



PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS 2023

THE RIGHT REVEREND DR MARK SHORT

Anglican Church of Australia, Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn
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*Blessed are those whose strength is in you:
In whose heart are the highways to Zion;
Who, going through the valleys of dryness,
find there a spring from which to drink ...*

Psalm 84:5-6

I acknowledge that we gather today on the lands of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples. I pay my respects to their elders past, present and future and commit myself to listening to and learning from their wisdom and experience.

My sisters and brothers in Christ, welcome to the First Session of the 48th Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn. Thank you to Canberra Grammar School for the use of their facility, which will allow us to gather in these not-quite-over-COVID times in a more spacious location than is the case at the Goulburn Workers' Club. I do look forward to us resuming our connection with Goulburn and St Saviour's Cathedral in years to come.

I welcome those of you who are joining us as Synod Representatives for the first time. Thank you so much for your willingness to serve in this way and for the ministries you already exercise in other ways, making Jesus known and serving God's purposes in the world. It is a blessing and an honour to be your Diocesan Bishop.

Beneath and beyond the intricacies of ordinances and standing orders a Synod witnesses to vital realities. It is a tangible reminder that the Christian faith is universal in scope. We gather as representatives from a variety of ministry units, schools, welfare and other agencies, reflecting God's concern for the entirety of human existence. A Synod is also a reminder that the Christian faith is particular in its application. We gather as a Diocese, a geographically-defined entity, believing that we are called to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in this place at this time. Finally, a Synod is a reminder that the Christian faith is God-inspired. We gather not just for God but with God, expecting that God's Spirit will give us the wisdom we need so that in discussing and even debating together we achieve far more than we could in isolation.

A Synod is also an opportunity to learn and be inspired, to make new friendships and renew existing ones. I look forward to touching base with many of you in the days ahead and hearing what God is doing in your ministry setting.

A World of Difference: Four Years On

In my Presidential Address at my first Synod in September 2019 I encouraged us to consider our common mission under the theme *Engaging a World of Difference with the Love and Truth of Jesus*.

I explained that there are two dimensions to difference.

First, we are a world where we are increasingly aware that we differ *from* each other. Second, we are increasingly a world where we differ *with* each other.

Since then we have been through devastating bushfires. We have journeyed through a Pandemic. We have looked on in horror as trench warfare returned to Europe. We have and are negotiating the rise of Artificial Intelligence and increased cost-of-living pressures. What ever-changing times we live in!

None of this has decreased our propensity to differ with each other. Quite the contrary, as new debates have been layered over old divisions.

There are many possible reasons for this, including economic turmoil, the 'echo chamber' effect of social media and cultural anxiety over demographic and other changes.

But there is one reason in particular which is outlined by British historian Tom Holland in his work *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind*.¹ In his book Holland makes a convincing case for the pervasive influence of the Christian narrative on the shaping of our culture. A similar argument is mounted by British evangelist and former Canberran Glenn Scrivener, who traces the Christian roots of ideas such as freedom, compassion, equality and consent.²

However, with the break-down of a previous cultural consensus these ideas have not disappeared. Instead they have been separated out from each other with different ideas being championed by competing groups, who may or may not appeal to or be aware of their Christian roots. Holland gives the example of how this manifests in the so-called 'culture wars' in the United States:

"The twenty-first century marked, in that sense, no radical break with what had gone before. That the great battles in America's culture war were being fought between Christians and those who had emancipated themselves from Christianity was a conceit that both sides had an interest in promoting. It was no less of a myth for that. In reality, evangelicals and progressives were both recognisably bred of the same matrix."³

