

Sermon at St David's Cathedral

**OPENING OF  
THE PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA 2006**

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Pope Benedict XVI, a conscripted member of the Hitler Youth and the German army as a teenager, walked through the gate of the death camp at Auschwitz last Sunday and sombrelly confronted the sites where his countrymen killed an estimated 1.5 million people, the vast majority of them Jews.

Dressed wholly in white, the 79-year-old pope passed under the infamous iron gate wrought with the Nazis' mocking slogan, "Arbeit Macht Frei," or "Work Makes You Free."

He paused to light a candle and pray silently in front of a stone wall where the Nazis executed

thousands of prisoners with bullets. Then he entered a cellblock and descended the stairs to inspect an underground dungeon where a Polish Catholic priest, Maximilian Kolbe, was left to starve after he offered his life to the Nazis if they would spare a fellow prisoner.

One Polish citizen at Auschwitz yesterday, Jakubowicz, aged 67, was imprisoned by the Nazis in the nearby Plaszow concentration camp as a child.

He said, "thirty-one of my relatives were killed here. It is both remarkable and proper for Benedict to make Auschwitz the symbolic climax of his visit to Poland."

**"The very fact that a German pope is coming to the concentration camp at Auschwitz and praying, isn't it a gesture of asking for forgiveness?"**

“Arbeit Macht Frei” – spin. Spin is the greatest danger to western democracy today. The fashionable truth, the mistruth, the half truth, the glossed truth, the failing to tell the bit that gives the full truth. My wife tells me that we lawyers are good at that and in the name of justice!

Work – Arbeit – is a wonderful and powerful commodity to empower the individual, to bring out the best in us, to mobilise our society for the good of all. Wollongong, my home town, with parts of Tasmania has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Australia.

But there is a more powerful source of freedom; it undergirds democracy; it is one of the higher category values that ensures the strongest society. Along with justice and faithfulness and genuine love for neighbour, it is foundational to true freedom.

The Son of God – the Lord Jesus Christ says, “The truth shall set you free,”

Our Australian Coat of Arms bears the Red Kangaroo and the Emu – two animals that cannot walk backwards, “Advance Australia Fair”. We are moving, forging forward.

[Someone also told me that we are the only nation that eats its icons – but we will not go there.]

The Tasmanian icons - the two Tasmanian Tigers on our coat of arms - are inedible for reasons we know only too well: note our motto “UBERTAS ET FIDELITAS” – FERTILITY AND FAITHFULNESS.

Faithfulness has a prerequisite – truth.

Justice shares that prerequisite – truth.

Love has three prerequisites – faithfulness, truth and unconditional service.

The current propensity to “spin” threatens the very foundation of democratic freedom.

This morning I thank and encourage you as leaders, custodians of the common good and shepherds of the people of Tasmania.

As ministers and priests of the Christian gospel we undertake not only to pray for you today but undertake pray for you every Sunday.

The apostle Paul reminds all Christian churches in his letter to his young disciple Timothy that *prayers and intercessions and thanksgiving be made for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.*

Can I challenge you to think again about the dangers of marketing for marketing’s sake – and spin that all so often clouds the truth.

In the letter to the Romans – Paul writes

*Let every one be subordinate to the ruling authorities, for there is no authority except by God, and those that exist have been put in place by God.* (verse 1) (verse 4) *The governors are God’s servants for your good.* (verse 5) *It is necessary to be subordinate, not only because of judgement, but also because of conscience. They are God’s servants devoting themselves to this very thing.*

Three points:

Firstly, God has put Paul Lennon in Government. God has put Will Hodgman as Leader of the opposition. Now, someone may wish it the other way round. Let’s depersonalise it for a moment. Again nothing personal, as we think of Benedict the 16<sup>th</sup> and his Auschwitz cry - **"In a place like this, words fail. In the end, there can only be a dread silence -- a silence which is itself a heartfelt cry to God: “Why, Lord, did you**

**remain silent? How could you tolerate all this?"**

Paul himself proclaimed the Christian gospel under pagan rulers – none other than the despot Nero – no friend to Christians. Yet he says – *there is no authority except by God,*

**Christians and non-Christians are to subordinate themselves** – the Greek – a technical word – means *choose to co-operate with* your leaders. Voluntarily submit yourself for the good of all.

We have seen in East Timor, rampant hooliganism offers no joy, no security. Paul knows that insubordination may be as harmful as an oppressive ruler.

Secondly, Paul says *the work of governance is a sacred ministry*. Members of Parliament Paul uses the same word in verse 6 of you as he uses of the Deacons in God's church. You in public

office as the representatives of the people, with our Judges and administrators in their public offices, in God's eyes exercise a ministry to the world as sacred as the priests of temple and the ministers of religion.

That is why we, the people of Tasmania, co-operatively not always liking what you decide, legislate, say - must choose to co-operate. We *voluntarily submit*. We demur only through the ballot box itself. Here is freedom. Here lies our security. Here is the foundation of that great principle of democracy known as the rule of law.

