

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS  
to  
THE 15<sup>TH</sup> GENERAL SYNOD  
of  
THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA  
by  
THE MOST REVEREND DR PHILLIP ASPINALL  
Saturday 18 September 2010

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It's my privilege to welcome you to this Fifteenth Ordinary Session of the General Synod of this Church.

The General Synod is a unique body. As we gather in this Synod, from around the nation, we can affirm that, in some sense, we are the body of Christ. We are members of each other, reconciled to God and to one another in Christ and bearing to the world around us the hope of reconciliation. May what we do together in these days strengthen our capacity to bear witness to that good news for the world and so give glory to God. I hope and pray that during these days, by the grace of the Holy Spirit present and active within and among us, we may think with the mind of Christ, love with the heart of Christ and act as the body of Christ. May our interactions with one another, and the whole tenor of our gathering, reflect the character of Christ. May our deliberations be marked by a generosity of spirit, respect for one another, deep prayerfulness, a shared desire to discern God's truth and a resolve to give ourselves to God's mission. May we be prepared to embrace creative and sacrificial ways of expressing our belonging together in Christ, both respecting our heritage and aware of the signs of our times.

Since the General Synod last met in 2007, the church has mourned the deaths of two former Primates.

## **Archbishop Sir Marcus Loane 14/10/1911 – 14/4/2009**

Archbishop Sir Marcus Loane died on 14 April 2009 aged 97. Sir Marcus studied theology at Moore College and later went on to serve there as tutor, as chaplain, as

Vice Principal and finally, from 1953, as Principal. He shaped several generations of Anglican clergy and saw a significant increase in numbers of ordinands. He also served as a military chaplain in New Guinea during the war where he was influenced by the preaching of Philip Strong.

Sir Marcus became coadjutor bishop in Sydney in 1958 and was elected archbishop in 1966. He chaired the General Synod in 1977, as Acting Primate, and in 1978 became the first Australian-born Primate, which post he held until his retirement in 1982.

Sir Marcus was a devout Christian, a fine orator and a compelling preacher. He wrote prolifically: historical, biblical and devotional works, including several volumes on the English Reformation and evangelical revival. He was deeply committed to the ideas of the Reformation and the evangelical movement. Sir Marcus had an enduring passion for mission and was President of the Church Missionary Society. He longed for revival in Australia and devoted much time and energy to that end, strongly supporting the Billy Graham crusades in this country.

As Primate, Sir Marcus presided over a relatively stable period in the life of the Australian church, assisted by his own innately conservative approach. He took great care before embracing change.

Archbishop Sir Frank Woods, whom Sir Marcus succeeded as Primate, credited him with having done more than any other person to heal divisions within the church. Sir Marcus reciprocated in his address to the 1977 General Synod, saying of Woods, “His emphasis and attitudes differ from my own in many respects, but I know and honour his own undoubted piety in faith and prayer”. There was an affection and respect between them that transcended differences of outlook and conviction.

The 1977 General Synod dealt with An Australian Prayer Book which Sir Marcus strongly supported. He explicitly appealed to the Synod for unity, calling for “as nearly a unanimous vote as possible”. In the end the Bill passed apparently with only one dissenting voice. In making his plea to allow the Bill for AAPB to proceed as an Ordinary Bill rather than as a Special Bill, recognizing that each diocesan synod would still need to accept it or otherwise, Archbishop Loane said – “This procedure

should protect the interests and convictions of all in a truly democratic spirit, but it calls for mutual tolerance and trust on the highest level. May it be so for the sake of unity in our church!”

By reaching such agreement about AAPB, the 1977 General Synod was something of a highwater mark regarding unity in the national church. But divisive issues were also emerging. Serious work had begun on the ministry of women. Addressing the report before the Synod, Sir Marcus stated his firm personal convictions about the nature of headship in the Trinity and its implications for human relationships including ordained ministry. Differences of understanding at this point still shape the life of our church.

