



# ANGLICANSTOGETHER

S Y D N E Y

VIA MEDIA MARCH 2021

**VIA MEDIA is the newsletter of Anglicans Together Inc, Sydney Australia.**

The title is 'borrowed' from Anglican Church Reformers who sought to walk 'the middle way'.

## Who we are

Anglicans Together includes a diverse membership of people from within the Anglican Diocese of Sydney who seek to work together in order to maintain, foster and develop our common life in the Diocese and wider Anglican Communion. We are a broad group with a diversity of beliefs and practices, reflective of our Anglican Church.

We promote unity and co-operation with one another and encourage one another in mission.



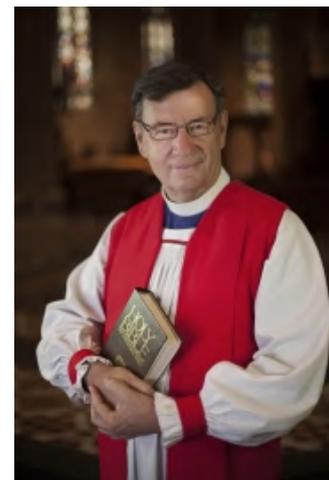
## The Rev'd Dr Max Wood President, Anglicans Together Sydney

For those of us who feel that our annual life journey as Sydney Anglicans just isn't complete without Synod, fear no longer – it's back! After being postponed due to COVID-19 restrictions in 2020, the first ordinary session of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Synod of the Diocese of Sydney is scheduled for a one day sitting on Monday 3 May 2021. The Administrator of the Diocese, Bishop Peter Hayward of the Wollongong Region, will preside. This will follow the retirement of our current Archbishop, Archbishop Glenn Davies, on Friday 26 March.

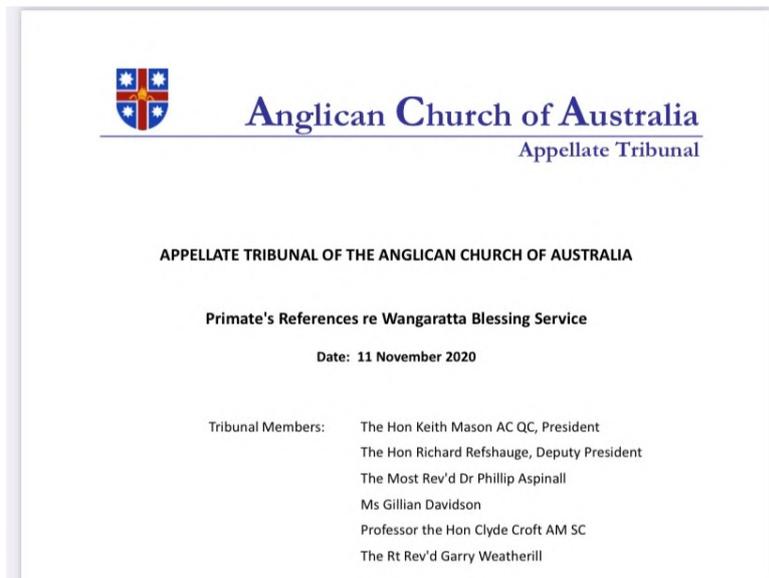
Synod will meet at the larger socially distance compliant International Conference Centre in Darling Harbour after a Synod Service at St Andrew's Cathedral commencing at 1.00pm. A special session of Synod to elect our next Archbishop will commence the following afternoon, Tuesday 4 May, concluding Friday 7 May or earlier if the election is completed prior.

Anglicans Together members who attended the final session of the 51<sup>st</sup> Synod in October 2019 will recall that there was some discussion and debate concerning which group of Lay Synod Representatives (the 51<sup>st</sup> or the 52<sup>nd</sup>) would participate in the special Archbishop election Synod. The global pandemic has resolved this issue, and it is Lay Synod Representatives of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Synod (Lay Synod Representatives elected at Parish AGMs held in 2020 or subsequently elected or appointed) who will participate and vote for the new Archbishop in May.

