

"...for such a time as this":  
Address at the National Convention of the  
Woman's Christian Temperance Union

Salvation Army Hall, Central Adelaide

27 May 2009

When Ellen asked me to give this address, I was reminded of an experience which a certain historian from England had in Australia. Invited to lecture at Sydney University and Moore Theological College, en route he arrived in Perth in the early hours of the morning, and, jet-lagged, collapsed into a taxi, and asked to be transported to his hotel.

'Where are you from?' asked the chatty taxi driver.

'England.'

'What do you do?'

'University lecturer.'

'In what subject?'

'History.'

'What period of history?'

'Early modern English history.'

'Who,' asked the taxi driver, 'in your opinion ruled more wisely: the Plantagenets or the Tudors?'

Suddenly the Professor was wide awake, with all his survival instincts on the alert. 'Help,' he thought, 'if the taxi drivers of Perth are like this, what must the historians and theologians of Sydney be like?'

When I asked Ellen what she wanted me to talk about, tonight, she replied that her **preliminary thoughts** were that I might speak on the need society has for people who can make a difference, for people who are culture changers, people who will change the culture in order to maintain a sound democracy. I thought, 'Help, if those are Ellen's preliminary thoughts, how good would her mature thoughts be? And she will be surrounded by those capable of such inspired thinking.'

Well, I'm a Sydney Anglican. Sydney Anglicans exegete inspired texts. So I want to unpack the inspired marching orders which Ellen gave me, namely our own nation's need for people who can make a difference, for people who are culture changers, for people who will change the culture in order to maintain a sound democracy. And, and since this is an after-dinner address and you will need to be provoked in order to stay awake, I've cast my three propositions in the form of three offences.

### Three offensive Propositions

1. The Muslims are right
2. Temperance is not a Christian word

### 3. Fathers always know best

My first proposition, that the Muslims are right, is designed to offend you in your Christian commitment.<sup>1</sup> My second proposition, that Temperance is not a Christian word, is designed to offend you in your commitment to the WCTU, and the third proposition that fathers always know best, is designed to offend you in your commitment to the feminist cause, which I trust you all embrace, at least to some degree. I know that my wife and daughters do.

Now, I am aware of the Scripture, Matt 18:7, exegeted most memorably by Abraham Lincoln in his second Inaugural, ‘. . . offences must come, but woe to that man by whom the offence comes!’

I do not want ever to use the Lord’s words in jest, and for that reason let me say upfront that, in triply offending you, my intent is far more serious than just keeping you awake.

#### **1. The Muslims are right.**

In 1962 Indonesia entered Irian Jaya (West Papua). President Sukarno persuaded President Kennedy to allow the takeover by threatening to make Indonesia a Communist state if the Americans objected. In the same year, the American missionaries, Don and Carol Richardson, arrived in Papua. They worked among a tribe reputedly still cannibalistic, and developed what became known famously as a ‘redemptive analogy’, about which Don’s missionary classic “Peace Child” is written. The Christianisation of Irian Jaya continued apace. There were numerous revivals.<sup>2</sup> Irian Jaya became one of the most Christianised places on earth. In many regions, the entire population went to church on Sundays. Meanwhile, following the Indonesian takeover, the Javanese population in Irian Jaya increased steadily, people of a different culture and a different religion. Muslim groups plan to make Irian Jaya a Muslim country by 2030. How will they do this? By force, if necessary.

In 2009 Tony Golsby-Smith, a business consultant from Sydney, visited Irian Jaya. He found another reason why Irian Jaya will succumb to the Muslims. The type of Christianity which the faithful missionaries had inculcated in the people was brilliantly successful in getting people to church, at making them very religious and respectful of the sacred. But these same missionaries had taught them to separate the sacred from the secular, and they were not interested in the secular world of business, politics, education – all the positions of leadership outside the church were occupied by Muslims. The Christians then were not in any position to do what Ellen

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<sup>1</sup> Not that you are likely to take offence at this. Values surveys show that churchgoers are more tolerant of non-Christian religions than non-churchgoers.

