

## Address by Hon John Anderson - The Second National Day of Thanksgiving of Australia



<b><u>Function:</u></b>	Catch The Fire Ministries NDT Victorian Celebrations
<b><u>Venue:</u></b>	Southland Christian Centre, Hoppers Crossing
<b><u>Date:</u></b>	14 May 2005
<b><u>Time:</u></b>	7.00 to 9.00 pm
<b><u>Keynote Speaker:</u></b>	<b>Deputy Prime Minister, The Hon John Anderson MP</b> with Mrs. Julia Anderson, his wife and his daughter, Laura Anderson

### **Keynote Speech:**

Can I begin very briefly by asking if you might join me in a word of a prayer?

*“Heavenly Father, I pray that what I say tonight might be truly honouring to You and uplifting to you and to those who are present, in Jesus Name. Amen”*

Now can I ask you at the beginning, can you hear me right down the back - if you can't, just signal will you. I hate to have to ask you half way through. I did that once in a tin hall out in the back in my bush electorate which is about 1000 – 1500 km from here and I could see a fellow in the gloom at the back of the tin hall and I could just make him out and I yell out to him, “Bill, can you hear me?” It had started to rain on the tin roof. He shouted back, “Yes I can, but I'd like to change places with someone who can't.” So - I won't ask half way through whether you still hear me. You just wave if you can't.

Can I begin by saying, Danny, that it is a pleasure to be here and I would really like to thank the Samoan members of your group here tonight for their wonderful singing. They were really fantastic! My wife Julia and I, went to Samoa to help them celebrate their 40th anniversary of independence. We had a marvellous time there. They're a joy-filled people. (The Samoans gave an acclamation. The Deputy Prime Minister said, “See what I mean!”) Very warm, very friendly and how appropriate that they should sing during your offertory hymn because they are very generous. Julia and I know because we were **each** presented with a whole roasted pig, when we were in Samoa. We had to delay our departure so that we could do it justice. We sort of rolled onto the plane and rolled off it at the other end. While I am just on the matter of cultural backgrounds, can I just say as an Anderson married to a Robertson, in other words of Scottish descent, how wonderful it is to see a faithful Presbyterian here, sir (addresses Pastor Shane Cassidy) – that's terrific. And I still think the Westminster Confession, which is the basic statement of a good Presbyterian or a good Scots faith, that first sentence is hard to beat. “The chief end of man is to worship God”.

Well I know that Peter Costello, a good friend of mine, did the honours here last year and that he gave a great message which generated a lot of interest here and across Australia. I want to say to you that I was very thankful for that, and I'm sure you were, and I think it promoted a good debate across the country. Can I say to you in that context that I think this idea of an annual Day of Thanksgiving across Australia is **a very good one!** I am honoured to be one of its Patrons and I'm delighted to have been able to cut some advertisements for it and I'm delighted to be here with you today.

Can I say to you that I can tell you in my job I often do see the evidence that we forget just how fortunate we are to live in this country, and it can only be, as the old saying has it, good for the soul, for each of us to stop and to ponder a little while, on how fortunate we are and to give thanks. Perfection will never be found this side of the grave but we are very fortunate, nonetheless, when you consider the lot that has beheld most of humanity down through the ages and even today to live in this country and we ought to be thankful. I hasten to add that I am just as in need of that reminder as anyone else here. There is nothing different about me. I am glad to have the opportunity to be reminded that I should say thanks as well. Can I say at the outset it would be

very remiss of me not to say thank you for the prayers that I know that you have offered, and thank you for those *unbelievable* quantities of cards that arrive at this time of year. Those cards, mostly green cards, which are the 'thank you' cards that have been organized by churches right across the country. I know a lot of MPs get them. I know it is good for the MPs and it is probably pretty good for their offices too as they stop and say, "What on earth are all these about?" and maybe that generates some good conversation. So tonight I would like to, if I may, share with you three profoundly personally held views as to why we in this country should express our thanks to God for what we enjoy.

The first is the one I have already touched on that Australia is a wonderful country to live in. The second is that in the Christian creed I can find an answer to the great conundrum that is humankind, that we are capable of such extraordinary greatness and yet capable at the same time of such utter depravity. Are we good or are we evil? How can we avoid trying to find an answer to that question? And thirdly, and penultimately, there is an all-powerful God who loves us despite ourselves and wants us to be in fellowship with Him.