In light of this, part of our Christian calling is to re-unite and re-integrate what culture has torn asunder, to recover and communicate a vision of the Christian faith that embraces and embodies truth *and* love, justice *and* holiness, a concern for the individual *and* a deep commitment to community. This will require close attention to the overall narrative of Scripture and how it resists being co-opted by any political or cultural faction. A recent work which seeks to do this is Christopher Watkin's *Biblical Critical Thinking*.⁴ Consciously drawing on Saint Augustine's *City of God* Watkin develops the strategy of diagonalisation, in which he draws on the biblical narrative to cut across and rearrange false cultural dichotomies.⁵ As one example, Watkin explores how the Old Testament narrative of the Exodus undercuts or at least qualifies both right and left wing versions of emancipation and freedom. The former understands it in terms of freedom *from* government and bureaucracy, the latter in terms of freedom *from* unjust prejudices and oppressions. But the Biblical version of freedom is positive rather than negative – at its heart it is freedom *for* service of God and neighbour.⁶

Of course, the teaching and narrative of Scripture is far more than a tool for political and cultural analysis. It is the source of our life and hope, the revelation of God's purposes for us and for the world and the shared story that builds a cohesive and vibrant church. Inspired by the Spirit these are indeed the 'lively oracles of God' to quote from the Coronation service. The following section explores how we are and can be shaped by its transformative story as we engage our world with the love *and* truth of Jesus through six priority areas.

¹ London: Little Brown, 2019

² In *The Air We Breathe* (The Good Book Company, 2022). NB This doesn't mean that only Christians subscribe to such ideas or that they are absent from other cultures and faiths. It does mean that in our context these ideas have grown in 'soil' shaped by the Christian narrative.

³ Op cit, p514

⁴ Grand Rapids: Michigan, 2022

⁵ Ibid, p15

⁶ Ibid, pp271-273

Engaging a World of Difference: The Next Three Years

Gracious and Patient Witness

As believers in Christ we are ambassadors of reconciliation, bearing witness that in Christ God was pleased to reconcile all things by making peace through His blood shed on the cross⁷. In a broken and divided world the message of reconciliation grows a reconciled church, those who through faith in Christ find themselves united at the foot of the cross. Across our Diocese local churches and other ministries are living out this vision and people are finding new life in Jesus and growing in their love for Him.

The General Synod Standing Committee has resolved that the Mission and Ministry Commission be requested to develop a plan for a coordinated national, parish-based outreach program of evangelism for implementation from Easter 2025. My wife Monica serves on the Commission so I look forward to receiving and passing on updates on its work. In the meantime our Senior Leadership Group has begun on how we might prepare as a Diocese to outreach together in ways that are biblically faithful and culturally relevant. It is my hope that we might also host a Provincial Convention on evangelism in the second half of 2024 – stay tuned for further details! Whatever else we do as individuals or as a church there is no greater gift we can offer our world than a clear presentation of the good news of Jesus.

As this gift is shared God is growing His church in Canberra-Goulburn. I am particularly grateful to Archdeacon Tom Henderson-Brooks, the Exploratory Ministry Unit and the Pelican Foundation in supporting and resourcing new expressions of ministry. At last reckoning we had seven church or congregation plants in the planning or early launch stages – and most of these are outside Canberra. Over the next three years we will develop a peer learning environment for leaders of these initiatives as well as a strategy for identifying new priority areas for church and congregation plants and leaders and teams for those opportunities.

Safe and Sustainable Ministry

Bishop Carol Wagner has done great work in implementing the Ministry Wellbeing and Development Policy Guidelines and Resources. We have implemented policies for professional supervision and development for licensed clergy, including extra resourcing for clergy in part-time and non-stipendiary positions. We are exploring how to implement regular ministry reviews across the Diocese.

Nevertheless, there is more work for us to do. The recent National Church Life Survey showed that Rectors of Parishes in particular are feeling under pressure and I expect these results would be replicated if we were to survey clergy and lay leaders in other ministry contexts. There are several contributors to ministry stress including the long-tail of COVID, limited human and financial resources and increased sensitivity around the use and abuse of pastoral power. Another contributor has been role mis-match – the gap between what clergy feel called to do and what they are required to do. In particular, our clergy spend more time in administration than they desire and correspondingly less time training and discipling others.