<sup>2</sup> R. Seton Arndell, ‘The Revival among the Kyaka Enga People of Papua New Guinea,’ *South Pacific Journal of Mission Studies*, 2.1, November 1991, p.11; *An Outline History of Evangelical Revivals in the Pacific Islands and in Papua - New Guinea plus Three Addresses on the 1972 Revival in Papua - New Guinea* by Margaret Reeson, Joan Rule, and Keith Everingham. Compiled and Edited by Robert Evans *Research in Evangelical Revivals*, 2007  
<http://revivals.arkangles.com/docs/EvangelicalRevivalsInThePacific.pdf>

asked for, namely to make a difference in their society, because they were not in their society as Christians. The Muslims were in the society as Muslims, but the Christians were not in the society as Christians.

Tony Golsby-Smith, to his astonishment, found himself speaking to thousands of West Papuans because he told them that the Lord wanted them to occupy the building blocks of their society as Christians. He taught, not a different gospel, but the whole gospel. He gave them effectively, not a redemptive analogy, for they already had that and they understood it well, but a whole-of-creation analogy, which they did not have. He told them that Christ wanted them to occupy the market place as well as the pulpit. The Lord wanted the Christians to be salt and light in the world, not just in the church. He told them that their society needed not a Sunday only Christianity which allows for the division of the sacred from the profane, because that only allows those of another faith to occupy the profane, which is exactly what the Muslims are doing, and insofar as that is what the Muslims are doing, the Muslims are right.

Now, this is but an extreme and not necessarily very fair example of the inadequacy of a type of Christianity which is disengaged from everyday life. It is not a fair example because the disengaged nature of West Papuan Christianity is not the only reason why it is threatened. It is threatened by trenchant opponents, who would be trenchant towards Christians no matter what the form of Christianity is like.

Actually it is a fairer example of what is wrong with Western Christianity than with West Papuan Christianity, for it is that Western brand of Christianity which separates the secular from the sacred, which the missionaries had taken to Irian Jaya. In Australia, too, Christianity is far too confined to the church as its *modus and locus operandi*; it is too little engaged in the market place; our Australian commentariat, or fourth estate, from which Christians are woefully absent, is blissfully ignorant of Australia's Christian heritage, and what Christian commitment can do for our citizenry and for the stability and prosperity of our nation. Those who identify themselves as social commentators tend to trot out the mantra of the separation of Church and State which means that Christianity can be ignored as irrelevant to the concerns of public life.

And the churches, for the most part, accept this marginalization. When the secularist social commentators tell us Christians not to interfere, we don't! We accept far too readily that any contribution we make in the public sphere is not a constructive and valuable contribution which society needs to adopt for its own welfare, but is rather interference, unwelcome, irrelevant and ill-advised. But, in any case, that rejection does not matter all that much because we Christians are so busy playing church that we do not have time or energy for non-religious concerns anyway. 'For such a time as this' we need a theology of engagement and the knowledge which only comes from the tough experience of engaging in the world of affairs. Only then will we have any purchase on public policy, on social wellbeing, and on cultural enrichment.

Wendy Simpson was born in Melbourne and now lives in Sydney. She has been thrice nominated as 'business woman of the year'. She is a goer. She and her husband have been foster parents to twelve children. And, as a young woman she

joined the WCTU. Why? Because she loved the engagement of its members in political and social action. Like them, she wanted to make a difference. So the Muslims might be right to want to be fully engaged in every aspect of their society, but Wendy Simpson is also right, which means the WCTU is also right. Maintain your engagement. Keep bridging the chasm in our society between the sacred and the secular. For such a time as this, the members of the WCTU must resolve to be present in our society, our community, our nation, as Christians.

