemed ominous', adequately summed up the situation. There was no indication that he was in favour of the proposed PhD but there was a veiled allusion to potential difficulties. If you ask to see the Bishop he may not agree to see you - he does a lot of *not-seeing* people. If he does see you, very early in the interview he will slip you a trick question to

see if you are really in the know about my situation. Hence his expression in his letter: 'However, I hope John has indicated to you that my support for him is conditional.' He'll want to know if you know that there are difficulties.

He'll slip you other questions, by which he'll try to gauge:

- 1) whether any of the history staff are aware of my situation;
- 2) whether there are on campus people (staff or students) for whom I am at present a source of hostility;
- 3) whether my being at the university presents even the slightest chance of hostility arising towards me/the Church.

The wrong answer to even one of these questions will result in him wanting me out of the university instantly.

No doubt the contents of this letter come as a bit of a shock. When you have read it, you'll want time to digest it. At your convenience we can discuss any questions you have and how best we can approach the Bishop.

Thankfully, I can foresee the stress of all this being considerably reduced by the two of us consuming a suitable quantity of alcohol during a long lunch, and enjoying the wonderful gift of human friendship. Roll on that time!

In due course, when you have read this letter, please return it to me and I will burn it.

With best wishes, Bruce.