

## Third Ordinary Session of the 45<sup>th</sup> Synod of the Diocese of Sydney: October and November 2001

### Presidential Address

By the Most Reverend Peter Jensen, Archbishop of Sydney Friday 26 October 2001.

#### OUR CONTEXT

“Fundamentalism” is an ugly word, with a fearful significance.

Strangely, it began life well, almost a hundred years ago. Powerful forces within our culture sought to deny the orthodox Christian faith. Humanity seized the central place, demanded freedom from God and called for the end of the authority of the Bible. In the face of modernistic attacks on the Bible and orthodox Christian faith, a number of evangelicals issued booklets defending “the fundamentals”. On the whole these “fundamentalists” made sober attempts to guard the truth; perhaps they were not radical enough, given the challenge of modern thought. Certainly it became a popular movement in the sense that its booklets were often aimed at the mass market rather than the scholarly world.

Unfortunately, it was not long before fundamentalism began to be associated with irrational, sub-standard defences of Christianity, often couched in shrill language, and accompanied by a literalistic reading of the Bible. It developed a reputation for fanaticism, and was scorned by cultured people. Today, “fundamentalism” implies an anti-intellectual, backward-looking and ugly zeal in the cause of religion.

And yet, in the contemporary world, we cannot dismiss it; not when it is linked to violence and terrorism; and not when we are called “fundamentalists”. The greatest apologetic challenge at the moment is to distinguish classical, orthodox Christianity from fundamentalism. An amazing, frightening consequence of the terrorism of September 11th is that all religion is being dismissed as violent and evil. Under the heading “Damn them all”, Nick Cohen of the London Observer (October 7th) writes: “If blame is to be cast, then the world’s religions must take the major share”.

Fundamentalism is not just Christian. Something of the sort has arisen in a number of religions as a response to militant unbelief. Western secularism – sometimes abetted by the Christian missionary movement – has penetrated cultures world-wide. The temper of modernistic secular thought is aggressively imperialistic; in the form of globalisation it respects no national boundaries. It awards the glittering prizes of power, knowledge and wealth, but at a price. Fundamentalism is, in part, a self-defence against modernity. It is an attempt to inhabit the past, to rebuild the fortified castles of ancient days.

Established cultures show a two-fold response to western secularism. To some extent they capitulate to the gift of technological power and its apparently atheistic scientific foundation. They become modern. On the other hand, they also develop an antagonistic response, using the real or imagined standards of the past to judge the present. The rate of change is too rapid; the loss of power too great; the walls go up. There is an intense hostility to freedom of thought, speech and action. There is a fundamentalist Islam and Hinduism, as communities and cultures protect themselves from simply becoming western and secular. Paradoxically, the fundamentalists are often adept at using the latest technology in the cause of the pre-modern ideas. Ancient thoughts travel on the modern web.

Of course, fundamentalism is not the only religious response to modernity. Some are conservative, others radical; some make minimal adjustments to earlier theology; others recast Christianity in the light of modernity. Some are massive intellectual constructs, like the works of the great Swiss theologian Karl Barth. Others are spirit-based revivals like the extraordinarily successful Pentecostal movement.

The strategic issue for Christians is very pressing. Is it better to join in the dance of secularism with the attendant danger of seduction; or is it better to be a wall-flower and sit coyly at a safe distance from the wicked fun? In these terms, fundamentalists are uncouth gatecrashers at life’s great rave party.

The modernistic culture takes swift revenge on any claims to religious truth. For Christianity, it has proved to be an extremely dangerous dancing partner. Secularism seeks to conquer all other thought forms, especially religious ones. Some of the greatest makers of the thought of the twentieth century world were explicitly anti-Christian – people like Sigmund Freud, Jean-Paul Sartre and Karl Marx. Many of the Christians who recast their religion in radical ways have in reality become captive to secular thought. Conservatives criticise these as

“liberals”, and they tend to denounce conservative Christians as “fundamentalist”. In this way, conservatism is linked with a dangerous social movement which seems anti-intellectual, fanatical, socially disruptive, racist, sexist and even politically dangerous. But this throwing of stones is a self-defeating policy.

Fundamentalists retreat from the modern world, refusing to join in the dance at all. But they are still present at the party. Their great contribution is their critique of radical Christianity and the complacency of the mainstream church. What they say to us is, that if we keep compromising with the world, the church will disappear, for no one will want to belong to it. And in this, at least, they have been proved right. Modernised Christianity is so anaemic that the denominations that embraced it are in danger of disappearing.

I am an evangelical Christian, but I am not a fundamentalist. Neither are the evangelical Christians of this Diocese. My consecration as bishop was a symbolic moment. It was incredibly moving for me to be consecrated by (among others) my honoured predecessor Harry Goodhew, and to be presented by two former Archbishops of this Diocese, Sir Marcus Loane and Bishop Donald Robinson. Here is an apostolic succession worth having – a succession in the classical apostolic faith as expressed in the reformed Anglican church. Loane, Robinson, Goodhew – who could ever pretend that such great leaders are “fundamentalist”? I want to place on public record my own profound sense of indebtedness to them. Imagine how this pygmy feels to follow such as these – let alone Barker and Mowll, the greatest of our 19th and 20th century bishops respectively. But follow them I do, and their legacy to me - and of this Diocese - is not fundamentalism.