## **2. Temperance is not a Christian word**

If Professor Edwin Judge, foundation professor in Ancient History at Macquarie University, were addressing you tonight instead of me, he would say, 'Now, concerning the WCTU, I hope you realize that temperance is not a Christian value. It is a classical virtue.' If you are offended by that, you might be able to forgive Edwin because his mother was a determined WCTU veteran in New Zealand. During the New Zealand elections when the ballot paper always had on its top line an opportunity to vote for local option, she would stand in the Cathedral Square in Christchurch in her early 20s and sing in a fine soprano voice, 'Strike out the top Line'.

Western civilisation, Judge argues, came to be built on biblical morality together with some classical virtues which Christianity endorsed rather than replaced. The so-called seven cardinal or heavenly virtues are made up of three biblical moral values and four classical virtues. The biblical values are faith, hope and compassion (care, practical love or charity). The classical virtues are courage, justice, temperance, prudence. Notice that the Graeco-Roman virtues are concerned with the inherent qualities of the individual; Biblical morality is concerned with our response towards others. Classical values are individualistic and self-referential; Biblical values are relational and personal.

And, if we want to understand Australian society, we need to realise the extent to which it has been forged out of the creative interaction between classical virtues and Christian values. The WCTU is an expression of that creative interaction – it has taken a classical virtue and Christianised it so that it will strengthen our relationships and the whole of our society, rather than just make one group of people feel morally superior to another.

Let me explain this a little more. In Australia, we have been talking about values now for a decade or so. It has not proved a particularly fruitful debate because it has been so abstract. It was better done at the memorial service for the Victorian Bushfire victims, by PM Rudd, when he spoke of the values of courage, compassion, and resilience. Courage is a classical virtue – one of the big four, as we have seen, along with justice, temperance and prudence; compassion is the Christian value par excellence, and resilience, well that does seem to be very Australian somehow.

Now, the point about temperance, as with courage, is that Christianity has made such virtues part of its own value system, and in the process, it has modified their meaning. The fruit of the Spirit we are told includes self-control, which surely is another word for what Christians mean by temperance. It is self-control, not for the

self-satisfaction which comes from self-mastery, but it is for the sake of others: you are satisfied with less of good things so that others might have more, and you have less of harmful things, so that others, by your example, might also be content with less, and so cause less self-harm. This, I assume, is the meaning of temperance as proclaimed by the WCTU.<sup>3</sup>

Now when Ellen said that we need people who make a difference, people who change culture, we can see that the way in which Australian culture needs to be transformed is that it needs to be more influenced by these classical virtues and Christian values than it is. We need to have a culture in Australia, not of self-indulgence but of self-control, not of drug-dependence but of human interdependence.

That is why in the WCTU you are so, so, so right to campaign against alcohol abuse. Australia's drinking culture is a manifestation of self-indulgence so extreme that it is way outside the boundaries of reasonableness. Muslims are right about this too – many of them are appalled by our drinking culture. 50% of Asian students enrolled in a certain Sydney university college leave before the end of the first term, horrified by all the drinking. It is the culture which needs to be changed precisely because so many in our society cannot see it. Blind drunk, you could say. And the blind drunk are very loud in their support of their culture. And the problem is that we take what the most vocal say as the norm: it is normal to drink to excess: not to drink to excess is not normal; and not normal is not to be trusted.

But these self-identified normal ones say some very abnormal things. Consider the policewoman who was appointed to work in an indigenous community where there was a total drinking ban; no alcohol could be brought into the community. But she contended that she should be allowed to bring it in and consume it, because Aboriginal people need to realize that alcohol consumption is part of the white man's culture, and if they (the indigenous people) want us to respect their culture, they should respect ours. Or there is the sad case of Nick Darcy, the swimmer disqualified from Olympic and world champion competition for assaulting a fellow swimmer when under the influence. He explained that he felt the need to binge drink because he had had to go without for so long while training that he felt he had missed out. He therefore had to catch up and consume as much liquor as he would have drunk had he not had to do without while training. There is a certain logic in both arguments. But, surely any culture which accepted that logic must be changed.