Concerning the one day first ordinary session, it is anticipated that much of its work will be procedural in nature. However it is also quite possible that there will be motions in response to the much publicised decision of the Appellate Tribunal in November 2020 concerning liturgies for the blessing of civil same sex marriages.



The majority opinion (5-1) of the Appellate Tribunal held that: "Wangaratta Diocese's proposed service for the blessing of persons married in accordance with the Marriage Act does not entail the solemnisation of marriage; is authorised by the Canon Concerning Services 1992; and is not inconsistent with the Fundamental Declarations and Ruling Principles of the Constitution of the Church."



This decision has been warmly welcomed by some sections of the Australian church. Bishop John Parkes, former Bishop of Wangaratta and Diocesan Bishop at the time of the passing of the contentious regulation, has said that he is “delighted...but not surprised that the Appellate Tribunal by majority of 5-1 decided that what we had proposed in terms of a rite of blessing for persons married according to the law of the Commonwealth was lawful ... Had I thought otherwise I would not have proceeded ... I

hope that this sends a clear message to LGBTIQ people at least in this part of the world that they are loved by God and affirmed and welcomed by God's church.”

In contrast, the Appellate Tribunal decision has been strongly condemned by prominent members of the Sydney Diocesan leadership. In a letter to clergy, Archbishop Glenn Davies wrote: “...clergy are forbidden to solemnise same-sex marriages, for to bless such a union would amount to the blessing of sin... In my opinion the effect of the majority opinion's legal interpretation undermines the clear teaching of Scripture and thereby dishonours God... This is a crisis for our National Church and should lead us to prayer as we reflect upon both the teaching of Scripture and the demands of discipleship.” The Reverend Dr Mark Thompson, Principal of Moore College, has also argued: “The opinion is deeply wrong because it opens the door for the blessing of behaviour which the Bible clearly says will exclude people from inheriting the kingdom of God...”

Sydney Diocesan Standing Committee has also unanimously passed the following Motion: “Standing Committee of the Diocese of Sydney entirely rejects the recently released majority opinion of the General Synod Appellate Tribunal. We stand with brothers and sisters all over the world who have resisted the attempt to bless what God does not bless and to ignore the teaching of Scripture on the extreme danger of the behaviour endorsed by the proposed services of blessing. We are deeply saddened that the delivery of this opinion further disturbs the hard-won unity of the church.” It waits to be seen whether similar motions are presented to Synod when it meets in early May.

Concerning the special session of Synod to elect our next Archbishop, nominations are open until 5.00pm Tuesday 23 March. Although there have been some procedural changes, it requires 20 members of Synod to validate a candidate's nomination and also appropriate confirmation of safe ministry checks.

There are now a number of names of potential candidates which have been canvassed, although three names have been consistently mentioned. They are (in alphabetical order so as to avoid any potential preference!):

- **Bishop Richard Condie**, Diocesan Bishop of Tasmania (b.1965) completed his undergraduate theological training and formation at Ridley College, Melbourne. He was

Ordained Priest in Grafton Diocese serving there until he then moved to lecture and minister in Melbourne Diocese. Bishop Condie was Consecrated and Installed as the Bishop of Tasmania in 2016.

- **Dean Kanishka Raffel**, Dean of St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney (b.1964) completed his undergraduate theological training and formation at Moore College, Sydney. He was Ordained Priest in Canberra and Goulburn Diocese serving there until moving to minister in Perth Diocese. Dean Raffel was Installed at St Andrew's Cathedral in 2016.
- **Bishop Michael Stead**, Bishop of South Sydney (b.1969) completed his undergraduate theological training and formation at Moore College, Sydney. He was Ordained Priest in Sydney Diocese in which he has subsequently ministered in a number of parishes. Bishop Stead was Consecrated and Installed as the Bishop of South Sydney in 2016.



It again remains to be seen if any of these potential candidates are nominated or ultimately elected as our next Archbishop.