On that occasion Sir Marcus also implored the church to be engaged in real evangelism. He remarked that the Gospel seems to have lost its power to change lives and turn the world upside down. He said, “Whether or not we admit the fact, we tend to become ashamed of the Gospel. We are embarrassed in the presence of others; we remain silent when we ought to speak; we keep our faith to ourselves”. Evangelism, mission and attendance have been our top priority now for some years and will be focal points again in this Synod.

In that 1977 address Sir Marcus also spoke about the importance of compassion for those in need and of grappling with the root causes of deprivation in society. He underlined the value and importance of the limited national infrastructure of the General Synod. He said -

I have at times made public statements or addressed myself to governments, both Liberal and Labor, both Federal and State. ...thinking that it was imperative to bring to its notice a strongly held Christian conviction when issues with moral or spiritual overtones were involved. ... This is one reason why the Social Responsibilities Commission and the International Affairs Commission have so significant a role in the church’s affairs.

One can only imagine that Sir Marcus would marvel at what the Anglicare Australia network has become in our day, with some 80 research staff spread through the 44 member organizations around the country.

Ironically, given that he vigorously opposed the change of name from Church of England to Anglican, it was Archbishop Loane, presiding over the 1981 General Synod, who proclaimed the change. Once the proposal was adopted he accepted it with grace and goodwill.

Sir Marcus had also opposed the adoption of the 1962 Constitution itself. He believed that Section 4 permitted unlimited deviation from authorized forms of worship which “would mean that the whole principle of common prayer would be undermined and destroyed”. His strong support for AAPB was based on his hope of restoring common prayer to Anglican congregations. But by 1981 he had come to believe that the Constitution was “a true instrument in the cause of national unity” despite his original misgivings about Section 4.

In that final General Synod as Primate, Sir Marcus reflected on the unity of the church nationally and internationally, affirming the Anglican Church of Australia as an integral Province in the international Anglican Communion. He pointed to the important influence of the Lambeth Conference which, though it “has no legislative or executive authority, ... can try to establish ‘the mind of the church’ on various subjects”. He traced the gradual emergence of the other instruments of communion, as we now know them, identifying the roots of each in successive Lambeth Conferences. He lauded the efforts of officers of the Communion “to inform and unite all its member churches as a coherent entity” and welcomed its ongoing gradual evolution.

The coherence and sense of belonging together which he valued in the international arena he saw as being at some risk within Australia. As Primate he had enjoyed visits to every diocese in Australia but was concerned about the tyranny of distance that “often weakens the understanding or development which ought to be common to the whole church”.

We who live in the east must never allow ourselves to forget those who live in the west, or we in the south to forget those who live in the far north. Our welfare as a nation is bound up in one great bundle and there is no substitute for our common heritage as fellow Australians. We are one people, in one country, with one Sovereign and the strength or weakness of the whole is

measured by that of all the parts. This is as true in church experience as in national interests. The church may be stronger or weaker in one place or another; we all suffer from its weaknesses, and we all should share in its strength.

It is not difficult to discern in Archbishop Loane's legacy a clear vision of belonging together notwithstanding difference and diversity.

## **Archbishop Sir John Grindrod 14/12/1919 – 4/1/2009**

Archbishop Sir John Grindrod died on 4 January 2009 aged 89 years. John Grindrod served as Bishop of Riverina from 1966, was translated to Rockhampton in 1971 and then to Brisbane in 1980. He succeeded Marcus Loane as Primate in 1982, serving in that role until his retirement in 1989. He attended three Lambeth Conferences and his ministry assisted a sense of continuity and development in this Church and wider Communion.

John Grindrod was a thoughtful and perceptive preacher, reflecting his years of meditation on Scripture and his deep understanding of human nature. He was a distinguished person of prayer. He was Archbishop during Joh Bjelke-Petersen's years as Premier in Queensland and found himself in tension and even open conflict with the Premier. He vigorously defended human rights, especially those of Aborigines.