To multiply examples would be the easiest thing in the world. Page after page of our daily newspapers are full of examples of appalling human behaviour fuelled by alcohol. Why do we not rise with one voice and proclaim loud and clear: 'This is utter madness! Enough! More than enough!' Well, we don't because our culture tells us that such a stand would be unAustralian. The liquor industry makes sure that our culture continues to believe that, and applauds the condemnation of its opponents

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<sup>3</sup> On 6 December 2008 at the University of New South Wales, a conference was held, funded by the ARC Discovery Grant, on "Restraint: Recovering the Virtue of Self-Control or Temperance to Strengthen the Australian Social Fabric".

as moralizing, kill-joy ‘wowsers’. The liquor industry, since our foundation, has been the most powerful lobby group in Australia.

The Anglican Rector of Redfern in Sydney, Francis Bertie Boyce, was President of the NSW Alliance for the Suppression of Intemperance for 24 years. His massive tome *The Drink Problem in Australia or The Plagues of Alcohol and the Remedies* was published in 1893 by the British National Temperance League and gave him an international reputation. Boyce was a great organiser, but he could see that the temperance movement demanded all his organisational energy and political skill. The liquor lobby, he insisted, was unscrupulous and unrelenting and had to be opposed by a persistent and determined organisation.

This is what the WCTU needs to be today, because the liquor lobby’s profession of goodwill and fairness deserves to be treated with maximum skepticism. Actually, the chief of the AHA in NSW, Sally Fielke, a South Australian, appointed in mid-2008, lost no time in getting the lobby to revert to its old style. She seems to prefer a confrontationist approach. Her comment that Kevin Rudd is not a wowser, because he hangs out at strip joints in NY, is a disingenuous, cheap shot. Those who want to put the brakes on drinking are wowsers who want a nanny state.

There had been those in the liquor industry who claimed to support responsible drinking. But the only responsibility Sally Fielke wants is for the industry to have the self-responsibility of controlling its own affairs, so that it will not have to submit to the restraints of taxation and government regulation.

The self-regulating liquor industry counsels us that it is wiser to keep pubs open for longer so that drinkers can pace themselves more calmly without bolting it down as they did in the notorious 6 o’clock swill days, and now they are telling us that medical tests prove that alcohol in moderation is good for your health.

There are fatal flaws in their arguments as I see it.

1. Legalising a product always increases its consumption. Legalizing longer opening hours for liquor outlets or pubs will always increase the consumption of alcohol. Of course it will – that is why the liquor lobby spends a fortune seeking to increase opening hours. Legalising a greater variety of liquor products such as alcopops always increases the consumption of alcohol. Of course it does – that is why the liquor lobby introduced them. Blind Freddy, unless of course he was blind drunk, could see that this cynical move was going to prove a disaster.

2. The problem with the liquor industry’s case is that it is not only wowsers who are against the consumption of liquor. So too is science. We Christians should not be surprised. I like to think that as we approach the Lord’s return, all genuine scientific discoveries will reinforce, not contradict, the revealed truth of the Bible, which condemns binge drinking. WCTU members will not be surprised either: the WCTU has always seen science as its ally. At your first Convention in 1891 science was on the agenda, and Isabel McCorkindale, I notice, when she was Director of the WCTU

Educational Committee from 1929 was also Director of Scientific Education among Young People.<sup>4</sup>

Recently science has demonstrated conclusively that alcohol is very damaging to the human brain from early childhood to early adulthood. We now understand that the brain changes very considerably in late adolescence and early adulthood. That this age group is a well-known 'period of Storm and Stress' was recognised long before modern science confirmed it. Shakespeare, in 'A Winter's Tale', Act III, sc 3 speaks of people of this age as impossible.

I would there were no age between sixteen and three-and-twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest; for there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancients, stealing, fighting

Young adults are far more likely to have brain snaps, we have always known that. But now science has confirmed that these changes make the brain extremely allergic to alcohol. Among the best research done on this is that conducted in the University of Dunedin. Their own students make prime subjects for the research. According to this research, the average uni male student engages in 3 drinking episodes per week, consumes 9 drinks per episode, or 25 drinks per week.