On a final note, although Diocesan Synod did not meet physically in 2020, it still undertook some important work virtually, with respect to electing positions required for this coming Synod period. As we previously advised, Anglicans Together Committee Members nominated for a number of positions. While none were successful in being elected in contested elections, it is fair to say that the percentage vote received exceeded

expectation. The President and The Reverend Michael Armstrong (Hunters Hill) were also elected, unopposed, as clerical members of the Northern Regional Council.

The Reverend Dr Max Wood  
**President, Anglicans Together Sydney**

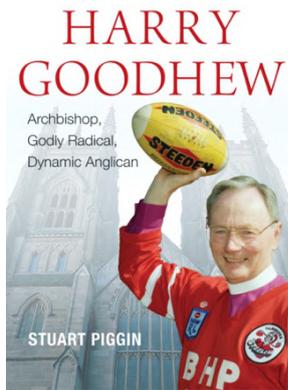
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## **Presidential Elections: American and Anglican**

We are betwixt two high dramas: the American Presidential Election behind us and the election of the President of the Sydney Synod (aka the Archbishop of Sydney) ahead of us. Members of the forthcoming Synod to elect a successor to Archbishop Davies will be keen to learn how it works. History is the best guide to this as to everything else. So, we here look at the 1993 election of Archbishop Harry Goodhew with occasional gratuitous reflections on the election of American presidents.



This is a very truncated version of the account in my biography of Archbishop Harry Goodhew, soon to be published by Acorn Press. I dare say the biography will be more valuable for the light it shines on Harry's servant leadership in parish churches and in the Diocese than on how he was elected. But the biography now begins with an account of his election because it was such a dramatic event. For a start, the response to the formation shortly before the election of REPA (the Reformed Evangelical Protestant Association) was so frenetic it disrupted the whole Diocese, just as near hysterical division preceded the recent American presidential election. Candidates considered unifying were victorious in both cases.

### A six-step election procedure

In October 1992, The Rector of Jannali, Bruce Ballantine-Jones, rang me to give me some advice based on his incomparable grasp of the workings of election synods. Because each candidate for election as Archbishop needs someone to organise his campaign, he suggested that I might head up the campaign for Harry. It was not that BBJ was supporting Harry – he was hoping that another might take that prize – but he wanted all the candidates to have well-run campaigns so that the election synod would be well informed. He outlined a six-step procedure that should be followed (consistent with the Appointment Ordinance 1982):

1. Within 21 Days after the occurrence of the vacancy occasioned by the retirement of the Archbishop, the administrator would summon an electing Synod. He would call for nominations to be received 21 days before the electing Synod meets.

Action: Organise nominations.

2. Not less than 10 days before the electing Synod, a list of all nominees, nominators and their seconders would be forwarded to each member of Synod.

Action: Procure as many nominations and seconders as possible.

3. Nominators and Seconders must be appointed for each of three stages in the election procedure and the Secretaries of Synod notified.

Action: Arrange a meeting of Harry's supporters to determine who will do this.

4. On the first day of Synod, nominations would be made and seconded. The purpose of this first nomination would be to get Harry on to the 'select list'.

5. After the completion of the select list which would be arranged by lot, on the second day the nominees would be proposed and seconded a second time and as many as possible were to be encouraged to speak in support.

When all speeches in respect of the nominee are made, the President will move that the name be included in the 'final list'.

6. In moving from the final list to the final result on the third day, the best movers and seconders should be used.

I rang Harry to discuss organising a campaign consistent with this advice. 'You are far too busy to worry about that', he said, adding that he would prefer not to be elected by 'a big machine.' Never much good with big machinery, I was happy to let the matter rest.

Towards the end of January 1993, a document began to circulate in favour of the election of another. It contained some rather pointed observations on the age of the main contenders, hinting that Harry, who would be 62, was too old for the job. By then Pope John Paul II was 73, and the Americans have just elected Joe Biden who will be 78 when he takes office. It was this document which really precipitated the campaign for Harry.