In 1985 John Grindrod consecrated Arthur Malcolm, the first Aboriginal bishop. 1988 was Australia's bicentennial year during which John Grindrod apologised on behalf of the church to Aboriginal people for their mistreatment in the past. That moving ceremony remains powerful in the hearts and minds of both indigenous and non-indigenous Anglicans. Coming 20 years before the apology in our federal parliament, it was a significant moment for the church and community.

During his period as Primate, the church moved to admit children to communion. It passed Canons permitting the remarriage of divorced people in church. It wrestled further with the question of the ordination of women and agreed to the ordination of women as deacons.

Anticipating the deep differences of conviction over women's ordination with which the 1985 General Synod would need to grapple, Archbishop Grindrod set the scene expressing the "hope it can be a Synod in which we can help one another and deepen our unity together". He paid tribute to Cecil Warren's contributions to "an Anglican Church of Australia, as not just a collection of dioceses, but a church with a strong cohesion and sense of mission". As a result of the visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury to Australia in 1985, he said, "We have seen ourselves more forcibly as part of a greater whole."

Sir John was Chair of the Liturgical Commission in the 1970s which saw the publication of AAPB in 1978. This experience had strengthened his perception:

It was a period in which the theological insights of the different traditions of the church were brought together and enabled to engage in serious debate and constructive thought for the benefit of the church as a whole. ... [the last 20 years] has been a period in which diocesan independence has been tempered by a growing sense of responsibility for one another.

John Grindrod strongly supported women's ordination himself but through the profound difficulties of those years exercised his considerable pastoral capacity and his gifts as a mediator to insist on there being space for the conscientious convictions of those who differed. As Primate he sought to hold the church together as emotions ran high and the media speculated that the church would split. He said, "We should not fly a flag of 'I am right, he is wrong – but Lord have mercy'".

Following the divisive 1985 debate on admitting women to the diaconate, Sir John made a Supplementary Statement as Primate. He said this:

We not only differ from one another but on the same grounds, namely that we believe we are being obedient to Our Lord Jesus Christ. That is the fundamental position on which one must stand. There are secondary arguments. But if we are to preserve a realistic ongoing relationship with one another, then each of us must so pursue their reasoning that he or she can say that I believe I am taking my position in obedience to Christ and His will. If we do that, then we can listen to one another and relate to one another.

If we can face one another with this integrity, then we can respect one another and recognize that we must work out a way of accommodating each other's sense of obedience to Our Lord's will, so that we can live together ...

If our faith is in Our Lord Jesus Christ and we are all seeking to obey Him, then He will hold us together and by our very struggles for truth and care for one another, bear witness about unity for the Church and the World. The Anglican Church has, in this stage of our history, in spite of our world smallness, a distinct vocation, wrestling with issues of unity, authority, divergence, integrity and conviction.”

A special Session of the General Synod was called in 1987 to tackle the question of women priests, over which John Grindrod also presided. The place and contribution of Australia in the international communion was clear in his mind:

The way we proceed may well be of value to the Communion as a whole ... since we happen to be, through our powers of diocesan decision, a church which is like a land-locked version of the Anglican Communion. This has its advantages and disadvantages, but it makes us work with great respect for one another, sensitive to our history and traditions in Australia.

Archbishop Grindrod saw a form of world-wide conciliar process emerging within the Anglican Communion; an evolving structure or pattern providing a sort of unity amidst needed diversity; not a centralized coercive authority but a fellowship of churches bound together by faith and ministry, but with regional autonomy. He told the General Synod that “a method of counsel for the whole which can give space for growth and yet preserve communion, (the koinonia), is developing”.

John Grindrod had a great gift of calmness in the face of controversy and enormous pastoral concern for minorities. Those attributes led his successor as Primate, Keith Rayner, to say of him, “His strength lay in the firmness of his faith, his pastoral concern for others, and his moral integrity that led even those who disagreed with him, to trust him”. These remarkable pastoral and conciliatory gifts led then Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, to ask him to chair the Anglican

Communion's Commission on women's ordination which reported to the Lambeth Conference in 1988. That report brought the notion of open reception to the fore in Anglican thought.