Of those who drink in university colleges, 70% missed at least one lecture in the last 3 months because of alcohol, 37% failed to get in an assignment, 33% had passed out; 57% had hurt themselves; 60% had vomited; 22% had engaged in sex without a condom; 33% of girls had sex with someone they did not intend to; and 32.6% of boys regretted getting involved with a girl they did not want to.

Measuring changes in the adolescent brain has been limited by technology until recently. But with the development of MRI, which measures magnetic fields in the brain, we can now map these changes. Late adolescence, it has been shown, is a period of rapid change in the Prefrontal Cortex. This controls critical thinking, planning etc. and all the behaviours required of young people in the community as they enter adulthood: judgement, impulse control, self-monitoring, forward thinking, learning from experience, ability to feel and express emotions, empathy. Alcohol consumption impairs all of those behaviours, and we can now measure the extent to which the impairment happens. An MR image of an unimpaired brain shows it lighting up like a Christmas tree as all those impulses are fired off; in an alcohol impaired brain the lights go out. And they do not come back on. The impairment is irreversible.

It is very cynical of the liquor industry to promote alcohol consumption among young people. There have been recent moves to lift the drinking age to 21 as it is in the USA. These moves are not scientifically justified. Scientifically-speaking, the minimum drinking age should be raised to 24. To my knowledge only two of Australia's university residential colleges have alcohol bans, while others have alcohol-free wings. But it must surely be only a matter of time before college Boards

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<sup>4</sup> Isabel McCorkindale, ed., *Pioneer Pathways: Sixty Years of Citizenship* (Melbourne, 1948). 80.

ban alcohol because they could be sued for allowing the consumption of a drug which impairs the university student's greatest life-time asset, his or her brain.

I could go on. You have heard it all before. There is no safe consumption of alcohol for children, teenagers or pregnant women, so the research now demonstrates all over the world.<sup>5</sup> Is there, though, a safe level of alcohol consumption for those of us who are not children, young adults, or pregnant? The liquor lobby copiously reports medical research which purports to establish that red wine is an anti-oxidant and therefore, if consumed in moderate amounts, is good for lowering cholesterol and slowing the ageing process which is contributed to by oxidation, and that therefore the average moderate drinker is better off than the average non-drinker. The problem with that research is that the average non-drinker is made up of all of those ordered by doctors not to drink because their health is already endangered. Further, whatever health advantages accrue from the consumption of red wine are far more easily and safely acquired through the consumption of other foods and beverages which are anti-oxidants. They do not have the threats to health invariably accompanying alcohol consumption, because alcohol is so easily neurotoxic and hepatotoxic, damaging the brain and the liver. There will probably be an ongoing debate among those who are attracted to the WCTU as to whether to campaign for moderate drinking or total abstinence. The latter should always be an option. Perhaps most of your own members accept the formulation: 'total abstinence from all things harmful and moderation in all things good'.<sup>6</sup> Others of a more postmodern disposition might prefer, 'moderation in the potentially harmful, and bingeing on all things good'. But that could hardly be foundational to good policy.

Talking about binge drinking, *New Scientist* recently published an article on seven ways to increase your creativity. One way is to binge drink. 'Alas,' concluded the article, 'not just one but several separate studies have come to the same conclusion: drinking alcohol does not make you more creative, it just makes you feel you are, which, as everyone knows, is the next best thing.'<sup>7</sup>

The WCTU is over 125 years old in Australia, but it is still right to combine Christian with temperance. That is a very powerful cultural synthesis of classical virtue and Christian morality. It is as right now as it has ever been to campaign against alcohol abuse. And rarely has it been such a politically hot issue as it is now, a reality which opens the door to success in that campaign. So, for such a time as this, keep doing what you have been doing for 125 years.

### **3. Fathers always know best**

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<sup>5</sup> The National Health and Medical Research Council has developed guidelines for alcohol use. See also reports from the Murdoch Children's Research Institute and The March of Dimes organisation in America.