I read the Bible literally – that is, on its own terms – but not literalistically. I read the Bible informed by the great classical expressions of our faith. My understanding of Jesus Christ impels me on to the dance floor of the world. His incarnation tells me that I must be involved in the world; I must learn its language; I must engage with – and learn from - its ideas; I must love its citizens and give myself to justice and works of compassion. But my understanding of the death of Jesus Christ also impels me to try to resist its blandishments, and to enter the world as a missionary. To love this neighbour I must also share the gospel of Jesus Christ with him or her, in all its purity and its power.

The radical Christianity represented at its most extreme by Bishop Spong is also missionary. In his case, secularism has turned him, and he has become an unwitting agent of the very forces which are attempting to destroy the gospel; in my view, a fisher of men amongst the Christians for a cause which is not Christ's. Such Christianity has compromised the purity of the gospel and therefore lost its saving power. In particular, it has undermined the authority of the Bible. Our nation needs a Christianity which is classical but not fundamentalist.

I have been trying since my election to argue the case for this intelligent Christianity in the public arena, actually to speak about God and the gospel from the Bible in a way that is clearly relevant to the world in which we live. I hope that you will be glad to be Anglican because public Anglicans stand for the gospel of Jesus. It will only be on those terms that Anglicanism will remain one of the most important elements in the Australian community. It won't do so by presenting as a pallid religious version of humanism. I want the media to report the Christian message, and not substitute a secularist twist for what we actually say. But for this to happen we must first speak Christianly, that is about Jesus, and, secondly, relevantly, that is to and about our humanity. To talk about social issues is a necessity; to talk only about social issues without God and his word is a cop-out.

So far I have portrayed modernism and secularism as extremely powerful forces, capable of destroying the church in the west. But, of course, they are nihilistic forces; they have nothing to satisfy the soul or save the lives of men and women. They are community destroying, not community affirming. Fundamentalists are not stupid. Whether in the US or in Pakistan, whether Christian or Muslim, they know emptiness when they see it. And modernism is malleable. It is subject to change, to transfiguration. To change as if by magic (Mac Uni); strange or grotesque transformation (OED). According to the analysts, modernism, with its heavy emphasis on human reason, has now become post-modernism: that is, reason has failed us and we now have an acute attack of relativism, a sort of peritonitis of the soul. The culture is all at sea; it needs a religious harbour; it needs to know its God. Fundamentalism is a powerful witness to that enduring need.

By labelling classical Christianity “fundamentalist,” our society – and many in the Christian movement - dismiss what they should promote. Talk about God is silenced; we are tamed; we are lampooned; occasionally, we are even demonised. All very well. But in doing this the world is eroding a form of the Christian faith which is proven to be spiritually satisfying, intellectually engaged and highly active in doing good works. You may criticise fundamentalism as both intellectually disreputable and politically dangerous, but the vacuous emptiness of secularism is no alternative. This will only prove the fundamentalist case; it will provoke a fundamentalist response. The adolescent tendency to be cynical and dismissive of all religion except designer-buddhism, has become cliched, tiresome and even perilous. What is needed is the satisfying well-spring of the true and living God himself. You can shove true theology out the back door, but there will be a queue of false religions at the front door before you have time to sit down in front of the tele.

Classical Christianity is based above all in the Bible. The scriptures have priority over all the thoughts of the human heart whether in the tradition of the church or in human experience. But orthodoxy is not in an intellectual isolation ward. In the first place it acknowledges the immense debt we owe to the Christians who have gone before us. It learns to interpret the Bible in the light of the reading of the Bible down through the centuries. In particular it learns from the early centuries of the church's reading of scripture, and it learns from the Reformation of the sixteenth century as well as the genuine advances of the more recent historical approach. And orthodox evangelicalism is also prepared to learn from contemporary thought. It recognises that current experience will always force us to ask new questions of the Bible and to discover truths of God's revelation which may have been neglected or not understood.

Classical Christianity calls us to believe together that we may mission together. We ought to recognise the sad truth, however, that under the impact of modernity and now post-modernity, our denomination will rarely or never achieve unity of the faith. Our witness is compromised by intractable differences of faith.

There was a defining moment at this year's General Synod which illustrates this. In the debate on homosexuality, Dr Glenn Davies said: "I hold the view that the plain teaching of Scripture is that homosexual practice is outside the purposes of God for humankind, and is against God's laws, and therefore will exclude a person from the Kingdom of God. That, I take it, is the teaching you will find in 1 Corinthians 6".

In the same debate, Dr Cathy Thomson, a learned theologian from Adelaide, said: "any contemporary study of how texts can be interpreted suggests that it is impossible to give precedence to the text itself, as indeed the text finds expression only in its apprehension by the human intellect; and the text can only realise meaning through its mediation within the context of a community, here – a faith tradition."