John Grindrod's engagement in Anglican Communion gatherings and the World Council of Churches Assembly, together with his election to its Central Committee, shaped his thinking greatly. He encouraged members of the General Synod "to gain a world mind" and not to "easily slip back into our corners".

## **Belonging Together, a Greater Whole**

I have reflected at some length on the lives and ministries of these two former Primates for several reasons. First and foremost, it is of course right that we should honour them and their respective legacies. It is right for us to give thanks to God for both Marcus Loane and John Grindrod because they were significant leaders, indeed statesmen, of this church. Two more diverse leaders it would be hard to find. They had very different outlooks, emphases and approaches. And yet, for all their differences, they had in common some characteristics of spiritual leaders. Both were faithful, devout, principled leaders. They shared a generosity of spirit, a graciousness. Neither would contemplate for one moment compromising their firm convictions and principles. But nor would they allow even profound differences to undermine respect for those with whom they differed, or their keen sense of belonging together and need for each other; their sense of being part of a greater whole.

This latter shared mark of their leadership is the second matter I wish to highlight. As I've been speaking no doubt you will have detected a surprisingly contemporary ring to a great deal of what they said in their own day. Indeed, it is not difficult to hear their voices as if they were directly addressing some of the issues we face today. Hearing them afresh provides an opportunity and basis for us to recalibrate our own ecclesiological compasses as we enter into the discussions before us in this Synod.

What do we believe the Anglican Church of Australia is called to be in our day? What is our shared vocation? That is a complex, multi-faceted question, but I hope we

would answer, in part, that we are to develop and make known a credible, intellectual rationale for Christianity in a way that will be life-giving for Australian society. The Anglican Church could be the first port of call for people looking to interpret Christianity in Australia and to understand its implications. We should have vibrant Christian communities all around Australia and in as many places as possible. For this to be so, we must have structures and processes in place through which the strong can help the weak. We must have institutional vehicles for Christian generosity. There must be an overriding sense of belonging together and sharing in this one great mission. There must be forums for addressing and vehicles for acting on issues of wider than local significance, the issues on the national agenda.

To some extent we are living out this vocation already, assisted enormously by national networks of organizations and institutions that increasingly own the Anglican banner.

### ***Anglicare Australia***

I have already mentioned in passing the tremendous research capacity of the Anglicare Australia network, which now supports 1 in 40 Australians and has become an increasingly effective voice on behalf of the marginalized and vulnerable. The chaplaincy network among Anglicare members is undertaking important work on developing partnerships with and building capacity in parishes.

### ***The Australian Anglican Schools Network***

The Australian Anglican Schools Network has become a real force in recent years. We are the largest single provider of education in the non-government sector after the Roman Catholic Church. In the last few years the network's emphasis on mission, particularly at its national conferences, has increased markedly. At a time when congregational life is struggling in some places, our schools have demonstrated growing willingness and capacity to carry forward Christ's mission and to identify themselves as Anglican institutions. We will hear from the schools network in the course of this Synod.

## ***Fresh Expressions, Back to Church Sunday***

In recent years we have become more resolved to tackle the myth of inevitable decline that has so dispirited our congregations and undermined the morale of church leaders. The Back to Church Sunday movement began some years ago in the Church of England and has now spread to Australia and New Zealand and possibly further afield. It involves Anglicans around the country simply inviting a friend to come with them to church on a special designated Back to Church Sunday. Experience in England shows that congregations that prepare well and encourage participation experience, on average, a 10% increase in attendance on that day and a good proportion of those who come on the day become regular attenders. I'm pleased to say that the vast majority of Australian dioceses have signed up and early results here mirror the English experience. This is an additional element in our focus on mission and attendance being driven forward by Fresh Expressions Australia, from whom we will hear later.

