



## CHAPTER ONE

### *The Dream that Won't Go Away*



"Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world. Every form of authentic evangelisation is always 'new.'"

Pope Francis, 'Joy of the Gospel'

Twenty years ago, I had a dream but my eyes were wide awake. I was in a park reading the New Testament (as you do) when these words of Jesus leaped off the page:

"Does anyone pour new wine into old wineskins? No! For if he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out, and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins."

Luke 5:37

That day a dream was born in my heart which has never gone away and which returns every few years to prod me like an

annoying friend. I saw in my mind's eye four words flashing like neon lights—'Australian Catholic Youth Church'—and I saw a picture of the Catholic Church that could be, 'the Church of the future.' Can I describe it to you?

*"I have a dream of a nation filled with churches so alive and vital that one day they will look back and say; "Can you believe this? Wasn't this unheard of before?" Because it was unheard of—it was unseen and undone.*

*I have a dream. It is of a place, of hundreds of places, of a whole generation, a future moment in history waiting to be written, where there is contemporary worship, powerful preaching and a height of spiritual revival unseen before in the Catholic Church. Where flocks, hordes of young people gather together under one roof to worship the living God with utter abandon and without restraint. Hey, forget the roof: under the stars! Because the building will be too small. A place where the Holy Spirit has free reign to move, to heal and to minister in power among His people, as in the days Jesus walked among the people and did exactly the same...*

It will be a generation burning with a passion for worship and mission. Places like this will be hubs, hives of missionary activity; a launching pad into this nation and overseas, to Africa, India, Asia and wherever else the Spirit would lead.

Justice and faith, action and prayer, mission and worship, flowing side-by-side as they were always meant to. Places like this would be a controversial sign of what 'church' is and is supposed to look like. Signposts of the kingdom to come."

Excerpt 'Walk With You': Chapter 'World Changers'

This was the dream that gave my spirit wings. I wrote songs inspired by it. I spoke about it with friends over late night drinks, or on plane-flights home from a ministry outreach somewhere.

As you may have guessed, I even wrote it down in a book hoping that somebody might read it and it would somehow catch on. I felt like an optimistic archer shooting an arrowhead out into the darkness with no target in sight, hoping somehow this ridiculous vision would strike home.

Sometimes—more often than not—there was no response, no ‘cry from the target.’ It felt like the message was falling on deaf ears. I’d start to think, ‘does anyone really want this, or is it just me and a few others hopefuls punching above our weight?’ Who were we kidding? After all, the denomination we were attempting to renew had to be the oldest, slowest, most stubborn of mules you ever sat atop of. At times I have figuratively ‘slumped back in the saddle’ and given up kicking. ‘Too big, too hard, too many negative voices’... and those were just the ones on the inside! I wrestled with my impossible dream like Jacob wrestled with his angel:

“So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.”

But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”

Exodus 32:24-26

Fortunately, I am slowly coming to learn that God doesn’t give us impossible dreams for us to just let them go. We need the perseverance of Jacob to hold onto them until daybreak and wrestle them to the ground until we receive the blessing.

As it turns out, my temptation to despair hasn’t been based on reality. Apparently I have

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not been alone at all. Quietly and slowly, God has patiently been raising up a generation around the world with fire in their eyes and a dream in their hearts. They are parents and teachers, mothers and fathers, priests and nuns, business leaders and lecturers, thinkers and artists, musicians and students. Some of them are vocal, active and leading the charge. Others are wondering if now is the time to come out of hiding and stir up that old flame once again. Some of them are holding this book as they have that very thought.

If you have ever dreamed of a Church that could be alive, on fire and changing the world for the better, you too need to know that you are not alone. In this book it is my hope to fan into flame that dream that may have dimmed within you, or even better still, spark a flame that has yet to be lit. Either way, welcome to the company of dreamers. You're in good company!

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### *Joseph the Dreamer*

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You and I are not the first to dream of 'a future that is not yet.' The first that comes to mind is Joseph, son of the same Jacob who wrestled with the angel. You may have heard Joseph's story before, but even if you have, it's worth recapping. His story comes from the book of Genesis, chapter 37.

Joseph is his father Jacob's favourite son, which makes his eleven older brothers jealous. Young Joe gets spoilt by his dad with new stuff all the time, like a bright multi-coloured coat (don't you hate those siblings?). However, what's really infuriating is the crazy dreams he keeps having about how one day he's going to be 'raised up above his brothers' and how they are going to eventually bow down to him, as if to a prince or king.

It's enough to make Joe's brothers beat him up, throw him in a pit, fake his death and sell him into slavery. Dust off the hands; job done!

Except the job isn't done. In Egypt, Joseph gets blamed for making a move on his master's wife and thrown into jail for thirteen years. *Thirteen years...* that's a long time right? Enough to make you want to give up those crazy dreams that started all this trouble in the first place, I bet.

The problem is, Joseph's gift of prophetic dreams was from God. By interpreting Pharaoh's dream of an impending worldwide famine, Joe not only gets freed from prison overnight, but made right-hand man in the kingdom. Boom! Didn't see that coming, hey? Before long, guess who's turning up to grovel at his feet, just like in his childhood dreams... yep, his twelve older brothers (who by the way are very sorry and apologetic now about that whole pit and slavery episode).

Moral of the story? The dreams God gave Joseph couldn't be fulfilled when they were first received; it was still too early. There was a time for the fulfillment of the dream and it lay in the future. *But the time was definitely there.* As the book of Ecclesiastes says:

"There is a time and a season for every activity under the sun: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot... a time to tear down and a time to build."

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Fast-forward with me now. Leading up to the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the then leader of the Catholic Church, Pope Saint John Paul II, also began to see dreams of the future and speak about them:

"I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelisation and to the mission to the nations."

St John Paul II (Redemptoris Missio 3)

I'm with JP II—'the moment has come.' Heck, the moment came and went years ago! Thankfully though it's never too late to begin. So whether you have a clear dream of the future burning inside your heart, or have no idea and feel like you're drawing blanks, I invite you to turn the following pages with me and see if there's not a dream inside you waiting to be discovered.