Over the next three years Bishop-in-Council, our clergy and our hard-working team at Anglican Diocesan Services will work to narrow this gap. This will involve liaising with other Dioceses who are asking similar questions. In no way does this remove or reduce our obligation to ensure best

⁷ Colossians 1:15-20

practice in areas such as safe ministry and workplace health and safety. Indeed, the more we are able to collaborate well in these and other areas the better we serve each other and those who come into our ministries seeking the love and care of Christ.

Compassionate and Skilled Service

Later in our Synod you will hear from Brandon Howard, the (relatively) new CEO of Anglicare. We sometimes speak of Anglicare as the caring 'arm' of the Diocese as if this priority is its unique and exclusive focus. However this is a priority for us all, with Anglicare leading the way and inspiring and equipping us all with its particular experience and expertise.

In this regard it is exciting that Anglicare has adopted Integrated Parish and Community Partnerships as one of its four client portfolios. Over the next three years Anglicare and Bishop-in-Council will work to develop targets for the number of active partnerships in areas such as chaplaincy, disaster recovery and relief and volunteering, along with transparent and agreed mechanisms for assessing and reviewing the effectiveness of these partnerships.

Safe and Affordable housing is another Anglicare client portfolio as well as being a matter of concern for Governments and communities. Later in our Synod we will be considering a motion about how 'surplus' Parish Property could be part of a solution. Recently I visited one of our country Parishes which is partnering with Anglicare to build government-funded accommodation for women and children fleeing domestic violence and I am sure we will see more such initiatives in the future.

Creative and Informed Advocacy

I will touch on the upcoming Referendum on the Voice towards the end of this address. Regardless of the outcome on October 14 the real work of truth-telling and reconciliation at the local level continues from October 15. Existing initiatives such as the Eden Canoe Project co-ordinated by The Reverend Michael Palmer and local elders and the long-standing partnership between the Parish of Batemans Bay and the Boomerang Meeting Place in Mogo allow us to hear the voices of our First Nations neighbours. However, there is more that can be done and I hope that over the next three years we will develop a Reconciliation Action Plan that encompasses the operations of Anglican Diocesan Services, our Parishes and other Ministry Units.

Without pre-empting the outcome of this process Here is a challenge for us all and the Parishes you represent. As a tangible expression of fellowship with First Nations Christians would you consider setting aside one per cent of your Parish budget to initiatives that support ministry to and especially by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island believers? The following organisations can help you on this journey:

The Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship www.aef.org.au

The Anglican Board of Mission www.abmission.org

The Bush Church Aid Society www.bushchurchaid.com.au

CMS Australia www.cms.org.au

Generous and Just Stewardship

One example of healthy diagonalisation is the Christian approach to creation. Our world, in all its beauty and diversity, is neither treated as divine in its own right nor is it reduced to a collection of inert resources to be exploited for our selfish interests. Rather it is the theatre of God's glory, the

sphere in which we are called to steward God's good gifts for the sake of our human and non-human neighbours.

Later in this Synod we will hear from Archdeacon Paul Cohen about the work of our Climate Change Action Plan Steering Committee and some of the practical and collaborative ways in which we are and can live out this aspect of our calling.

Inspiring and Empowered Worship

In many ways this final priority is the most vital and the most elusive. It reminds us of our utter dependence on the enlivening work of God's Spirit and the folly of reducing our common life to just one more arena of unaided human effort.

If over the three years God works in us to make us a more prayerful Diocese, that will be profoundly transformative even though mostly hidden from sight. Thank you for all of you who pray for Monica and me and for our Bishop's Office team. If you aren't already familiar with it I commend to you our Diocesan Cycle of Prayer which you can find at <https://anglicancg.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Diocesan-Cycle-of-Prayer.pdf>.

Working Through Difference: The Example of Recognition

Later in our Synod we will be hearing from Associate Professor The Reverend Canon Glenn Loughrey and considering a motion about the forthcoming Referendum. What follows is not designed to pre-empt or pre-determine the outcome of that process but to explore some of the ways in which the wider debate has been shaped by some of the factors I mentioned earlier.