## ***Defence Force Ministry***

Many of us, I'm sure, have read and watched media coverage of our Defence Force deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan, in particular, and been grateful for the very visible roles played by our chaplains. Sadly, that has included ministering to bereaved families and colleagues. We are grateful for all that our Bishop to the Defence Force, our chaplains and the Defence Force Board undertake in our name.

The vibrant mission of the Anglican Church of Australia to the nation is evident in all these ways. But we are at a time when finances are tight and when mistrust and even suspicion of one other could undermine the infrastructure necessary for the life of the national church. We should not give in to the temptation to withdraw to our own corners and engage only with people who think the same way we do. We must nurture confidence that it is valuable and possible to remain engaged, to work through differences and disagreements for the purpose of mission.

## ***Women Bishops***

One recent example of that happening is the protocol developed by the bishops in the advent of the consecration of bishops who are women. Since the last General Synod

two senior women have been consecrated as bishops to serve in the dioceses of Perth and Melbourne. In 2007 the national bishops meeting decided that no consecrations of women should take place until the bishops had met again in April 2008 to consider how to care for those who objected and how we would live together in the face of this development. Though that informal resolution of the bishops was not binding on anyone, I am pleased to note that it was respected by all the bishops and in particular by the Archbishops of Perth and Melbourne, notwithstanding significant pressure on them to proceed from within their respective dioceses. The 2008 national bishops meeting spent considerable time in robust discussion and finally agreed unanimously to a protocol which would respect the diversity of views in our church. While some did not and do not welcome the advent of bishops who are women, I trust we can all welcome and celebrate the unanimous agreement of the bishops to care for all, to protect minorities and to relate constructively and respectfully in the face of diversity.

### ***Evolving Institutions and Structures***

A third characteristic shared by Marcus Loane and John Grindrod was their keen sense that the necessary institutions and structures necessary to carry forward the mission of the Anglican Church and wider Communion were still evolving. That dynamic is very evident in our shared life today, though perhaps still not to the extent it needs to be.

### ***Defence Force Structures***

In recent years several attempts have been made to develop the structures to better support ministry in the Defence Force. At one stage a Defence Force Diocese was considered by some. Later a Defence Force Ordinariate was on the drawing board, after the Canadian model. Neither of those kites flew! Bishop Eacott and the Defence Force Board have worked hard since the last General Synod to shape organizational arrangements that will in effect extend the range of relevant canons to Defence Force personnel, serving both in Australia and overseas and to provide effective pastoral support and a greater sense of belonging for chaplains. The good news is that they think they've found a way through the maze which won't involve Constitutional or Canonical change by the General Synod or the creation of a diocese or ordinariate or anything of that kind. I look forward to further reports to the Standing Committee.

We should recognize that the earlier proposals foundered basically because of our diocesanism. Primate Keith Rayner was reflecting, not on Defence Force ministry, but on indigenous ministry at the 1998 General Synod, when he said, “Our hard and fast structures based on completely autonomous dioceses may not be adequate for the future well-being of the church and its mission. We need a willingness to experiment with better ways, while being careful not to jettison the real virtues of our present system.” In relation to NATSIAC he was prescient.

## **NATSIAC**

We are now some 22 years from Sir John Grindrod’s apology to Aboriginal people on behalf of this Church. It is right that we note and celebrate the achievements of NATSIAC and its forerunner Council in that period. They are significant.

In 1992 the General Synod unanimously endorsed a proposal to establish a National Aboriginal Anglican Council. In 1998 the General Synod passed the NATSIAC Canon which included Torres Strait Islander representation in what initially been an Aboriginal body. That General Synod also changed the Constitution to include Aboriginal and Islander representatives in the membership of the Synod itself, as of right. It included an Aboriginal bishop and an Islander bishop as full members of the House of Bishops. Those additional representatives first took their seats in General Synod in 2001.

Successive general synods provided minimal, some would say token, financial support for NATSIAC and for the bishops with occasional marginal increases. We welcomed the establishment of an Indigenous Ministries Trust Fund and encouraged dioceses to contribute to it, which by and large hasn’t happened.