One who had seen it was Dudley Foord who rang me to express his view that it was likely to be powerfully persuasive. He believed that, in 'the sovereign plan of God', Harry was the man, but his understanding of God's sovereignty was an encouragement to human initiative rather than to passivity. So, on Sunday 31 January, the decision was made to start organising for the election Synod (29 March-1 April, 1993) and not waste another moment.

### **The campaign for Harry: 'The cut of his jib'**

Stephen Judd, co-author of the diocesan history, Sydney Anglicans, rang me to tell me that he intended to give Harry's campaign his support: 'I like the cut of his jib,' he said. With Stephen on board, the campaign developed a strategy. He wished to try something that he believed had not been done before: each of the three stages of the synod debate was to be distinct in its emphasis:

Night 1. Harry, the man, his qualities and his achievements

Night 2. Harry's agenda – his policies

Night 3. Why Harry is the man

The first support meeting for Harry was held at Robert Menzies College, Macquarie University, on 4 February 1993. It was actually quite difficult to get people to it. The zealous supporters of one of the candidates had raided the clergy, and many of the most vocal synod clergy had been recruited to his cause. Among those present at the first meeting were some who were more anti-this candidate than pro-Harry. Shades of those who were more anti-Trump than pro-Biden.

Between the first and second strategy meetings, Peter Kell and Dr Ron James, both laypersons associated with St Michael's, Wollongong, entered the fray. They encouraged me to get on with the job of writing a brochure for Harry and they organised for the funding of its production and posting.

The writing of the brochure was one of the most moving parts of my involvement in Harry's campaign. I contacted people in each of his six previous appointments and asked them for their views of Harry. The exciting conclusion was that, everywhere they went, Harry and Pam had been stunningly successful bringing congregations together, releasing the laity for ministry and generally presiding over the happiest and usually fastest-growing period in their histories. The important, if not necessarily scientific, inference I drew from this research was that Harry could do the same for the diocese and do it quickly.

On 4 March, just four days before the last day for nominations, Harry had not received any nominations. Stephen Gabbott got on the phone and brought the Wollongong clergy to do their duty. In the end Harry received a very respectable 25 nominations from clergy and 23 from the laity.

On 10 March, Stephen Judd and I had lunch with Harry, and Stephen explained his strategy for getting him elected, which meant we had to have some indication from Harry of his vision since we wanted to make this the main thrust of speeches on the second night of synod.

That discussion formed the basis of an agenda paper for Harry, which we discussed at the fourth planning meeting at Miranda on 13 March. We there decided on movers and seconders for the first two days of the debate.

The fifth support meeting was held at Gymea Anglican Church on 25 March 1993. After spending half an hour in prayer, we each gave our impressions of our candidate. It was a moving and incredibly exciting time as we each rehearsed the speeches we would give if called on at the synod. On this night, we finalised our movers and seconders and organised for about 28 people to have speeches in their pockets for Harry.



#### **The election synod**

The election synod began on 29 March at 4.30 pm in the Wesley Centre. Harry's mover, Peter Kell, and seconder, Stephen Gabbott, looked at Harry's qualities and track record. They demonstrated that Harry was the most experienced of the candidates in a variety of parishes in a variety of dioceses. They were two brilliant speeches, and Harry was voted on to the select list to be considered the next evening, with scarcely a dissenter. Bp Paul Barnett made it through with equal ease. Bp John Reid and Phillip Jensen also made it through, but with more difficulty. Their elimination the next evening looked inevitable.

On the second day, 30 March, we held our sixth support meeting in St Andrew's House. Someone suggested that, of the four candidates, we pray that Harry would be dealt with first, and, at the synod, Harry's name was drawn first. Paul Perini and Stephen Judd set Harry's broad vision and double agenda before us. He would build confidence and promote desirable change, they said. Biden's vision of 'unity' and 'possibility' echoes this.

Neither Phillip Jensen nor John Reid got through this second phase. Again, Harry went through, this time to the final list, with no voiced opposition. What struck me was that Harry's supporters were the ones sounding youthful and passionate. Being inexperienced, I did not appreciate that this was the lull before the storm.

