

Award of Degree of Doctor of Laws *Honoris Causa*

MR PATRICK LIONEL DODSON

Patrick Lionel Dodson has given a lifetime of service to the Australian community. He has been at the forefront of national issues that continue to shape the contemporary Aboriginal and Australian experience. He rightly carries the title: "Father of Australian reconciliation".

Born in 1948 in Broome, WA, Patrick Dodson spent most of his childhood and early schooling in the Northern Territory. Losing both parents under tragic circumstances he was sent, in 1961, to Monivae College in Victoria. Six years later, he was elected Captain of the School and became captain of the College football team. After completing secondary school, he enrolled to study for the priesthood.

Patrick Dodson was ordained a priest of the order of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in May 1975. His ordination as Australia's first Aboriginal Catholic priest was a major national event in Aboriginal Australia and the Australian Catholic Church.

After service as a priest in the Northern Territory, Patrick Dodson joined the Central Land Council in 1981 and was appointed Director in 1985. He was a key player in many sensitive and significant negotiations with the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments at a time when negotiations over the issues of Aboriginal land rights were generally bitter, divisive and politically contentious. In his work with the Central Land Council, he played a key role in negotiating the return of the Uluru Kata-Tjuta National Park to traditional owners. He is recognised as a senior native title holder for the Yawuru people.

In 1989, he was appointed as one of the Commissioners of The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. In September 1991, the Parliament of Australia agreed, on a bipartisan basis, to the establishment of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. Patrick Dodson was appointed its first Chairperson. His leadership of the Council brought together leaders within the Aboriginal and the mining, pastoral, religious, media and cultural communities. This culminated in the historic Aboriginal Reconciliation Convention in May 1997.

His connections with Melbourne University have been long standing and productive. He collaborates with University staff through the Cranlana Programme, the Lingiari Foundation and the NHMRC Kimberley men's health project. He has given important lectures at Trinity College and Newman College.

Over the last decade, Patrick Dodson has devoted himself to applying and extending the lessons of reconciliation. Whether as a representative of the Yawuru people, lead negotiator for the Mirriwung Gajerrong people's native title claim, Chairman of the Kimberley Development Commission and the Lingiari Foundation, or as part of a developing partnership between the Aboriginal people of the Kimberley and Monivae College and Wesley College, he has worked tirelessly to bring together different sectors within Australia, all with their own concerns and interests. Patrick Dodson has taught the Australian community that reconciliation is not an elusive ideal, but a practical, achievable reality for the future of our continent and all its peoples.