In short, our profound differences about homosexuality owe a great deal to *how we read*, and especially *how we read the Bible*. And what makes it "impossible to give precedence to the text," to adopt the plain or literal reading of scripture, is the person of the reader or readers, the fact that to reading we bring of necessity our personal prejudices, understandings and emotions. The reader – or even the community which reads - is integral to what is read.

It is hard to exaggerate the significance of this clash of approach. I want to assure you that we are dealing here with matters of great missionary as well as spiritual moment. It is precisely the question of how we should read which is on the agenda of the schools and universities of our nation. Teachers and students are adjudicating between the rights of the reader and the rights of the author to establish what texts mean. If we adopt Dr Thomson's approach, there is no "plain meaning of a text" of the sort Dr Davies wishes us to believe in. I am concerned that we may become masters of the text, masters of its many possible meanings. Valid human communication seems doomed. The undoubted fact that reading requires a reader, has been turned into the determinative fact for the establishment of meaning. At the extreme – which is much further than Dr Thomson went - it says unabashedly, "the reader is the Author"; when you get to that point you are in a contest with God, to establish who owns his text, for he claims to be the ultimate Author.

I am an orthodox evangelical Christian by conviction. I am grieved by our disunity in the faith. But in this perilous moment, I join hands with classical Christians of all types, especially in the Anglican church. I am saying to you that whatever differences we have – and they are significant - we must see that the threat to foundational beliefs and standard ethical commitments is now being posed by how we read the text of scripture, and that we must not dance with the world at this point. I am saying that we have in the scriptural gospel a message of enormous significance for the whole community. I am saying that we must not allow ourselves to be dismissed as fanatics and fundamentalists, but have confidence in the integrity of our message and in the "plain teaching of scripture". I am saying that we should affirm and promote without embarrassment classical, orthodox Christianity; Anglican Christianity and, for many of us, Anglican evangelical Christianity.

Unbelief is profoundly unloving, because it gives our fellow citizens only husks; it reaches into their homes and weakens them; it leaves their children without an understanding of God's law; it denies them the true knowledge of their Creator; it leaves them under the condemnation of God and not his blessing. Furthermore, secularism reaches into our homes. It is not as though we can isolate ourselves from the world. The children of Christian families may well be better equipped and better guarded against the world, but they can never be made invulnerable to it. They, too, are being taught new, subjective ways of reading texts. The state of the culture remains of high significance to us whether we like it or not. Secularism damages the nation and fills the halls of hell.

## OUR MISSION

Do we care? In the face of this sort of world, what sort of Diocese do we propose to be? Most of us would identify ourselves as classical Christians, most indeed as evangelical Christians; neither fundamentalist or liberal. The question for us is, are we merely an establishment church, or do we propose also to be a missionary church? Allow me to repeat what I said at the Deep Impact rally in August:

“Church-going Anglicans in Sydney are about 1% of the population. We are becoming invisible. It is almost as unusual to have a friend who is a church-going Anglican, as it is to have one who is an animal-keeper in the zoo. We are poised to become exotic. Most people will never meet or know one of us; it is hard for our children to have sufficient friends to support them. How will our neighbours hear the gospel from us?

“If we wish to have a deep impact on our society - humanly speaking – we need to aim in the next decade to have at least 10% of the population who are committed, equipped and bold to speak in the name of Christ. Whether God will so bless us, is in his hands. But this ought to be our aim. There will need to be more of us, and the more of us will need to be more deeply committed, more constantly prayerful, more missionary-minded, more confident in God, better equipped, better educated in the Bible and more prepared to sacrifice time and money and worldly happiness than ever before.”

I do not believe that I have been brought to this position of Archbishop in order to acquiesce silently in the passing away of Anglican Christianity in this region. I cannot look out in satisfaction and complacency at our past achievements. I cannot compare us with Christians elsewhere and draw comfort. I can say that, given the events of the last decades, we have done well in various ways. I can say that there are elements of the present situation which give us cause for hope and joy. I can say that all is not lost. But we need to recognise that we live in days of crisis, in days of decision, for our Anglican Church in Australia and for the evangelical movement in this land and for our Diocese in particular. Choices lie before us - difficult choices. It is no accident that Bishop Spong says that Australia is his most fruitful mission field, that he expects his sort of Christianity to flourish here. He is right. Crowds flock to hear him and some churches even support him - they are like turkeys voting for an early Christmas.

That is the point at which we have arrived. And that is why I have proposed that we make this the mission statement for our Diocese and to follow out the consequences by acting on it:

“To glorify God by proclaiming our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ in prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit, so that everyone will hear his call to repent, trust and serve Christ in love, and be established in the fellowship of his disciples while they await his return.”