The choice was now between Harry and Paul Barnett. According to our strategy, this final night of speeches was to address the subject of why Harry was the man. Debating was not my forte and, too late, I realised that I should have allowed another to put the motion for Harry's election. For, now I had to make a speech in reply. Throughout the evening, I was bombarded with suggestions from anxious Harry supporters about what I had to say. I rose with a great pile of incoherent and unreadable notes. I had no idea what to do with them. Furthermore, I was flustered by the fact that serious misgivings had been expressed about Harry by Paul's supporters. I did not do well.

The surprise was Chappo, who concluded the evening by saying that Paul and Harry were equally eligible, which was plainly true, but not the sort of truth often found in election synods. It was the last synod speech he ever gave and one of the best, the mature verdict of an ecclesiastical statesman, aware that the whole process had become excessively personalised. It was a brilliant way to end the debate, leaving many with a pleasant taste in their mouths.

Maybe there was hope for the diocese after all! Asked later for his impression of the 1993 election synod, Trevor Edwards wrote: It was a remarkable experience ... our group covered the whole Synod in prayer and the people from our group consistently got the right tone in their

speeches. Once the list had been reduced to Barnett and Goodhew there seemed to be a genuine attempt by the Synod to choose between two good options.

We were then required to return the next afternoon, 1 April, and cast our vote. It is a very good idea to allow a day between the last speeches and the final vote. It helps synod members to reflect less on the campaign and more on the candidates. The candidate should not be chosen on the basis of who was supported by the best campaign. It should be decided on the basis of who is the best person for the job. I comforted myself with the thought that, as synod members reflected on the candidates, Harry would get himself elected.

Stephen Judd never wavered in his conviction that Harry would be elected. His best calculation was that in the House of Laity, where 237 votes were required, Harry would win with 269 votes, and in the House of Clergy, where 132 votes were required, Harry would win with 139 votes. In the event his calculation of the vote for Harry was optimistic, by two in the House of Laity and two in the House of Clergy. Harry won with 267 votes in the House of Laity (against 203 for Paul) and 137 (against 122) in the House of Clergy.

Now, humour me! Permit a further comparison with another American President. Admittedly, comparing Harry's election with Lincoln's election in 1861 must strike you as more than faintly ridiculous. But the parallels are really interesting. Both were four horse races; both victors were the least known of the candidates; in both, the losing contenders lost because they had made enemies or at least strong opponents, whereas both Lincoln and Harry had avoided criticising others, and their lower profiles meant that they had not only fewer powerful friends, but also fewer powerful opponents; both Lincoln and Harry were the first choice of the minority and the second choice of the majority; in both it was easy to think of the outcome as a defeat for the most aggressively supported candidate rather than a victory for Lincoln or Goodhew. Then, as Lincoln's and Harry's time in office unfolded, both, though the least vindictive of men, endured tough opposition. Political reality is similar in church and state.

### **Response to Harry's election**

With the announcement of the result, post-election euphoria broke out as the feeling swept over emotionally drained synod members that the decision reached was the will of the Holy Spirit of God who had guided us in answer to our prayers. When Harry and Pam were presented to the synod, Harry was relaxed and radiant. He spoke with such facility and grace as to immediately impress those who did not know him well. The synod broke into spontaneous song, 'A new commandment I give unto you that you love one another as I have loved you.' Harry took that to be 'the expression of a desire for all of us to find a deeper experience of Christian love, generosity and kindness in our shared life across the Diocese.'

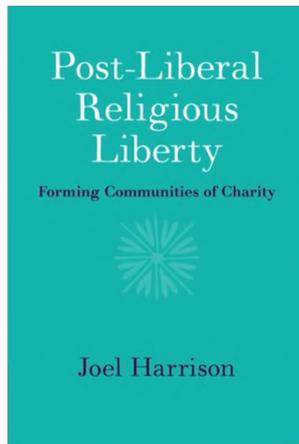
Riley Warren, Principal of Macarthur Anglican School, wrote to Harry, for you to be elected in the first ballot, and to receive such a genuinely warm welcome and ovation, I believe is a true indication of Synod's recognition of you as God's man for Sydney at this time. I praise Him for it.