<sup>6</sup> Judith Pargeter and National Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Australia., *For God, Home and Humanity : National Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Australia : Centenary History 1891-1991* (Golden Grove, S.A.: National Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Australia, 1995). 3, 251

<sup>7</sup> *New Scientist*, 9 May 2009, 36.

If we can see that our society needs citizens who make a difference, and its culture of self-indulgence needs to be challenged and changed, how do we do that? And, in particular, to take the last of Ellen's three challenges, what must we do to make Australia safer for true democracy?

It will not be easy. If I could turn our Lord's words, 'Woe to that man through whom the offence comes', through 180 degrees, our society does not take kindly to those who attack its most entrenched cultures. It does heap woe on the man or woman who, by crying 'enough', offends against the drinking culture. The prospect of having this woe heaped upon them is why so many Christians retreat into the safety of church. But we cannot stay there.

Through the Australian Christian Heritage Foundation, of which I am chairman, I have found that our politicians are crying out for church people to get involved, to show their true colours, so that our society will not be left to go to the dogs, and they are cross with us for not standing up for the right and doing it publicly with an unmistakable message. To make our society safe for democracy we should exercise our right of speaking into that public sphere where our democracy is played out.

Our democracy is worth defending. We are now actually one of the oldest democracies, and we are perhaps the most stable democracy in the world. Let us be in no doubt that that is because we are a Christian democracy. Our democracy has features which have only developed in Christian nations: the enfranchisement of all adult citizens; the civic responsibility of citizenship; equality of opportunity; justice for all; the rule of law; the security of order and wealth; the separation of powers; unity in diversity; and the panoply of freedoms – freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of worship, freedom of conscience and the right of private judgement.

Our democracy becomes safer when Christians participate in it, learning how to speak into its institutions. But how do we do that? I have a few suggestions. I would love to hear your suggestions for most of us Christians are pretty inexperienced in this game.

#### *1. Make the Invisible Visible.*

The Australian Christian Heritage Foundation wants to hold a second national forum in Parliament House, Canberra, in March 2010 on the theme, 'Making the Invisible Visible', and speakers will address the role of the Christian faith in the development of our democracy and in public life, seeking to make explicit what most people do not see, so that they will realise that Christianity have given us social and spiritual capital which we do well to draw on in our efforts at nation-building. To hold our first Christian Heritage Forum in 2006 we had to get parliamentary hosts, Christian politicians who would support us. We found no difficulty at all in getting them. I have been told that more than 60% of our federal parliamentarians have church connections. We should support them in their attempts to promote Christian values.

The Heritage foundation, secondly, is seeking to influence the national history curriculum which the Howard, and now the Rudd, government is calling for, so that

our school children will be inspired by stories of those motivated by Jesus to live for others. You can do something about this by getting on to the national curriculum website and letting the committee know that you want to see more on the Christian contribution to the development of Western civilisation in general and Australia in particular ([www.ncb.org.au](http://www.ncb.org.au)).

Thirdly, the Heritage foundation is seeking to establish in Canberra a Christian Heritage Centre along the lines of the National War memorial, for Anzac is not the only story of self-sacrifice in our history: so too is the story of Jesus in the hearts of many. That Centre would be the ideal place to showcase the WCTU story because you have saints galore in your heritage. If they are invisible to the Australian public now, they should be made visible.