Why have this statement? It aims to bring God’s word home to us just as and where we are. It is not intended to be a complete statement of theology – it is trinitarian in shape, but there is nothing explicit here about sin, atonement, or the scriptures, for example. It is not intended to include or justify all the valid activities which we may engage in on behalf of Christ. At another time it is possible that a different mission statement may emerge. It is not intended to be compulsory. In no way will parishes or individuals be forced to subscribe to it. I do not mind much that some will look for a more pithy and memorable statement. I am more concerned that it be recognised for what I trust it is, a prophetic application of God’s word to our present situation. And, if it is the application of God’s word, it will persuade us to make decisions, show faith and enter commitments.

What do I mean by the claim that the mission statement is the application of God’s word to our situation? It means this. We are not content to be a hobby organisation; we believe that we have a message of salvation for the world; we are bound to accept the immense challenge to share the knowledge of God. Let me now explain why I think that this is God’s challenge for us at this time. In brief, I believe it is, because what I have said is so firmly rooted in scripture.

It is precisely from within the missionary situation of his own time that the Apostle Paul speaks to us about this: “So whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews or Greeks or the church of God – even as I try to please everyone in every way, For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” (1 Cor 10:31-11:1). What is our purpose in life? More specifically what is the purpose of our behaviour towards others? “do it all for the glory of God.”

Even our love for others comes second to our love for God. We who belong to him, wish to see him receive the glory that is due to him; we wish his reputation to be high over all; we wish that every knee would bend before him; we wish that the songs of all the redeemed would echo his praise; we pray that God would hallow his own

name. The glory of God and the salvation of his people are united. Salvation reveals his glory and creates a people who glorify him as their goal in life. Ezekiel teaches us that the hallowing of God's name is something which he himself does as he saves his disobedient people and restores them (Ez 36:16-23). In the end, human beings are mere creatures, and our greatest good is found when God is glorified, when he is given his rightful place as the centre of all things. That is the goal of creation; the moment is going to arrive when "the Son himself will be made subject to him...so that God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

To commit ourselves to the glory of God is an entirely fitting aim for human beings; but it is also a proper introduction for what follows. In fact, if you just wish to have as your mission statement "to glorify God", all else will follow, for the salvation of the world is his glory. That is why Paul says in this very context, "For I am not seeking my own good, but the good of many that they may be saved." And that is why the next words have to isolate the proclamation of the gospel as the way by which people are saved.

The scriptures emphasise the importance of the godly life in the process of proclaiming the gospel (eg 1 Peter 3:2). Indeed that is Paul's point in this very passage. But although the godly life adorns and commends the message, it does not take the place of the message. In God's economy of salvation, it is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ which is the saving instrument. It is the word, but not merely any word, or indeed any word about God: it is the word that Jesus Christ is Saviour and Lord: "we preach Christ crucified...to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:22-23).

Now let me give two provisos in saying this. The first arises because I isolate the word of God as the special means of God's saving work. I am not saying, that all of us are involved in proclaiming the word in the same way. We ought all to be prepared to "give a reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15), but opportunities, gifts and training differ from person to person. In the body there are many gifts. Secondly, however, we all retain our responsibilities to *support* the proclamation of the word, and to give it the highest priority in our support. After all, the hallowing of God's name is the first petition of the Lord's prayer, and his name is hallowed in the salvation of his people. You do not have to be a missionary to be an extremely active supporter of missionaries.

When we see the mission statement and the goal together we may think that we are being invited to solve all the world's problems with one answer and in our own strength. But God does his own far wider work in the world without our co-operation at all, and the gospel of Jesus does not need us in order to make progress. Immediately, therefore, the mission statement goes on to say that we are to proclaim the gospel of Jesus 'in prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit'. Salvation and the application of salvation to the human heart are the business of God; he graciously allows us to be involved, but he is the one who must do these things. All our efforts will be quite fruitless, without trust in God expressed especially in prayer. One of the immediate consequences of accepting this mission statement would be the notable multiplication of prayer for its fulfilment.

Paul told the people of Athens "God commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:31; also Mk 1:14,15). The gospel is universal, it does not discriminate between races or language groups or any other human diversities. If we wish to be involved in God's gospel ministry, we too need to be universal in our outlook and not restricted to people of our own kind, race or class. We cannot be satisfied with the penetration achieved by the gospel in this Diocese. There are too few people; we are too restricted to the professional and middle class; we are too limited to European and English speaking tribes. A commitment by us to this mission is a commitment to all people that they will at least hear the gospel in its true form. The repentance that Paul and Jesus speak of first in these texts is the repentance of faith. That is, its first action is to put trust and confidence in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the one mediator between God and humankind.

One of the most important theological truths to get right is the connection between saving faith and obedience. We are not saved by good works, by obedience. But salvation leads to good works; faith is the mother of obedience. The rest of the mission statement tells us of the powerful effects of the gospel of Jesus. By receiving him as Lord, we commit ourselves to walking with him by faith and in love. On hearing of the mission statement a number of people have expressed concern lest the good works that we do as individuals and in churches and organisations such as Anglicare and the Retirement Villages are omitted. Nothing can be further from the truth. We are to serve Christ in love; this means that we are to love our neighbours and to be involved in works of love in the community in which our lives are set. Indeed holy living itself attracts people to the Lord.