From 1 April 1993 to 19 March 2001, Archbishop Harry Goodhew was to be 'God's man for Sydney.' Now we must pray that Synod will elect the next God's man for Sydney and beyond. Praying for Joe Biden would also be a good idea.

Stuart Piggin,  
**All Saints, Hunter's Hill**

## Post-Liberal Religious Liberty: Forming Communities of Charity

[Joel Harrison](#) is the author of the recently published [Post Liberal Religious Liberty: Forming Communities of Charity \(Cambridge University Press, 2020\)](#). He is Senior Lecturer in Law at Sydney Law School, University of Sydney. The following is an edited version of a conversation with David Taylor at [The Eucatastrophe](#). Part 1 of the conversation is available [here](#), and part 2 [here](#).



**DT:** *Your account of the purpose of religious liberty begins provocatively: ‘Religious liberty protects the quest for true religion.’ What do you mean by ‘true religion’ and how does this differ from the typical use of ‘religion’ in religious liberty discussion?*

**JH:** By true religion, I mean a religious quest to rightly order our lives towards God. Finding out the truth of religion – what it consists in, what is its end – matters. Augustine writes of ‘right flowing from the source of rightness’. He means forming a community that lives well together, in light of the epiphany of God. True religion then concerns not simply the individual, but the shape of the political community and the role of political authority in furthering the common good. I argue that religious liberty consequently means civil authorities protecting and encouraging this quest. Ultimately, it concerns protecting the free creation of communities of solidarity, fraternity, and charity – love of God and neighbour.

Of course, this sounds provocative – and maybe it is. However, a key argument of the book is that we are simply faced with competing versions of true religion, shaping competing understandings of the political community.

In the book, I criticise liberal egalitarian accounts of religious liberty. Put very broadly, these come in two types. For some, religion is understood as a very capacious category, while for others religion is simply a subset of a broader category of ethical convictions, where each conviction is functionally equivalent or equally meaningful to the individual. Both types of argument point at something like individual authenticity, convictions of conscience, or integrity as the goal or end to be protected by the civil community. Ronald Dworkin writes in this respect of a new understanding of the *res publica* – one based on equal concern and respect or a commitment to ethical individualism. These accounts often see themselves as moving away from religion as a special category for protection and care, to something more abstract, but I suggest that they are fundamentally rooted in theological categories or developments presenting an alternative account of ‘true religion’.

**DT:** *Let’s return to the connection to theology in a moment. First though, what do you argue is problematic in these liberal egalitarian accounts?*

**JH:** They present a paradox. Religious liberty seemingly becomes a capacious category of personal autonomy – expanding to the blooming of multiple identities or ethical choices. But this means that religious expression and religious groups are also increasingly subject to state interests because they are simply one (private) form for expressing authenticity or integrity. This is seen in strands of case law from the United Kingdom and the European Court of Human Rights, discussed in the book. Take the case of Catholic adoption agencies who, consistent with Catholic doctrine, attempted to place children with heterosexual married couples. A non-discrimination law must be applied increasingly universally, against these groups, because the

law is seen as reflecting the balance of individual interests, which in effect means the group itself must become a vehicle for what the European Court of Human Rights identifies as the importance of ‘self-determination’. In practice, I suggest this ironically means that liberal egalitarian accounts struggle with pluralism and real difference. By failing to identify the good of religion, they can flatten religion out of public life.

I’m also very interested in what these accounts then say about our life together. Religious liberty is both interesting and important because it does not simply concern a self-contained discourse. How we think about religious liberty is part of understanding and shaping the very ends of political community – why it is we associate together and what the purpose of political authority is. Typically for liberal egalitarian accounts, religion that would try to shape the life of the political community is at least suspect, and likely in need of some containing. It would be confusing what is private for what is public, or entail exercising authority illegitimately. And yet political community on these accounts still promotes some understanding of our common life – one rooted in an ethical individualism that is not divorced from religion. Consistent with other post-liberal writing, I query whether these accounts further what Charles Taylor calls the malaises of modernity: a sense of rootless meaningfulness (most things are equal and potentially equally arbitrary), atomisation, and a market-based understanding of the ethical life – or, put simply, consumerism.