## *2. Build virtuoso teams*

Don't attempt to change Australia on your own. Do it with your friends. That is another thing that the WCTU got right. It called itself the Woman's CTU, but the really important thing is that women ran it, conspiring together for time and eternity, on a host of issues. The WCTU in its history has put together many a virtuoso team such as Wilberforce did when he abolished the slave trade. Just imagine what conversations Catherine Booth Clibborn – 'La Marichale' – Frances Willard and Josephine Butler would have had. Or what about that South Australian virtuoso team made up of Serena Thorne Lake, the eloquent Bible Christian preacher; Lady Mary Colton, wife of the Mayor of Adelaide and Premier of South Australia and a Wesleyan benefactor on the grand scale; Rosetta Birks, a wealthy member of Flinders Street Baptist Church, who persuaded the Baptists to support female suffrage; Elizabeth Nicholls, a Wesleyan Methodist and an energetic organiser who identified with the WCTU following 'a remarkable spiritual experience'; Mary Lee, a Primitive Methodist, who urged South Australia to be in the vanguard of Christian nations by extending the vote to women thus establishing a just society, and Catherine Helen Spence, who though not an evangelical, campaigned for the good. They, like Wilberforce, knew how to co-operate across doctrinal differences when the cause was right.

Historian Beverley Kingston complains that this brand of feminism produced 'no compelling organizations': it was merely a deflection into morality and education instead of into a concern for equal rights.<sup>8</sup> But the reverse is true. Surely, equal rights was the first and most stunning achievement of the WCTU. It gathered 7,000 of the 11,000 signatures on the petition to the SA House of Assembly for female enfranchisement.<sup>9</sup> Soon after in 1894, the Bill was passed: one of the WCTU's proudest victories. Feminism would have been inconceivable without WCTU-style Christianity. Yours is a glorious Christian heritage. I hope you use it to inspire your social and political conspiracies.

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<sup>8</sup> Beverley Kingston, *The Oxford History of Australia, volume 3, 1860-1900: Glad, Confident Morning* (Melbourne: OUP, 1988), 104.

<sup>9</sup>

In principle, a team will have more chance of being a virtuoso team if it combines the specialised knowledge of the expert, with the resources of the business leader, with the networking capacity of those with political skills. Expertise, resources, connections, expressed through the grace of conspiratorial friendship which is a gift of Christ.

### *3. Campaign for the synergy of government, corporates and churches*

Don't accept the doctrinaire notion that the church must be kept so free from the state that no religious insights should be permitted in the public square. In welfare, in indigenous affairs, in education, in health, in the social services including aged care, the best solutions are found when governments, business corporations and churches, together with their clients, talk to each other and trust each other. Too often in our democracy, this most sensible of arrangements breaks down as governments pull the plug on arrangements which previous governments have made with church groups, and years of experience, together with commitment and resources, are lost. Let governments know clearly that you expect the synergy of government, corporation and church to be the norm in Australian society. And let your churches know that you expect nothing less from them than to enter into the arrangement.

But, you are asking yourselves, what about your third offence, that 'Fathers always know best?' Explain yourself and then please sit down. OK. My last point.

### *4. Seek the mind of the Lord and speak it*

The most important factor in motivating you to seek to make a difference is the conviction that God wants you to do it. You only acquire that conviction when you are aware of the presence of God in your life and are determined to maintain the sense of that presence. Your mission is a tough one; you must know that God is with you so that you will have the grace to persevere in it. That grace is the confidence that God has anointed you for such a time as this, giving you the words to speak his truth into needy situations.

The most important religious event in the life of our nation was arguably the 1959 Billy Graham Crusade, the fiftieth anniversary of which is now upon us. One of the most important reasons why it made such an impact was that Billy was quite confident that God had anointed him for 'such a time as this'. And he was confident that God had anointed him because he knew for a fact that tens of thousands of people were praying for him throughout the world, and that there had never been so much prayer for any event in the history of Australia.

Serena Thorne was the same as Billy in this conviction. There she was in 1870, at the tender age of 27, the biggest event in Adelaide, packing out the town hall on repeated Sabbath evenings, and between them, holding eight meetings a week including those held at midnight for prostitutes, which particularly upset the 'low publicans'. How could she do it? Prayer. She prayed that the Lord would give her 'more of the quickening breath of Pentecost': 'May the God of Horeb answer me by fire'. She had fire in her belly all right. When her fiancé, Octavius Lake, a preacher

with the Bible Christian churches, was foolish enough to let someone get away with the impression that he did not support women preachers, she broke off her engagement with him peremptorily. That brought him to his senses, and she took him back. A pity the clergy of the Diocese of Sydney did not have such women in their lives.