But the holiness is a fruit of the gospel, and if we fail to get the order right, we will confuse the means of salvation with its consequences. If we wish our lives to be productive with the good works of God, we must give the proclamation of the gospel a priority of place and a uniqueness of effect. That done, we must serve Christ in the community and in the home and in the church with all our hearts. Our goals as churches and Christians are multiple not single. If we fail to get this right our good works will be done for the wrong reason, they will be the wrong good works, and unregenerate people will be doing them. The very soul of our denomination is at stake in getting this matter right.

The church is not incidental to salvation. God saves individuals, but he adds them to his people, and he often saves them in the midst of his people. We cannot be content to see individuals won to Christ without also seeing them established in the Christian fellowship. In the future, that fellowship may not look much like the standard Sunday church which we may be used to. Its timing, form, location, size and membership may be very different. But the fact of fellowship around the Lord Jesus Christ cannot be different; in particular, like him, we are looking for fellowships made up of disciples, of learners who seek to obey him and walk in love. I am saying that as a missionary strategy the mission statement is calling on us to multiply Christian fellowships, not to be content with a parish-based Anglicanism alone, but to insist on a spiritually based Anglicanism in which the reality of the church is more important than its outward shape. I am saying that the quality of our churches as nurturing communities must be strong if we are to survive and grow.

The fellowship of Christ's disciples will be marked by faith and they will be marked by love. They will also be fellowships of hope. They will not be so caught up in this world as to forget the world to come and the coming Saviour. When Paul spoke of his early converts in Thessalonica, he praised them for their faith and for their love and then he refers to the fact that "you turned from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath" (1 Thess 1:9-10). This will be one of the chief ways in which these Anglican fellowships are going to differ from the world around, for the sake of the world around.

"The coming wrath" is a phrase that brings home to us the significance of the issues of which I am speaking. There is a day of judgement; there is eternal life and there is eternal condemnation; the issues of judgement are worked out in this life; there is a Saviour and his name is Jesus. That men and women are in need of salvation from the coming wrath; that this, indeed, is their most desperate need. These are so clearly, so plainly the teachings of the Bible that it is scarcely necessary to recite them. But what are we doing about them? I trust that all persons here have turned to Christ as their only hope of salvation from the coming wrath. I trust that this is your position as I speak to you. But if it is – what should you be prepared to do to forward the work of salvation for others?

I realise, of course, that in saying this I have come to one of the chief "rocks of offence" for the post-modern world: the fact that there is a coming wrath, a day of judgement. The compulsive relativism of our contemporary world cannot cope with this fixed and immovable future point, this moment of absolute truth, when the secrets of all hearts will be disclosed. And, unfortunately, this is precisely where the contemporary church has shown itself to be pitifully weak. It will not preach the coming wrath, and it will not announce Jesus as the one true Saviour of humanity.

September 11th was one of those days when the world changed. We all knew that it was possible for wicked and desperate men to do fearful damage in the great cities of the world. We knew it, and yet the fact that no such thing had ever happened made us confident that no matter how desperate and wicked men are, they would not be party to such a slaughter of the innocents. Now we know better, and without wishing to be alarmist I have to say that if such a deed can be perpetrated, there is no reason whatever why far worse and more horrible things may not be done. Indeed, the faces of the innocent in Afghanistan are beginning to haunt us also, as terror begets terror. On that day, surely, post-modernism died and we had to readmit the words "absolute evil" to the language. In the face of realistic human fears, hope, the forgotten virtue, may be one of the great distinguishing marks of the Christian fellowships. But it won't be a hope of the kingdom of God on this earth; it will be a hope of the coming of Jesus, and of his capacity to save us from the wrath to come. And yet this hope will be particularly important for the quality of life here on earth.

Let me apply this to a less apocalyptic, more mundane contemporary matter. In a short time we will be voting at a federal election. You may think that, with my strong emphasis on the future, matters like elections should be of little consequence to us. On the contrary, it is our gospel of the coming wrath which makes us intensely interested in all that goes on in our world, not least the issue of government. Our judgment in elections will be of significance in the final judgement. One of the elements of the political process which should especially concern us is the quality of candidates. I am told that there has been a very significant decline in the last thirty years in the number of people offering for pre-selection in all the major parties. The numbers have been slashed; the question now is – are there sufficient people of quality offering?

I fear that a major factor in all this is the contempt which is expressed about politicians almost universally in the community. Who would want to join the ranks of such a despised cohort? Cynicism has swallowed up intelligent political commentary; it is in danger of making the good work that our political leaders do, invisible. There is not much encouragement to be a committed servant of the people; on the contrary we have a tendency to reward politicians and parties who reflect some of the worst features of our national life, not least our selfishness and lack of generosity to those in need. I believe that the bi-partisan policy on refugees is not something of which we should be proud.