*DT: On your account, this consumerist mentality – which echoes the liberal egalitarian’s emphasis on authenticity – remains religious. You draw in particular from Graham Ward’s analysis of contemporary religion as ‘spiritualising subjectivity’. But this is part of a wider argument that even the very understanding of the secular promoted by these accounts remains religious or shaped by a ‘half-concealed theology’, as you put it.*

**JH:** That’s right. The question here is: how did we reach a point in which political authority and the political community can be conceived of without thinking of these as a meditation on how we participate in God’s created order?

Within religious liberty discourse, and liberal writing more generally, most writers would think in terms of secular autonomy – the necessary differentiation of spheres of religion and the secular. For example, Jürgen Habermas writes of ejecting the theological or religious warrant for society’s unity in favour of discovering a more fundamental basis in modern constitutionalism. This is known as a ‘stripping away’ narrative. Religion is stripped away to reveal a more fundamental or simply available secular reality. For liberal egalitarian writers, the secular space of political authority is separate from religion; it concerns the autonomous logic of facilitating, negotiating, and furthering claims of right to conscience, authenticity, or self-determination, for example. But drawing from John Milbank, Charles Taylor, William Cavanaugh and others, we can think about how this secular space (and its counterpart, a privatised, increasingly subjectivised religion) had to be theologically invented; how it is we come to understand individuals as exercising sovereign power, mediated by a single sovereign political authority, unmoored from a now distant God. It is this secular space that purports to protect society against the pretensions of religion, and the individual’s self-determination against the collective claims of religious groups.



**DT:** *You are challenging notions of secular neutrality. That must be contested, even by different religious legal theorists. How do they understand religious liberty typically?*

**JH:** In the book I discuss the views of John Finnis, Richard Garnett, and Nicholas Wolterstorff, in particular. But we can draw a general contrast to accounts rooted in what I'd describe as liberal pluralism, which rests on some notion of secular neutrality.

For example, freedom of the church theorists will emphasise that the church's freedom poses a jurisdictional limit on the authority of the state. But on this account, the state fundamentally promotes freedom, rather than a religious end. Because the state is not competent in religious matters, factional difference and ultimately the freedom of the individual can bloom within civil society. In turn, this means that no single group can take the reins of government.

Or, from a more popular angle, you now see [some appealing](#) to the so-called 'Benedict Option' argument. Here the claim is that we have entered a post-Christendom world (or Babylonian freefall) in which the task is to build lifeboats, arks, or local communities. We should eschew a more integral politics or what Jacques Maritain called the 'comprehensive aim of building a better or new Christian civilization', realising this is lost for now. At the same time, we must advocate for religious liberty – understood now as the freedom to cultivate our own spaces within a multi-culture. While I think building communities is exactly right, I have real problems with how this account construes Christian politics, as we have [previously discussed](#). It is also not clear it provides any basis for securing the good of religious liberty. There is, I think, an assumption in both of these accounts that freedom itself provides the source for respecting and protecting such communities. However, if that is what is at stake, then why shouldn't these communities be equally subject to the law, like other instances of freedom?

**DT:** *In contrast, you develop what you call 'the ecclesiological account' of religious liberty. What are its features?*

**JH:** Religious liberty I suggest is grounded on a goal that civil authority is serving and subordinate to – a desirable good; a transcending truth; a social end. I argue this is forming communities of solidarity, fraternity, and charity. And such communities are to be free. In pointing to and instantiating a higher end that the civil authority responds to, they cannot be entirely subject to or mere delegates of the state.