In 2004 the General Synod welcomed the initiative of NATSIAC in preparing a statement of mutual commitment between indigenous and non-indigenous members of this Church. It was subsequently endorsed by the 2007 Synod. Members of NATSIAC have also made liturgical contributions as APBA was developed, and represented Australia at meetings of the international Anglican Indigenous Network. Thanks be to God for what has been achieved in the journey thus far. But there is a long way to go.

In 2007 I advised the General Synod of a review of the place and roles of the indigenous bishops in the national church, the role and responsibilities of NATSIAC and its level of resourcing and of indigenous ministry at diocesan and parish levels throughout the country. Associate Professor Michael Horsburgh chaired a committee which reported to Standing Committee in three parts. The full report is on the website and you have a summary and the recommendations in your papers. We are indebted to that group for its thorough work and straight-talking report, though it doesn't always make for happy reading.

The report highlighted NATSIAC's desire to be a peak body for consultation and negotiation on any indigenous issue. But the reality is it doesn't have the wherewithal to deliver. Moreover, all NATSIAC's income comes from outside indigenous communities. That has to change if NATSIAC is going to be owned.

The review group concluded that the original NATSIAC Canon is not serving the Church well. It is ambiguous and diffuse in its terms. NATSIAC is too large a body and one large annual meeting is insufficient to generate clear direction and momentum to carry the work forward effectively.

One result of the review is a Bill before this Synod to reshape the structure and operation of NATSIAC. It provides for a smaller, streamlined, more focused Council with more realistic responsibilities. The revised Canon is one small step in the right direction and I hope it will receive the support of the Synod.

However, the review also made it abundantly clear that much more difficult decisions and harder work lie ahead if we are to be serious about establishing a proper and effective national focus for indigenous ministry. While applauding what has been achieved, the report describes the actions of the national church to date as consisting of largely symbolic gestures, carefully shaped to secure unanimous agreement at general synods. The time has come, it argues, to deal much more realistically with the real issues. That will mean real debate on practical decisions about which we should expect disagreement rather than unanimity.

The existing Constitutional and Canonical framework is one such issue. The report notes that the Constitution provides for some form of national indigenous bishops but has no power to put it into effect. There is no national role specification and even if there were, the General Synod has no power to enforce it. Effectively implementing the provisions depends on indigenous bishops being appointed in dioceses. A proper national indigenous episcopal presence is lacking.

The reviewers concluded that the General Synod should not subsidise indigenous bishops in North Queensland as a means of providing a national indigenous episcopal presence. Subsidies should only continue if the General Synod or the Standing Committee believes North Queensland must have indigenous bishops. But, if so, the question arises: Why North Queensland and not the Northern Territory or North West Australia?

The reality is that the national church doesn't fund anything other than the Primate, the Registry and its own Commissions, and those at a level that barely enables them to function. Everything else is funded by dioceses or voluntary societies. The General Synod doesn't have the authority to bind the national church and doesn't command the resources to do anything much. That's why it has relied on symbolic acts, without teeth, that have been unanimously agreed.

If the General Synod really wants an effective national indigenous episcopal presence the Committee recommends a robust debate on a practical motion about what it should look like and how it will be funded. If the outcome of such a debate is that the national church lacks either the authority or the resources, or both, to implement such a presence, then the way would be opened to other approaches, some of which the report identifies.

## **Belonging Together Internationally**

At the national level, then, our belonging together, our being part of a greater whole, is expressed in a variety of ways and enables mission to the nation which otherwise would not be possible. But there are real risks we need to steer around and further development of institutions and structures is necessary.

The same is true in the international Anglican Communion. There is vitality and strength in the Anglican Communion evident especially in the emerging networks. The recent advent of an international Health Network together with the new alliance of Anglican aid and development agencies, means the Communion is now better positioned than it ever has been to improve the health and well being of some of the poorest parts of the globe. Through the active families network, the reinvigorated refugee network and the environment network, together with work being undertaken in theological education and interfaith relations, the Anglican Communion is making a significant contribution on the world scene.