As those committed to classic Christianity we ought to think very hard about this. In the first place, our biblical view of sin should leave us with no illusions: political - and church - leaders are sinful and will often let us down. Secondly, we are right to ask for the highest standards of probity and integrity in public life and be disappointed when less is offered. Thirdly, we are also able to point the way to repentance and forgiveness through Jesus; we know what it is to admit a mistake or failing and then take appropriate action. When a political leader would admit to a false judgment or even an unworthy action, he or she is rarely forgiven. No wonder they are so inflexible and combative in public; how different things could be; would we forgive a political leader who said, for example, “my policy on tax, on education, on refugees is wrong, and I am going to change it”? In other words, the gospel of judgement is sharply relevant to key issues of political and community life.

That is the mission statement and something of its biblical basis and the reach of its application. It calls us to evangelistic mission as our chief priority. But it does not stop there; for evangelism must lead to conversion of life and heart, and to the life of justice and love in the community, and to the creation of rich and nurturing Christian fellowships, to strong churches. And this is not to pull us out of the community; on the contrary, voluntary associations such as ours are vital to the good health of the Australian community. For example, people whose lives are nourished by God in these fellowships should offer for community leadership.

Am I advancing novel ideas in saying all this? At the end of this year we farewell three of our most respected senior brothers, Ray Smith and Paul Barnett from their role as regional bishops, and Peter Smart as Registrar. There have been and will be other occasions in which more will be said by way of thanks for their service. Suffice to say that all of them lay down their tasks with our esteem and deep gratitude. As you know I am delighted that Glenn Davies, Peter Tasker and Philip Selden have agreed to succeed them. But, despite any differences in gifts and personalities between those who retire and those who succeed, there is no difference in commitment to this mission. They exemplify it in their lives. Furthermore, Ray and Paul were part of the committee that laboured hard to produce the mission statement and the document on strategic spending, and Peter and Glenn are members of the Standing Committee who present it to you for your consideration. What a great tradition we are able to unfold in this succession. I praise God for his provision!

## **OUR RESOLVE**

Which leads us to this Synod.

The Sydney Synod is first and foremost an assembly of brothers and sisters who represent the churches (and to a much lesser extent, the organisations) of our Diocese. The churches are the true heart of the Diocese. Our business is to work harmoniously together to foster the work of the gospel through the churches of our Diocese. The work of God goes forward especially in the churches; the Diocesan structures, even the most important of them, exist to serve the churches, not the other way around. All the legislative and political work of this assembly is meant to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and his people, not be an end in itself.

This means that the churches must not see themselves as small cogs in a giant machine; not as isolated and marginal gatherings forgotten by the centre; not as struggling but despised branches of a large corporation. Each church is at the centre; each church is where the action is. In all my extensive experience of this Diocese, wherever I go I almost always find someone who has a gripe about their relation with the alleged centre, usually known as “they” or “them” or “The Diocese”. *Let me assure you that this includes the people in the alleged centre.*

Let me exaggerate to make the point: all the organisations complain; all the committees complain; all the parishes complain; all the bishops complain about isolation – and you should hear the Archdeacons! Brothers and sisters, our true centre is in heaven; we march to the beat of His drum; Lithgow is just as close to the centre as St John’s Parramatta or St Andrew’s Cathedral or beautiful Ulladulla or the Archbishop. We must accept our local responsibilities, and in Synod work together for the glory of God and the good of all. Synod is not the coming together into the centre; it is the assembly of the congregations whose centre is the Lord Jesus Christ. Synod should be for us a joy as we work responsibly and in unity for the cause of the gospel through the churches in the Diocese and far beyond.

You will notice some changes in the way we conduct business at this Synod. Not only are we meeting over two weekends, but in this Synod we are going to hear more from some local churches, their hopes and dreams; we are going to have slightly more time, I hope, for motions; we have taken steps to speed legislation and give Synod the in-principle debate, rather than have us all stuck discussing endless amendments; we have incorporated time for discussion and prayer with the people seated around you; missionary hour has been revamped and you will already have noticed that the venue of the Synod service has changed. In none of this have the rights to free speech and to amend legislation been curtailed.

But we do need a change of mood so that we can own together the business which is before us and see its relevance to the mission of the Diocese. I hope that in the end it will be as natural to bring your Bible to Synod as it is to bring your seventh handbook. I hope that you will come to future Synods eager to hear how the churches are developing and how the mission is progressing; eager, in fact, to fellowship together.

We will be discussing all sorts of issues at this Synod; we will be voting in elections (perhaps the most important task of all); we will be hearing reports and praying; we have legislation before us; we must decide what to do about Gilbulla. In the end, however, it must be the mission statement and its implications which will dominate our thoughts. This Synod is the primary consultation about this call to mission. Our attitude to that is what this Synod will be known for. Let no one be deceived: it is a call for sacrifice, for change, for unremitting effort in dependence on God's Spirit. To plan for its fulfilment is going to require much work and hitherto undreamed of demands. The nature of ministry may change; episcopacy may change; parish structures may change; organisations may change; regionalism may change – it may be that we will need six regions rather than five, for example. If we are going to take the challenge of this mission statement seriously, we must be ready to commit ourselves to it by this time next year.