The account is ecclesiological because it starts from the Church as a kernel, setting out – as Augustine argued – a practice that should shape all of life. I then break this down further into three themes. First, religious liberty concerns pursuing the common good; it is part of the quest for human flourishing and true sociality. Second, it concerns forming a 'community of communities' (to borrow from John Neville Figgis) – the Christian tradition emphasises a complex overlaying of associations and sites of authority. Third, religious liberty then ultimately serves this community, pursuing the common good, to live in charity in all spheres of life. As I conclude in the book, religious liberty on this account concerns participating in a divine economy of love.

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## The Heroic English Village

In this very difficult time of the coronavirus pandemic I recalled again the story of an English village named Eyam. Eyam is in Derbyshire and my wife and I visited it while on a long camping

holiday around Britain in 1975. My Willson ancestors came from the area around Hope, in the same county. I read again the story in a volume of "The King's England".

In September 1665, during the reign of Charles II, the bubonic plague had broken out in London and thousands were dying. Samuel Pepys gives a vivid account of it in his diary. The eleven volumes of the famous diary, with accounts both of the Plague and the Great Fire, rest on my library shelves.



### THE DEADLY INFECTION

That month a box arrived in Eyam from London with cloth and old clothes. That box carried the deadly infection. The first victim was the journeyman, (carrier), who had opened the box. He was dead within four days. By the end of that month five more people had perished.

For more than a year the pestilence raged in Eyam. Within a year 259 out of 350 villagers had died, as well as 58 children.

But it is how the village responded to that frightful ordeal that makes it famous to this day. It was not only a place of grief and despair but also a place of quiet heroism.

### ISOLATION

The Church of England parish priest, William Mompesson, his wife Catherine, and another clergyman living in the village, set themselves to isolate the village from the outside world and so to contain the infection. With a stick they drew a line around the village and everyone swore not to cross it.

They arranged for food supplies to be brought from the outside world and left at places on the boundary. They left coins to pay for these supplies, each coin being carefully washed before being taken away.



Deaths became so frequent that the church bell ceased to toll and there was no room in the graveyard. In August 1666 Catherine Mompesson, wife of the Rector, died and was buried in the churchyard. A yew tree now marks her grave.

The heroic sacrifice of Eyam was not in vain. The infection of the plague did not spread to neighbouring villages around Derbyshire. My Willson ancestors, and many others, may possibly have owed their lives to the sacrifice and courage of Eyam.

### REMINDERS OF THE PAST

We visited the Parish Church on a beautiful summer day. The quiet beauty of the place today seems to be a world away from the horrors of the plague three hundred and fifty years ago.

Much of the ancient medieval church was later "restored" and sadly the old furniture was scattered. But there are many reminders of the heroism of the village. I remember seeing a beautiful book on display listing the names of every recorded villager in Eyam, those who died and those who survived. Visitors may see an ancient oak chair carved with the Rector's name "Mom, 1665". It is said to have been rescued from a dealer's shop in Liverpool where it had been discarded as junk.

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I remember seeing the “leper’s squint” dating from the Middle Ages. A leper would be totally isolated and forced to ring a bell and cry “unclean” to warn anyone not to approach him or her. But he was allowed to crouch against the outside wall of the church and view the Mass being celebrated on the altar through a hole called the leper’s squint.

### THE 2020 PLAGUE

In 2020 the world is struggling to cope with a coronavirus pandemic, a new plague like the bubonic plague or leprosy, and many have died while scientists desperately struggle to find a vaccine. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century there was no knowledge of a vaccine but the people of Eyam coped with their ordeal just as we are being asked to do. They kept themselves isolated to protect the people of other villages and many paid for it with their lives.

Our Blessed Lord said, as recorded in John 15: 13, “There is no greater love than this. That someone should lay down his life for his friends.”

Robert Wilson

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### Annual Membership Renewal

Membership of Anglicans Together is now due for renewal. Membership is \$35.00 (\$30.00 concession) and your support will help us to continue representing a more inclusive expression of Anglicanism in the Diocese of Sydney.

For more information, please visit: <http://anglicanstogether.org>

**Editorial Policy:** We aim to publish a wide range of views and opinions in this newsletter. Publication should therefore not be read as necessarily endorsing or approving a particular view or opinion.