So let me say on the first one, by way of illustration, I love spending time with young Australians. I like to, in fact, try and encourage them to think positively about this country and how fortunate we are to live in it and how they need to be part of the solution on an ongoing basis rather than part of the problem, because all the temptations are there. You know when you stop to think about how we inculcate our kids with negative attitudes about our nation all the ingredients are there to make them a bit cynical actually, if you stop to think about it. You know, when they come to Canberra in particular I try and spend some time with them and we talk about what they have seen in Canberra, and where they have been and many go to the Questacon Science Museum, they go to the War Memorial, they go to the Old Parliament, they go to the Telecom Tower and then they come to the Parliament, they see the two houses and usually by about that time, they are getting pretty weary but I try and spark them up.

We talk about all of that and when they least expect it, I spring a question on them and I say to them, "Now, how many of you boys and girls, before you came down here have heard people say, 'Oh, you are going to Canberra, the Government is useless and all those politicians they wouldn't know what they were doing, they are just making a complete mess of it.' Have any of you heard that?" And you know, in 16 years I haven't seen a kid who didn't immediately do that (the Deputy Prime Minister raised his right hand). They have all heard it and even more depressing for me, it doesn't matter who is in Government at the time, they still say it. It underscores a bit of a point and so I then seek - on the basis that it is too easy to not consider it, too easy to forget what we have got, too easy not to think it through - to engage them in a conversation, in a dialogue.

My second question is usually "Well, what do think the best country in the world to live in is?" They all think it is Australia. And I'd say to them, "Well you name me a great country to live in that isn't a liberal democracy". You know they never can and neither can their parents and teachers, by the way. So what is this thing 'democracy'; and why is it that we think that we are the best country in the world to live in but we don't stop and think through democracy. You have a great conversation with them. You ask them what it is that makes Australia great and I tell you, out of the mouths of babes, one of the first thing they usually say is that 'we don't have war or we live in peace'. That's what the kids usually say, and there is a bit of reason behind that, isn't there. No civil war, no secret police dragging us out of bed in the middle of the night, the rule of law, freedom of speech. They say we enjoy great health where our forefathers, Prof (Graeme) Clark, would have been *amazed, amazed* at what the health revolution over the last hundred years have done for us.

If I'd lived a hundred years ago I would have been thanking the good Lord that I lived 4 or 5 years beyond the average life expectancy at the point of which I would be pushing up daisies because I am 48 and the average male a hundred years ago, I think, lived for about 43 years in Australia. Women did a bit better, they were up in the mid fifties but now, both can reasonably expected to exceed 80 and of course the quality of life all the way through is much better.

Educational opportunities - the kids usually recognize how valuable that is and how fortunate they are to be at school. They say, 'We're rich, we're rich!' and they're right of course by international standards. This is one of the biggest economies in the world despite the fact that we are a mid-sized nation, one of the biggest economies in the world. We don't go to bed hungry. Indeed we enjoy, I am told, disposable incomes that have risen fourfold since 1960. Interesting to note that prescriptions for anti-depressants have risen fourfold in the last decade, but our disposable incomes have gone up enormously and that's a powerful reminder that material

wealth and prosperity is a good thing but we need to take in hand the old dose of medicine that says that money is “A kind slave but a cruel master.”

So as we explore together why Australia is a great place to live in, it starts to dawn on them, I think, often for the first time, that good government is a vital ingredient to an open, prosperous, free and safe society. And that for all its faults, as Churchill put it, democracy is really better than all of the alternatives. We then move on to say ‘Why do we need government?’ Let’s start at that level, ‘Why do we need government?’ Law and order. You know the first one they come to is law. Very interesting, that’s illustrative too. Usually the boys - they’ll tell you, ‘Oh, you’ve got to have policing. You’ve got to have a defence force’. They innately know that we need checking, don’t we. We don’t have to be taught to do the wrong thing - unfortunately, it is innate in our human nature and they pick up on that. And that’s true, we need defence forces, we need police forces, we need the courts, we need the legal system, we need our prisons and so forth, unfortunately. And then of course there’s order, someone has to determine which side of the road we’ll drive on, who goes to school and for how long and who is going to pay what taxes to support our need for roads and hospitals and social security.

So we need government but we need more than government, we want it to be *good* government. History is replete with examples of bad governments, of bad leaders and the evidence that countries or societies with bad governments with bad leaders are not good places to live in, of course, very soon recognized by those kids. So the great problem is of course is how to keep good government. How do you make it effective, keep it effective and keep it fresh, keep it effective, keep it decent - given this other part of the conundrum that I am going to talk about in a moment. That great Christian thinker Lord John Acton described the dilemma when he said, that “Power corrupts and absolutely power corrupts absolutely”.

Democracy then, it seems to me, has produced the best answer to that dilemma. It’s not perfect, as I said before, it never will be on this earth, but the best by far. It seeks to do several things. It limits the amount of power that any one individual or group can obtain and retain. It divides power up between different levels and within governments. It places clear legal checks and balances in place and ultimately it gives the final say to the people - through the vote. So it is that we should be deeply thankful that we have this very great blessing of a system of government which responds to the clear Christian principle that everyone matters, all are entitled to be protected by the rule of law, regardless of creed, of background, of gender, of wealth, of colour - that there should not be discrimination, that stability and freedom should be maximized. Opportunity pursued for all and that we can speak freely.