But how can you know that God is with you, anointing you to speak out to make the difference which only the hearing of His truth can make? Permit me to share with you an experience I had a few years ago in order to make this point.

I was involved in teaching a course at Macquarie University on the history of Christian spirituality. I knew that I did not know enough about it, so when I saw that a retreat for spiritual directors was being held I decided to go along even though I am not a spiritual director. It was taken by a Catholic priest and a Catholic nun. It was fascinating, and I took copious notes of everything that was said and done because there is a technique, a process in these things, which we Protestants know little enough about.

We were advised not to limit the way we think to the merely cognitive, the realm of rational logic. We were advised also to think experientially and contemplatively. To think experientially is to reflect on your core experiences, your formative and deformative and transformative experiences, and to trust your reflections on those experiences. To think contemplatively is the sort of rare thinking which we experience when we are so aware of the presence of God that we are no longer so conscious of our own needs and anxieties and ambitions, but of his glory and his grace and his purpose. In Catholic spirituality, as you may know, that beatific state may be approached through the processes of lectio, meditatio, oratio, contemplatio.

We were sent away to meditate on the temptations of our Lord in Matthew 4.1-11. What was the Lord's besetting temptation and what is yours? In that time I suddenly saw that one of my deformative experiences, which was an experience of rejection, the pain of not being able to have what I wanted, made me very reluctant to deny to anybody that they should have what they wanted. I did not want them to be as unhappy as I had been, and therefore, if anybody wanted anything, they should have it as far as I was concerned. Now, if you think about it, that is not a great philosophy for bringing up your kids, nor for heading up any sort of an organisation. I was then CEO of an organisation, and one member of staff, in particular, was making life a misery for every other member of staff because I had no inclination to stand up to him and tell him that he could not have what he wanted. I could now see that my reluctance to speak into situations like that would have to change.

I went home. The following Saturday was my daughter's wedding. It was the most miserable of days, dark, and it was raining cats and dogs. My daughter was totally heart broken. She had obviously envisaged this day for many a year. It would be all sunshine and the light would be intense in its brightness so that all could behold her incomparable beauty. But, instead she, like the day itself, was a sodden mass, weeping such copious tears that the inside of our house was as drenched as the outside world.

Her pre-retreat father would have stood around gingerly, muttering that it was indeed rotten luck, and that I really could not imagine what God was thinking when he allowed such a calamity. I would have thought this would have sounded sympathetic. But such a father never knows best. Instead, to my astonishment I found myself saying, 'Darling, it is normally said that a wedding is the bride's day, and that the role of everyone who attends is to make her happy. But in fact the reverse is true. How happy everybody is at your wedding depends entirely on how happy you are. If you go to your wedding unhappy, everybody will be unhappy. If you go radiant with your incomparable smile everybody will be delighted.'

Before my very eyes she was transformed. The determination, the resolve, the steel entered her soul. The sun came out in her face, the creases were replaced by those gorgeous dimples, and she put on a terrific show and it was a fantastic wedding. It **was** a show, it was an act, she knew exactly what she was doing and why she was doing it. She has often commented since on the unbelievably rotten weather, and the wedding photos bear testimony to the blackness of the clouds on that day. But she had a great time and she gave everybody a great time.

Thus my third offensive proposition. Fathers always know best, by which I mean, the father of the bride always knows best when he speaks *Coram Deo*, in the presence of God. We all know best when we speak *Coram Deo*.

If we are to speak into the heart of our needy nation we need to speak the words which come from the heart of God, and we will only find those words and the courage, that classical virtue, to speak them, if we are *Coram Deo*, in the presence of God. For such a time as this, we need His words, not our own, and therefore confer with your sisters in this movement so that your words will be arrived at collegiatively, and confer with Jesus, so that your words will be arrived at contemplatively.

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