In doing so I invite you to join me in conversation with the Canadian Theologian Charles Taylor, and ultimately the teaching of Holy Scripture.

In his 1994 paper *The Politics of Recognition*⁸ Taylor outlines two versions of recognition that have developed and now co-exist in contemporary Western culture.⁹

A first version of recognition focuses on equality and what I share in common with every other human being. Recognition occurs as others affirm that in some profound sense *I am just like them*.

By contrast, a second version of recognition focuses on difference and the on the distinct group(s) to which I belong and with which I identify. Recognition occurs *as others affirm that in some sense I (or we) are different to them*.

Taylor unpacks the potential conflict between these two versions of recognition as follows:

“For one, the principle of equal respect requires that we treat people in a difference-blind fashion. The fundamental intuition that humans command this respect focuses on what is the same in all. For the other, we have to recognise and even foster particularity. The reproach the first makes to the second is just that it violates the principle of non-discrimination. The reproach the second makes to the first is that it negates identity by forcing people into a homogenous mould that is untrue to them.”¹⁰

⁸ Taylor, Charles. “The Politics of Recognition” in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Edited by Amy Gutmann. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, pp25-73

¹⁰ Ibid, p43

¹⁰ Ibid, p43

It is not difficult to discern these different versions of recognition in the debate about the Voice. For some, the Voice is to be rejected because it violates the principle of equality before the law.¹¹ For others the Voice is to be supported because it affirms the particular and unique place of First Nations people within the Australian community.

So what can we say as Christ followers? First we need to acknowledge that both these versions of recognition are historically contingent – that is they arose in a particular time and place. That does not necessarily make them untrue, but it should caution us against treating them as self-evident, at least in isolation.

Second, we might want to consider whether here as in much else we have an instance of different cultural groups drawing on different aspects of a common, yet oft-forgotten, Christian heritage.

Is there a way to bring together what contemporary culture has pulled apart? In the final section of his paper Taylor suggest a way forward for navigating these two versions of recognition:

“One ground that has been proposed is a religious one. Herder, for instance, had a view of divine providence, according to which all this variety of culture was not a mere accident but was meant to bring about a greater harmony. I can’t rule that out ... we only need a sense of our own limited part in the whole human story to accept the presumption.”¹²

Now as a Catholic Christian I suspect Taylor is more open to this possibility than he lets on. Certainly, within Scripture it is observable that recognition most often occurs not through the communication of abstract principles but through God’s providential actions in the human story.

The pre-eminent Old Testament example is of course the Exodus. It is through God’s judgement on Egypt and the deliverance of Israel that both will come to know the LORD.¹³ Likewise in the New Testament we come to recognise the love of God through Jesus Christ laying down His life for us.¹⁴ In both Testaments God’s people are given means to remember, recount and re-live these foundational divine actions through the Passover and Eucharist respectively.

Shaped by these actions and this story God’s people are then able to form community in which fundamental equality before God is combined with ongoing difference without one cancelling out the other. Elsewhere I have sought to show how this works itself out for Jewish and Gentile believers according to Paul’s letter to the Romans.¹⁵

What has this to do with contemporary debates? Insofar as the teaching of Scripture reveals something true about the nature of the world it suggests a healthy Constitution is shaped both by principle and story, equality and difference, without one cancelling out the other.

As far as the Australian Constitution is concerned the ‘story’ is contained in the preamble:

WHEREAS the people of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, and Tasmania, humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God, have agreed to unite in one indissoluble Federal Commonwealth under the Crown of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and under the Constitution hereby established ...