Let us not defeat the God's plan; let us not undermine the basis of freedom – the very rule of law with marketer's spin.

Thirdly, increasingly heard is the Spin that the churches and its clergy and people should keep their nose out of politics. A sneaky phrase that is un-Australian and undemocratic in our

Westminster system is frequently raising its ugly head – the false ideology of the **separation of Church and State.**

This is totally un-Australian. It is an American constitutional construct that arose from the particular traditions of oppressed immigrants from European countries with peculiar oppressions.

It is quite clear. Australia does not have a legally entrenched principle, or even a vague set of conventions, of the separation of church and state.

From the appointment of Rev. Samuel Marsden the first magistrate in colonial New South Wales, to the adoption of explicit policies of state aid for denominational schools in the 1960s, Australia has had a very consistent tradition of church/state cooperation

“Separation of church and state”, along with “pleading the Fifth”, are phrases that we have learned from the US, and which merely serve to confuse once they are taken out of the context of the American Constitution.

What Australia does have is a principle of state *neutrality*, or equal treatment, when dealing with churches.

Remember there are four times as many Anglican adults in church in Sydney on any given Sunday than are members of the Liberal and Labour parties combined, I am told. In any week 10% of Australians tend to be in church. We make a most significant contribution.

The Kingdom of God – preached by Jesus the Christ – is not simply some heavenly concept. As a disciple of Jesus Christ I am a pacifist, a humanitarian, an opposer of prejudice and tyranny and carer of the marginalised.

Followers of Christ have been among the great political change agents – Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr to name only two in the last century.

In history Elizabeth Fry of the Quakers and the chocolate makers elevated the place of women. She was instrumental in reforming women's prisons and on Sunday preached a great sermon.

Wilberforce and the evangelical Clapham sect were foundational in the abolition of slavery: in initiating child labour law in factories; in creating London's suburbs with clean air and sewerage. Do not tell Fry or Wilberforce or Mueller of Bristol – he was of the Brethren faith - derided by some in the recent Tasmanian elections – he housed 10,000 orphans and spent 250,000 pounds of his own fortune spent on the poor. Separation of church and state – they would laugh.

Until 100 years ago charities world wide had a common foundation – the love of Christ.

It is the Sabbath. We are in Nazareth. Jesus stands in the synagogue in his hometown. The Rabbi brings the scroll and Jesus finds the text of the day,

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
Because he has anointed me  
To preach good news to the poor,  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the  
prisoners  
And recovery of sight to the blind,  
To release the oppressed,  
To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*

The Sydney Morning Herald on Friday May 12 front page headline said – **Chief Justice takes swipe at lynch mob.**

The head lyncher was the leader of the opposition, Peter Debnam, who calls for

mandatory life sentences for cop killers. The criminal in question, and he was a criminal, was the driver. The Court of Appeal found he lacked the necessary *mens rea*, the intent, to be convicted of murder.

This is troubling spin. We must protect the innocent. We must especially safeguard our police, but it must be just.

The law and order debate is seen as a vote winner. Let's not clothe it in spin. Boomers like myself read as our final high school year text – Waugh's *American Way of Death*. Today we eagerly adopt the *American Way of Gaols*. Remember there are more people incarcerated in gaols in the United States than in college.

I had a client some months ago. She was gaoled for six months for lighting her abusive, partner's clothes after a particularly provocative attack. Yes, the house was badly

damaged. She got 6 months. Her lover on a prior conviction got 100 hours community service for shifting her nose to the other side of her face. Her surgeon comments, "I had never seen anything quite like it."

Why are our gaols so full? Where is true justice to be found? Are we moving forward or like 17th century England creating a greater social evil all over again?

Now not all spin is bad spin.

This year Tasmania, Hobart, this Cathedral celebrates 150 years of *responsible government*.

The God of the Bible longs for faithfulness, justice, truth and love under his rule.

His Son the Christ proclaimed the inbreaking of God's new era – the age of the Christ and the Pentecost Spirit. This Kingdom promises

true Utopia for God is recreating a new creation – no greenhouse any more – he is creating a new humanity – peace, no tears, no death – and this Creator God by his Son invites all Tasmanians – “share in my new creation now and forever”. That is why this Cathedral stands with you and desires to serve and pray for you.

And God’s Kingdom stands on FIDELITAS – never spin – costly FIDELITAS that endures.

I deliberately called you Shepherds. The Biblical shepherd is strong and caring and pays a great price. I know that as Parliamentarians you pastor many an undeserving citizen; you give up family time; you are hurt too often in the making of hard decisions.

We thank you – we pray for you personally and for you in your task of advancing this state in all its fertility and beauty and troubles.

We pray that you will not be tempted by spin – but will stand firm for:  
\*justice with good law making;  
\*truth without which there is neither security nor freedom;  
\*love which is of the essence of God and a healthy community – and above all  
\*FIDELITAS faithfulness – faithfulness in office and family  
for the blessing of this state and its families and yours. AMEN

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Dean of Hobart 30 May 2006