We should give thanks to our forebears who with clear Christian conscience sought these freedoms for us often at terrible costs to themselves. We should not forget how hard it was for our forebears to secure the vote for all. We should not forget that until just 200 years ago our own societies, which were basically European by derivation of course, condoned the evil of slavery. Just 200 years ago - our forebears were keeping slaves. Worst than that, they were capturing slaves and trading them around the world, just 200 years ago. And it was Christian conscience, spearheaded by William Wilberforce - and you sang my favourite hymn tonight, Amazing Grace, the song of Jon Newton. He’d been a slave trader and William Wilberforce, who never left the back bench, who has perhaps become the most powerful influential parliamentarian that England saw that century, met him. He [Wilberforce] never left the back bench but he was converted. He became a believer and he thought ‘Parliament is no place for me’ - I can’t imagine why he thought that! He was about to leave but he felt drawn to talk to Jon Newton, so he did. He records in his diary that he crept down there under cover of night hoping that no one would see him go and talk to this old evangelical - but he did. And as he talked to Jon Newton he became convinced that he ought to pick up on Jon Newton’s repudiation of the evil of slavery which he himself had been engaged in - and the rest is history. First the slave trade, then slavery - abolished by William Wilberforce heading up a clear crusade that changed the world and backed by many believing Christians *who did not give up* until that social revolution had been completed.

And then of course the work at home was picked up, when he passed on at around 1830, by Lord Shaftesbury. Another man of clear Christian conviction and conscience, who recognized that it was inherently wrong to send the children of the poor down mines when they were eight or nine years old and make them work there 12, 13 or 14 hours a day and started that whole social revolution that ensured a decent equality for all. It was all a product of Christian conscience in our culture. And we should be deeply thankful for it and we should not ever let go of their heritage and their memory or their example, let alone the things they gave us.

We should not forget or become blind to that which is good and worthwhile and important. We should fight to keep it fresh and vital. Better to stop and think, as with your Day of Thanksgiving are urging us to do, and appreciate and to then build up, than to lose it all through apathy or armchair laziness or allow the curse of cynicism to slowly rust away the great institution our forebears gave us out of their Christian conscience.

But let me come to my second point - this conundrum between our capacity for good and our capacity for evil. We talked about it at length tonight, you honoured people who keep the law but you acknowledged, Danny (Nalliah), how difficult it can be. Why is it difficult? What's the problem? Why is it hard to secure and maintain good government and a fair, just and safe society? Why can we so clearly see the difference between good and bad - why when we can see it, is it so hard to secure and maintain the good? The Christian creed gives me an answer to a question that for me will not go away. It is the elephant in my living room. Have you heard that expression? You know, the idea that there is an elephant in many of our living rooms and many of us try to ignore it. But I have one and it's called the conundrum of good and evil. I can't ignore it. It's too big. I have to have an answer for it. I want to know what that elephant is. Our nobility and our contemptibility, what the thinker and writer Pascal called, "The glory and the scum".

Just this week, in the Parliament we acknowledged the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war in which some 60 million people died. And we were reminded during that debate of the stark contrast between the gallantry and the courage and the selflessness and the sacrifice of many seeking to defend their countries and their loved ones against the unrelenting darkness that was the evil of the gas chambers and the death marches. The glory and the scum. In contemporary Australia we celebrate as we have done here tonight the extraordinary abilities and capacities used wisely for the advancement of others - whether it is in medicine or in our defence forces or in our police forces or in our educational institutions. But at the same time, I think just recently of reading of the young Australian charged with murder for forcing a crying baby into a tub of boiling water because he wanted her to shut up.

I got talking shortly I got into the parliament with a (politely what we call in Canberra) "Leftie", a member of the Senate. A very fine fellow, he's not there anymore, he's not from your state and he's not from my state so don't try to identify him; but the point of the story is not to identify him, he was a nice bloke - but I got into a conversation, a deep and philosophical one over a very boring lunch with some visiting dignitary and in a quieter moment - and I don't know how but we got to the big questions in life - I asked him if he believed in God. And he said, "Some days I do and some times I don't." And I said, "What are you believing today?" He said, "I'm not today." I said, "So, are you a humanist today?" and he said, "Yes, I am a humanist." I said, "Are you an optimistic humanist? Are you one that thinks that mankind is gradually improving his lot and we are going to reach Nirvana on earth? Or are you a pessimistic humanist and think it is all gradually getting worse?" Now the optimistic humanist, for all those who are interested in history, World War 1 should have finished you off. But there is no reason to be an optimistic humanist, I would say. And for a pessimistic humanist, well all I can say is what black despair there is there. But he said, "It's a bit like (his belief in) God; sometimes an optimistic humanist, sometimes I am not, I never quite know what I believe." And I said to him, "How then do you feel (and I am not being personal here, I just am genuinely interested) you are equipped to lead in the context of contemporary Australia?" His answer was a very illuminating one. He said, "Ideally, I am exactly where the Australian people are at."