¹¹ See eg the article by Greg Sheridan [Voice a dagger to the heart of liberalism - The Centre for Independent Studies \(cis.org.au\)](http://www.cis.org.au)

¹² Op cit, p72

¹³ Amongst many see Exodus 6:6-8 (for Israel) and Exodus 9:13-16 (for Pharaoh and Egypt)

¹⁴ Eg 1 John 3:16, 4:9

¹⁵ In my editorial for the June *Anglican News*

That story then qualifies, or at least shapes, how principles are applied elsewhere, for example through the stipulation that all the original states shall have the same number of Senators; as opposed to strict application of equal representation which would have seen the numbers determined in accordance with relative population.

There is of course one glaring omission in our Constitution's preamble and that is the absence of those who were present in this land for thousands of years before European colonisation. The place of First Nations peoples in our shared story is unique and cannot be generalised or paralleled to any other racial or ethnic group.

This then raises the question of how Constitutional recognition of this reality can occur – is it, for example, sufficient to modify the preamble to acknowledge our First Nations or, as in the case of Senate representation is it appropriate to allow this reality to shape other Constitutional provisions? My view is that, as in the case of Senate representation, a Constitutionally-enshrined advisory Voice is an appropriate means of recognising equality *and* difference in this aspect of our common life.

There is of course much more than can and will be said. Let me conclude with these words from my June editorial.

I encourage all of us to listen carefully and speak wisely in the months ahead. The greatest potential to divide our nation, our communities and our churches lies not in the outcome of the vote but in overblown rhetoric and careless attitudes in the lead up to it. Please be particularly mindful of our First Nations neighbours, especially those who share our faith in Christ. Few of us who come from a different cultural background can imagine what it feels like to have one's identity a subject of national debate ... My prayer is that as we engage as God's people with these weighty matters we might commend the gospel, not least through our willingness to be distinctively grace-filled in our words and actions.

Farewells and Thank You

As we gather in Synod I recognise and thank God for those members of our Diocesan family who are not with us having been called to glory or to other ministries since we last met. These include:

Deaths

Mr Phil Bloomfield

The Reverend Dr John Cohen

The Reverend Daniel Octigan

Ms Janet McKinney

Mrs Pam Wright

Mr Graeme Williamson

The Reverend Canon Dr Robert Withycombe

Mr David Shephard

Retirements and Re-locations

The Very Reverend Phillip Saunders

The Reverend Stephen Davis

The Reverend Ian Marshall

The Reverend Byron Steele

Mr Jeremy Halcrow

The Reverend Dr Andrew Cameron

Mr Jeremy Halcrow

I also thank God for all who continue to serve, from 221 London Circuit to the various extremities of our Diocese and especially my wife Monica, with whom I share the joys and challenges of ministry and more recently of grandparenthood!

Finally, we acknowledge someone for whom this will their final Synod. Bishop Carol Wagner has advised me that she will be retiring and concluding her service as Assistant Bishop early in the New Year. Since her ordination in 2001 Carol has served with diligence and distinction in the Parishes of North Goulburn, Taralga, Berridale/Snowy Mountains and Bodalla/Narooma and as a Regional Archdeacon. In her current role she has helped us make major strides in our processes and policies for clergy and ministry well-being and vocational discernment as well as being a trustworthy and gracious confidante and colleague to me and to many others. I am sure you will join me in thanking God for her and wishing her and Jay many years of joyful and fruitful retirement on their beloved South Coast.

Conclusion

In 2019 we considered the image of low fences and deep waterholes to describe our common mission. In similar vein here is an image from Psalm 84:5-7

Blessed are those whose strength is in you:

In whose heart are the highways to Zion;

Who, going through the valleys of dryness,

find there a spring from which to drink:

till the autumn rains shall clothe it with blessings.

They go from strength to strength:

they appear, every one of them,

before the God of gods in Zion.

What a precious reminder of God's amazing and sufficient grace as we journey through the changing circumstances of life and culture! More than mere survival, God calls us from strength to strength in Him. During the next three years of our shared pilgrimage may we drink deeply of God's living water freely gifted in the Lord Jesus Christ, and In God's time, appear before the One who is both the way and the goal. AMEN