The key question before us is this: How do we evangelise the area we know of as the Diocese of Sydney? You may be sure, by the way that we will not do it by neglecting our mission responsibilities in the rest of Australia and the world. But nor will it be done through uninterrupted drift. Let me make the following five observations.

First, the talk of 10% is a mission strategy. We must be clear that we are not talking of a 10% increase in our churches, but 10% of the 5,000,000 people who make up our region. Humanly speaking, our aim is to reach the important base point of 10%, so that we may have some hope of effectively evangelising the other 90%. It is our necessary first stage. Please note that I am not endorsing big churches as our strategy here. Big churches have their place; so, too, do small churches. We just need lots more of both.

Second, we need to acknowledge at once that the task is absolutely daunting. As you look out over your part of the work it may be hard to imagine an increase of 10% in those going to church let alone 10% of the whole area. You may feel that you are already working to your limit; indeed you may be exhausted. But that is why this needs to be an aim of the Diocese as a whole. That is why we need to gear up all our resources to the mission; that is why we need to come to encourage innovation and permission giving. Sydney cannot be reached merely by the parochial system; the threefold ministry on its own is not enough; the world has utterly changed. History tells us that our nineteenth century Sydney Anglicans were far more innovative, far more daring than we are. We are stultified; we are jealous of one another; we are spiritually arthritic and emotionally crotchety. We need to think, what would a pioneer missionary do here? We have to applaud those who have the new ideas of parishes without property, of church planting in schools, of specialist ministries to professional or hobby groups, of church during the week, of camping, Internet and TAFE ministries, of crossing the cultures. In short, we need to encourage innovation and effort.

Third, we need to adjust our approach to money. Tonight we are going to be debating the document *Strategy Driven Spending*. It is the result of hard work by the Diocesan Executive Board, and was virtually all complete before I joined it in July. My own chief contribution was the mission statement, and various editorial changes. I would not describe it as a radical proposal, but it is a significant one. It is going to invite us as a Synod to commit ourselves to preparing our next budget in a principled way – and the principles are going to be those enshrined in this mission statement. In effect, it gives us the next year to analyse, to consult, to plan, to pray before we come back to Synod and decide not merely on the budget, but on the mission. I am proposing that at the Synod next year we deliberate on both these connected issues. Next year is when we enter the race and respond to the starter's gun - or we decide that this is not the race we want to enter.

Frankly, after such a process of consultation we may decide not to get involved as a Diocese, not to accept the budget, not to agree to such goals. That is permissible; it may be wisdom. But passing the motion tonight commits us to real consultation, with real decision in view. I am not talking about an endless inconclusive process. To that end, I am going to suggest to the Standing Committee that it renames the Diocesan Executive Board something like the Diocesan Mission Board and tells it to get on with the job of planning. For my part, if you pass the resolution tonight, consultation, prayer, analysis and planning will dominate my own life for the next twelve months to start with. But I will not give up sharing the gospel, no matter how busy we become.

Fourth, I would like to introduce you to the activity of mission planning and ask you to practise it here and now. The Diocesan Executive Board endorsed the mission statement. I am glad to say that the members instantly saw the implications and began to ask themselves what would happen if we took this seriously. *They began to plan for mission before my very eyes*. Let me share some of those initial thoughts; they have no special status. I am not announcing new policies or initiatives. However, as we began our analysis, three necessary elements of mission planning became clear. We must:



- *Look at the end-point*

If we did see very significant increase in numbers of people, what changes would we need to make in order to cope? How many ministers? How many in training? How many buildings? How many regions? What would happen to Synod? What about Diocesan services?

- *Look the process*

In the first place we are going to have to consult our people, motivate and train them. What steps need to be taken now to accomplish this? Who is going to do this? What about the organisations? We began to look at some tough propositions; for example "For the mission to succeed it will have to become the all consuming feature of diocesan life involving a top down change in diocesan organisation as each relevant part reviews and adjusts to fit into the mission strategy". We began to isolate six phases that need to be passed through by this time next year.

- *Look to the strategies*

Here is the making of a list (may I stress again that this list has no status – it serves us here as a way of getting you involved in mission planning):

We intend to multiply congregations, not merely grow big churches.

Therefore...

We intend to encourage specialist churches, not merely concentrate on generalist ones.

Therefore...

We intend to make church attendance consistent and faithful, not episodic and uncommitted.

Therefore...

We intend to recruit and train as many as possible skilled persons for mission and ministry and not wait passively for candidates to identify themselves.

Therefore...

We intend to put in place spiritual, legal and theological foundations so the new believers will be secure and not allow the diocese to lose its way.

Therefore...

But you do not have to wait for me or depend upon the mythical centre for direction. Can I challenge you as representatives of our churches and organisations to set to work at once? Here are some pointers: have you given up on Sunday evenings? Then the Sunday morning church has taken a step towards extinction within ten years. Why not at least meet with two or three for prayer? Start something at five o'clock. Can you tithe your membership and send at least ten percent in for training? What about training of the congregation in evangelism? Can everyone handle *What is a Christian?* Or *Two Ways to Live?* Is there any adult education in your church? Can you plant a new church? Can ministers improve our preaching? Can we at least make sure that our churches are physically and relationally inviting and friendly places? Have a stock-take and get ready for mission.