I just say, let's just encourage our friends and neighbours not to ignore that elephant that is sitting there in the room. It is a bit intellectually lazy and I'd suggest you are a bit spiritually and perhaps eternally dangerous to ignore the big elephant and not to ask the hard questions. But anyway, I can't be a humanist, it is a very unsatisfying sort of a doctrine for me. I have to go back to basics. Abraham Lincoln, he was quite a guy, the United States President who was tragically murdered just before the end of the civil war in America, wrote (I found this the other day) "Surely God," he said, "Would not have created such a being as man to exist only for a day. No! No!" he said, "Man was made for immortality." He believed that God was real and he believed that man was no accident. And no lesser authority than the Bible, the good book, says that he is exactly right. It tells us that our brilliance, our capacity for moral choice, our capacity for nobility of spirit, for self sacrifice, for joy, for love, all stem from our creation in the image of Almighty God as the high point of the creation.

Indeed it tells us that we were created for fellowship with God, you and me. Little old you and little old me, created to be in fellowship with the all powerful, all knowing Creator of the Universe and to be in fellowship with one another. We were created for something good and something noble. As Job said at the time, "The

morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” But something went wrong. The shouting for joy is now not so loud. Given free will we chose to exercise it. We chose to go our own way, *our own way*, and our own way has been self-centred. And that self-centredness has broken our fellowship with God and broken our purpose of goodness. We’ve learnt to hate, we’ve learnt to hate God and His creation and other people, to destroy and to ruin.

None of us is all one or all the other. The great Russian writer and Christian novelist, Alexander Solzhenitsyn writes that he discovered in the Gulag Archipelago a degree of freedom, when having been there for a long time, it finally dawned on him that the dividing line between good and evil couldn’t be somehow placed between captor and captives, or black and white, or man and woman, or Catholic and Baptist but it lies somewhere across every human heart and that’s right, and we all know it is. But can I say to you we need to make sense of mankind’s condition and I am very deeply thankful that I can find that explanation in the Bible. But - I am then left with a further terrible dilemma. What to do about the great problem that the elephant in the room has now revealed to me?

I now understand that I am out of communion with God. My exercise of free will along with all of the family of Adam means that the relationship that I was intended for is no longer in existence. And if Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, was right - and we are such amazing beings that we *must* have been created for immortality – then being out of communion, not having a relationship with God, becomes a real problem. Now, and even more so for the future.

Yet, of course, here is this most wondrous thing. The God of the Ages provides a solution and it is for *that* solution that we must give our penultimate thanks today and at this annual time of Thanksgiving. That solution, the Bible tells us, is Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that, for all of our desire to go our own way, God so loves us that He *still* chooses to personally engage with us if we are willing. He loves us, you and me individually, so much that He provides a way back. A narrow and winding path that not all will find - but which nonetheless is there. And that of course is found through Jesus Christ. We are told in Revelations 3 that Jesus Christ stands at the door of our hearts and knocks and we are told very clearly if we hear Him and if we open the door, He *will* come in. If we open the door He will come in. And Paul tells us in Romans that the blood of Christ on the Cross washes away our wrong doing and sets us free, if we will but believe, in fellowship with God. He will credit to us the punishment His Son bore in that awful death on the Cross even though He was innocent and we can go ‘scot’ free.

You know this is the most extraordinary news we could ever have imagined. CS Lewis, the great English writer that some of you may have read some of his books or read the Narnia series to your children. He said, ‘Really if you stopped to think about it, it is so improbable that you really have to investigate it and the more you consider it, the more it has the ring of truth about it.’ God reaches down to us in mercy and compassion, we can’t reach up to Him. He deals with our wrong doing and character shortcomings as a free gift and sets us free to respond in love - both to Him so that the relationship is restored vertically and then sets us free to restore our relationships with each other [horizontally], whereas we have been forgiven, we are able to and *must* seek to forgive others. Evil and strife and hunger and hatred can be overcome, can be conquered. Our need, our craving to be loved and accepted without condition - and that is at the heart of every man’s and woman’s desire, no matter how lovely or unlovely we might be - can be met. There is hope, there *is hope*, real hope now and in the future. Let us be truly thankful and thank you for having me here tonight.

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