

*TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY PROFESSOR IMELDA MAHER on 14 June 2022, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Law, honoris causa on PROFESSOR JOHN D FEERICK*

Professor Feerick is the former – and celebrated – Dean of Fordham Law School, whose professional life falls into three chapters. Two years after becoming a lawyer, he published an article on Presidential inability in the Fordham Law Review, of which he had been editor in chief. It was 1963 and within a matter of weeks, President John F Kennedy had been assassinated and the question became one of supreme constitutional importance catapulting Professor Feerick into the centre of debates on what was to become the 25th amendment of the constitution. The late Senator Bayh noted the debt owed to Professor Feerick by the United States as he was very instrumental in securing that amendment, the value of which became apparent a few years later with the emergence of the Watergate scandal. Thus, Professor Feerick is one of the few scholars whose academic writing has been significant in securing constitutional change, and whose books on the process provide a fascinating insight into the interplay of legal change and the politics that effect it. What a way to start a legal career.

While undertaking this important work, Professor Feerick had started his career as an attorney ultimately specialising in labour law with a leading international law firm. During this period, he also published (with others) the 800pp treatise on National Labour Relations Board Representation Elections: Law, Practice and Procedure. He ultimately left the firm to become Dean of Fordham Law School in 1982, a position he held with distinction for 20 years, and where he is now the Norris Professor of Law. An outstanding dean, during his tenure the School reached a top-25 ranking for the first time, rebuilt its faculty into a top-25 law faculty for scholarly impact, and established its highly ranked LLM and clinical programmes. Upon stepping down from his deanship, Professor Feerick founded the Feerick Centre for Social Justice, reflecting his work on ethics and conflict resolution.

John Hume, Bill Clinton and David Trimble had all been to Dean Feerick's office at different times in the germinal 1990s. The then Dean Feerick travelled with President Clinton on his first visit to Northern Ireland and organised a conflict resolution programme in 1995 with the University of Ulster. In 2001, working with our then Dean, Professor Paul O'Connor and Professor John Jackson, then Head of the Law School of Queens University Belfast, he instituted the Fordham/QUB/UCD summer school where students from all three schools take classes together in Belfast and Dublin.

Which brings us to the third chapter of Professor Feerick's professional life.

Originally when reading Professor Feerick's books and in particular his memoir, *That Further Shore*, I was reminded of the famous 1953 Isaiah Berlin essay, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*. This essay took the fragment from Archilochus – a fox knows many things, but a hedgehog knows only one big thing – to reflect on Tolstoy and his work. Berlin sees writers and thinkers as those who embrace a single universal organising principle and those who pursue different and possibly contradictory ends drawing on a variety of experiences. Initially I thought of Professor Feerick as a fox: the scholar at the heart of constitutional debates; the practitioner at the heart of union/employer relations; the dean with inclusive and demanding values of service and rigour; but then the third chapter brings us to his public service. Professor Feerick himself describes an innate incapacity to choose and focus. As well as his constitutional work; setting up a conflict resolution centre in

Ghana; and his work around Northern Ireland; he has served on countless public bodies and chaired many including the Board of Directors of the American Arbitration Association; Presidency of the New York City Bar Association, the New York State Law Revision Commission, while his work with the Legal Aid Society resolved longstanding difficulties around homelessness in New York City to name a few key initiatives. In other words, Professor Feerick is a writer, thinker and advocate who looks like a fox but in fact is a hedgehog where the vocation for public service informs all he does.

Which brings me to what I think of as the prologue of your life John: your Bronx childhood of Mayo parents and of course your wife Emalie. We honour you today as an Irish American whose memoir shows the pain, challenges, and opportunities of migration and how enriching it can become for both the society left and the society embraced. There are numerous special places which have shaped your life of public service, including Toomore, Craggagh, Ballinrobe, Upper Colmore, Carrowkeel, Ballytrasna, Kylemore Abbey, 161st St, 302 Broadway, Grand Avenue, Riverdale, Mount Kisco, Lake Carmel, and of course Fordham Law School. We hope that, with the conferring of this honorary degree today, that those special locations may also include UCD.

When I recently met Professor Feerick I asked him what it meant to be dean. He said it was about empowering others to achieve their best. In his scholarly contribution to American constitutional legal change, as Dean and in his work around the Belfast Agreement, he gave expression to his values of inclusion, community and academic excellence. And it is these values and leadership that we in UCD are acknowledging here today.