I was delighted recently to discover that the Western Regional Council has already begun this process. Here is a selection of its strategic goals for the next few years. Perhaps other Regional Councils have done the same thing.

I am now going to pause in my presentation and consult by inviting Synod members to ask questions about what I have been saying to this point. To facilitate this I have invited Mr Riley Warren to be ready with a couple of questions. As he puts his questions you may like to formulate your own.

After the question time there are a few more remarks to make before I conclude.

I believe that two of the principled stands of this Synod in previous years are going to make much sense as we mission together if that is what we decide to do. The first is our belief that the ministry of women does not include the ministry of eldership of the congregations. Here is a point at which as a whole we have deliberately but painfully resisted the call of many brothers and sisters whom we respect and admire, but also the call of the community in which we live. We have all begun to see that what is at stake here is far more than proper employment practices. We have been forced to discuss the nature of God and the whole matter of the relationship between men and women. In doing so I think that our position has been biblically and theologically vindicated. It is my conviction – and I know that in saying this I differ from many whom I respect highly – that we have been called upon in our time to bear witness to the need for men and women to have overlapping but different roles in

home and church, for the sake of the good health of families. I think that the ministry of women has been aided by the stand we have taken; certainly there is a gratifying and significant increase in the number of women entering and involved in the ministry of the word. I believe that the day will come when the community itself will recognise that we have stood for principles of high importance for the good of all. I believe, furthermore, that for this mission to achieve its goal, godly women are going to be fully involved at the cutting edge.

The second is the commitment of this Synod to lay administration. I have been astonished at the suggestions that have been made in various quarters that we wish to adopt this course as a sort of adolescent pay back aimed at the National Church for ordaining women. We have been talking about this for over twenty years. The theology of lay administration is linked to lay ministry and especially lay preaching, and flows naturally and properly from the theology of the Bible and our reformed heritage as it applies to the contemporary world. But more than that. The theological importance of the congregation and its significance as an agent for mission also calls for this development. In this Diocese we expect lay people to minister and to offer spiritual leadership in the congregation. It is strange not to allow for this ministry in an ordered way. Other dioceses have developed novelties such as local priests and extended communion to help with ministry. Lay administration, should it be legal, would be a contribution to the common task of bringing the gospel to Australia.

In 1959, the churches responded magnificently to the challenge of the city-wide Billy Graham Crusade, with incalculable results for good. I am putting before you something as momentous; but the days have changed and we are not now thinking merely of a month, but of a decade. This is the first opportunity I have had to face the Synod which elected me as the Archbishop of this Diocese. I thank you with all my heart for the honour you have done me. I take it that it was not in your minds that I would be an idle or backward-looking prelate; or one content to enjoy the office with its powers and to pass them on untouched to my successor. I take it that you knew that you were appointing a minister of the word of God, who has given his life to that service and intends to continue in that way. You do not have to agree that this is the path we should take. That is why we have allowed time to talk and pray in the next year. I am offering to give you the best leadership I can in a mission as bold and yet as necessary as I can imagine. My question is, will you join me?

## **IN THE DIOCESE**

The agenda of Synod awaits us. I place on record the appreciation of the Diocese to those who have retired and to those who have died in the past twelve months.

We thank God for the ministries of all those who have devoted themselves to the Lord's service and who have faithfully ministered to God's people over the years.

The retirees were: the Rev Lance A Johnston, Rector of Strathfield and Homebush; the Rev Noel J Pilcher, Rector of Richmond; the Rev John H Adams, Rector of Granville; the Rev Graham L Harrison, Chaplain of Wollongong, Port Kembla and Shellharbour Hospitals; the Rev Dr John R Bunyan, Rector of Chester Hill with Sefton; the Rev Ian E Fauchon, Assistant Minister of St John's Park with Canley Heights; the Rev David C Woodbridge, Rector of Nowra; the Rev Brian J Seers, Rector of Millers Point; the Rev Canon Warren D Croft, Rector of St George (Kogarah); the Rev Dr Victor W Roberts, Rector of Darling Point.

Those who died were: the Rev Lloyd F Newton; the Rev Harry Robertson; the Rev Bruce L Smith; the Rev Canon Allan H Funnell; the Rev W T (Bill) Gregory; the Rev W V (Bill) Payne; the Rev Canon Roy F Gray; the Rev Geoffrey S Clarke; the Rev Frederick J Camroux; the Rev Daryl J Robinson; the Rev Reg N Langshaw and Deaconess Gwyneth Hall.

We remember them with thankfulness to God and express our sympathy to their loved ones. We do so in keen anticipation of the resurrection to eternal life and the fulfilment of Christ's eternal kingdom.

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with us all.

Peter F Jensen  
**Archbishop**