

The ORDER of AUSTRALIA ASSOCIATION - ACT BRANCH



ANNUAL "MULTI-FAITH OBSERVANCE"
11.00 am SUNDAY 21 AUGUST 2011

ANZAC MEMORIAL CHAPEL OF ST PAUL, ROYAL MILITARY COLLEGE,
DUNTROON

"FAITH IN A GREEN WORLD"

***- 'LIVING WITH THE GRANDCHILDREN IN MIND'
- 'FAITHFUL STEWARDSHIP OF OUR RESOURCES'***

AN ADDRESS BY

**THE RT Rev'd Dr GEORGE BROWNING
Former Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn
Convenor Anglican Communion Environmental Network
Member, Advisory Council, Climate Institute
Direct from an international conference in Peru on
Environmental Issues and Interfaith Responses**

**The Order of Australia Association-ACT Branch
Annual Multi Faith Observance
The Anzac Memorial Chapel of St Paul, RMC 21 August 2011**

“Living with the grandchildren in mind”

It is a privilege to be in your company as you celebrate this annual multi-faith observance. You, members of the Order of Australia Association, are not simply men and women who have been honoured for deeds past, you are people whose honour assumes that you exemplify in your ongoing lives the virtues and values that we cherish as a civilised and free people. We do not need the British riots to be reminded that values are easily lost and that a younger generation constantly requires modeling of that which is noble, honest and right. We live in a world where the young often find it difficult to put down roots. Through your acceptance of the honour bestowed on you, you also accept the role of value bearers in Australian society.

It is also an honour to be in the company of my friends, leaders of the major faiths that have taken root in Australian society. Tony Blair, in his recent lecture tour of Australia, observed that as recently as the 1970's pundits were confidently predicting the demise of religion as a significant force in people's lives. A generation on it is clear that this is not the case, all world religions are strong and growing, sometimes in unexpected places. As Blair observed, Christianity for example is growing strongly in China. However, what is not clear is whether the religions will prove to be a cohesive or divisive force in human affairs during the course of this century. We will not know the answer to this question. It will be up to our grandchildren and great grandchildren to judge. At their best, all religions stand for harmony, equity and justice, at their worst religions can provide a home for those, (who do not necessarily hold to their beliefs), who want to justify an extremely held position.

What is clear is that the topic you have chosen for this service, a focus on a sustainable world, is a value that is held equally by all religions and therefore a reason for religions to find common ground, a common voice and collaboration. What may not be appreciated as much as it should is that here in Australia we have a level of respect between religions and religious leaders which is second to none anywhere in the world. Australia has the opportunity of showing the world what religious harmony and tolerance might look like. Such tolerance does not mean holding less firmly to one's own beliefs, on the contrary, it means that through one's own beliefs respect and trust in others can be developed.

I would like now to focus on those beliefs that all religions hold in common as we look towards a more sustainable world.

First, because all religions assume a Creator, we approach the created order from a position of respect, perhaps even of awe. We assume a certain sacredness to the whole created order which prevents us from assuming a dominant stance of exploitation. The sheer beauty of the world is a cause for praise and thanksgiving, the diversity of the world is a cause for respect and honour and the abundance of the world is a cause for restraint, for treading lightly. We commonly believe we are stewards of that which is not our own. We inherit a world not of our making, we have

a solemn obligation to ensure that it is not harmed or depleted on our watch, but that we hand on to the next generation undiminished that which we have received. The Noah story reminds us that all of life is blessed by God, not just humans; therefore the loss of any other species depletes humanity.

Secondly we accept as axiomatic the relatedness of all things. Human beings cannot live as if we are 'apart from' creation. We are a part of it, our health is tied to the health of the created order and we share its destiny. I have always been attracted to Lorenz's metaphor "when a butterfly flaps its wings in South America, the weather patterns in Europe change". It is in understanding that all things relate, that religion and science have converged in modern times. Since the enlightenment there had been a tendency for science to deal with matter in isolated and disconnected disciplines. This tendency has been corrected in recent times: the eminent British scientist James Lovelock so considers the whole created order to be a single living organism that he gives it a name Gaia. Modern western economies tend to treat the created order as a commodity that can be exploited apart from humanity. This aspect of our culture is increasingly being seen as a failed experiment. As the leader of the Islamic community has just said, we must choose between green and greed.

I have just returned from chairing the International Anglican Communion Environment Network meeting in Peru. Our world is currently focused upon the troubling and looming economic crisis, particularly through the lens of indebtedness in North America, Europe and Japan. What we in Australia are less conscious of is that the environmental crisis is of equal proportion, indeed that they are reverse sides of the same coin. We have reached a point where the needs of humanity are stretching the capacity of the natural environment to sustain its own health. If such a situation were to continue, then its effects will sadly, but necessarily, escalate.

The delegate from Argentinean spoke of the huge tracks of land that are being bought by foreign interests and immediately cleared of all natural vegetation for the growth of a monoculture like palm oil or soya bean. Rain forest soil in particular is fragile and thin, without considerable care its usefulness for agriculture is very quickly depleted. The representative from Bangladesh asked me on each of the six days of the conference how many of that country's displaced people Australia would take. (I felt able to ask him what Bangladesh is doing about its runaway population explosion). Both are fair questions. We visited a mine on the high plateau of the Andes that has been in operation since the 1920's. You can see the effects of arsenic poisoning with your own eyes. You can see the discolouration of the river. You cannot see the level of lead poisoning in the people, particularly the children, but since 2008 it has forced the closure of the mine and the smelter. There is no reason to think this is an isolated case in a world hungry for resources and where international companies make overseas investment, but are beholden first to their shareholders.

The meeting assumed two matters to be beyond debate.

That caring for the environment and caring for the world's poor are reverse sides of the same issue.

1. That global warming is real, that its effects are clearly apparent on all continents and that the human footprint is a very substantial but not the only cause.

What are we, or are we prepared, to do about it?

I am one who believes that the answer to this question must be taken up by members of this association and other responsible citizens because politics is incapable of doing so. We appear to have fallen into one of the most extreme forms of adversarial politics amongst western democracies. Common ground is not sought. Significant issues are not debated on their own terms. Issues are used in the political arena as tools to leverage political advantage, no matter how unseemly that advantage might be. I note that in your up and coming events you have an address at ANU entitled 'What is wrong with parliament'. I would like to be a fly on the wall!

We, members of the faith communities, would like balance to return to human affairs. At the moment the international judge of a nation's health is GDP. At best this is an arbitrary tool which does not consider all economic factors, let alone more important one. We would like to see an international measure of well being established which considers the health and wellbeing of humans and the non human creation alike. We would like this measure to include forecasts as to the likelihood of the health and well being of future generations as a result of the choices we make. It is clear that material wealth on its own does not contribute to happiness and well being. It is the health of our relationships with God, with one another and with the created order that achieves this.

May God bless you members of the Association as you seek to live out values that will inspire others to live for a sustainable world.

May God Bless Australia and her people as we seek to live fairly and equitably
May God bless the world community as together we seek solutions to the problems we share.

May the candle of hope remain firmly alight as we hold to our faith that the abundance with which God has provided us will be sufficient for our health and well being if we in turn do justly and walk humbly.

Bishop George Browning
21 August 2011