Yet you could be forgiven for not knowing any of that that, given the media concentration on conflicts and threats to the Communion, which, of course, are real. Internationally churches of the communion are facing the temptation to withdraw from participating in the gatherings of the communion, to engage only with the like-minded, and to develop parallel structures that will mean meeting only with those with whom they agree.

For my part, I would counsel against such isolation and parallelism. I believe it can serve only to fragment and weaken the relationships which are so integral to the practical carrying forward of mission, to say nothing of undermining the message of reconciliation we are to bear to the world.

We should place a high value on coherence, unity and belonging together in both national and international spheres. At the same time we should recognize that the institutions and forms that give concrete expression to that coherence will continue to evolve.

Both the national church and the Communion are, in a sense, ongoing experiments, not yet finished, not yet perfected. We would do well to see this Synod's debates in the context of the developments and trajectories of the last 50 years or so, both within the Australian Church and the international Communion. We would do well to recognize that we now make our contribution to that evolutionary process and that ours will not be the final word either. We should assess our inheritance, critically yes, but also sympathetically and gratefully, recognizing our obligation to take the next

steps but also resolved not to discard too lightly what those before us laboured so faithfully, under God, to create.

Consideration of the Covenant for the Anglican Communion in this General Synod will be part of our contribution. But in a number of other ways as well, we will be asking ourselves over these days how we can take further steps in giving form and shape to our being more than local, to our belonging together in that greater whole in order to further Christ's mission.

## **Mission**

Let me conclude with one final word about the significance for mission of our belonging together in a greater whole.

2010 marks one hundred years since the great World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910. That conference gave birth to the modern Faith and Order and Ecumenical movements. The western missionary societies were the driving force behind it. One of their goals was to achieve greater cooperation. What emerged, though, was something of a surprise. A much more powerful vision grasped the conference. Some who were present described it as an experience of conversion. It emerged not from the organizational concerns of the west but, in part, from an impassioned speech from one of the few delegates from China, Cheng Ching Yi, who said -

You have sent to us missionaries who have made Jesus Christ known to us, and we thank you for this. But, you have also brought to us your divisions; ... Deliver us from all "isms" by which you have affected the preaching of the Gospel amongst us."

The 1910 Conference -

... saw with striking clarity that Christian disunity, competition, parallelism, isolation and hostility was the greatest obstacle to mission. How was it possible to proclaim a Gospel of reconciliation – a Gospel of repentance and forgiveness to all the nations – when the bearers of that Gospel were unreconciled amongst themselves? The hypocrisy around Christian disunity continues to block the mission of the church today because disunited Christianity distorts the Gospel.

The operative word is ‘disunity’, not diversity. ... The diversity amongst Christians speaks of the health and vitality of Christianity, and the freedom of the Spirit to blow in different cultures and languages and experiences as the Spirit wills. The vision of Edinburgh 1910 was never a uniform Church but a united one, one that preserved, safeguarded, and celebrated diversity in one Lord, one faith, one baptism (John Gibaut, Bible Study 3 NCCA Forum, Canberra July 2010)

We have an opportunity in our day, and in this Synod, to discern something further of a pattern, a framework that will express our being members of each other, that will keep us engaged with each other, that will enable differences of view and emphasis to be examined, explored, addressed, robustly but respectfully while leaving room for diversity. Unity, is not simply our desire, though I trust it is that. More than that, it is God’s gift. We are obliged to express that belonging together for the sake of Christ’s mission in the world.

## **Thanks**

Finally, on behalf of us all, may I thank the General Secretary, Martin Drevikovsky, the General Synod Office staff and the volunteers who have worked so tirelessly and effectively to prepare for this Synod. Chief among the wider team has been Bishop John Noble and those who worked with him on the local arrangements committee. Your contributions have put us in the best possible position to ensure that our gathering will be as constructive as possible in building up the body of Christ to serve Christ’s mission. We thank you sincerely as we now turn to the business before us.