

*This is the transcript of an address given by former Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson at the Brisbane Lord Mayor's Annual Breakfast held last month. It is a timely reminder for our nation as we face a militant push to neutralize the influence of the Christian faith in our nation.*

By John Anderson former Deputy Prime Minister of Australia.

Hello and thank you very much indeed for your kind introduction. It's great to be in Queensland. I'm sort of 'out to pasture' these days in terms of public life and I have to say that I don't greatly miss it, and I think very much of myself as just a private citizen again so it's always a bit of a shock when sometimes someone recognises me or half recognises me.

I was in a reception line for a charity in Sydney a little while ago and people were filing past and politely saying 'hello' to the heads of the charity and then to my wife and then to me, and a very charming and gracious elder lady from a prosperous area of Sydney, immaculately dressed and manicured, looked straight at me in the eyes and great warmth radiated and she put her hand on mine and she said 'Now Sweetie, I know I've seen you around Sydney many times over the last couple of decades. Worse than that, I know we've been introduced, but I've forgotten your name and I'm going to have to ask you to tell me who you are because I cannot resist the temptation to tell you that you bear an uncanny resemblance to that fellow John Anderson who used to be the Deputy Prime Minister.'

Lord Mayor Campbell Newman, it's great to be here with you. I served for many years around a cabinet table with your mother. I was very fond of your mother; she was a lovely, warm, friendly person – one of those genuinely beautiful people – and I mean that in every sense of the word. You will know, as her son, that the smile often hid a very forceful and gritty approach to life.

I remember on one occasion she came to me with an idea that involved spending quite a bit of money on disadvantaged rural communities and she said, 'Are you with me on this?' and I said, 'Absolutely!' She said 'Do you think that the Treasurer and the Finance Minister and the Prime Minister will be?' and I said 'No, not with that price tag attached to it.' 'Good' she said, 'Well I'll go up and publish it now as our Policy, and then they can clean up the mess afterwards!' And I have to tell you that she and I lost quite a bit of skin over that, but we got the Policy.

Well, like so many Australians, I watched on with horror at the recent seasonal events - out-of-season natural events in the state - over the summer period and I want to say to you that our hearts certainly went out to you. We admire greatly the leadership that was shown and the volunteerism and all of the things that went to ensuring that the best of a dreadful situation was made.

It did cause me to reflect on something, and that is that, tragic as it was, and particularly tragic where lives were lost, we are fortunate indeed, are we not, to live in a country where we have the capacity to mount outstanding emergency responses, and the financial wherewithal to assist communities and indeed the state, frankly, to recover? Those are good things!

The great majority of people who live on the surface of the globe today do not live in societies where such things are possible. Yet we take them for granted. But I want to say to you, ladies and gentlemen, that I don't think we should take the great blessings we enjoy for granted. I think we are in very, very great danger in the West of seeing our privileged position ebb away.

As a farmer, I'm very conscious that if you want to grow a good crop you have to first till the soil in which the crop is grown. The crop of freedom, of democracy, and all of the good things we take for granted in our lives, is, in fact, Christianity and yet our society has moved away from it and so little understands now, the soil in which the crops of freedom are grown, that I do not believe that we can continue to expect to grow those crops, and I'm deeply sobered and deeply concerned by this. I really am.

You know, it strikes me as a great irony that the atheistic regime in Beijing better understands our history than we do. I'm indebted to the ABC (I'm sorry, Heather – another media organisation, you've heard of them) to the ABC Religion Hour, if it still exists, for a broadcast they had a couple of years ago and someone gave me the transcript and it was with a very senior correspondent in Beijing and he was reporting on a major study that the Communist government had undertaken into the Christian church in China; and the report had come back indicating that the church growth in China was amazing and that it is not likely to be stopped.

And it caused great consternation, and that is, of course, behind the persecution of the house-church movement in particular in China. Why? I'll tell you why, as our correspondent said. The Chinese government understands that it is Christians who start to agitate for the recognition of 'the little person'. For the radical idea that we take for granted yet you find in no other culture. No other belief system that I've ever encountered. That all have dignity before God, and that the King must respect the peasant just as the peasant is expected to respect the King - the Good Samaritan story.

The Bible, of course, is based on the whole idea that each is precious; and the Chinese understand the European history! It was that radical nation that built the idea of representation in Parliament, peaceful means of removing those who become corrupted by the lure of power, which is almost all people who get hold of power. Not Ron Boswell and me, but most people, and you need a peaceful means to resolve that and democracy has evolved out of it. Nor do we understand the way in which transformed and renewed lives have transformed our society.

My political hero is a man called William Wilberforce. To many of you he's still a hero today – to Christians everywhere. Here is a man who came from Hull, entered Parliament as an extraordinarily privileged and wealthy young man with the world at his feet, in an age of great moral 'messiness' in Great Britain. It was a 'Superpower' but it was a dreadful place; inequitable, corrupt, vice-ridden, and he had everything to gain by remaining the sort of dissolute young man that he was, but he got converted.

He got converted and he was transformed, and this man went on to do something that was extraordinary for somebody from the mercantile class; a very wealthy man. He came to see that people with black skin mattered equally to God to those with white skin and he led the greatest human rights campaign of all times, that which freed the slaves.

The Left in this country used to prattle on about human rights till whales became important; until the cows came home but we've erased our understanding that it was the Christians who gave rise to our democratic freedoms and to the idea that slaves should be freed, and so on and so forth. We've jettisoned it all.

Now England, the country that exported Christianity and freedom; you know, the 'mother of the parliaments' and what have you, has changed. Like Australia, there was a time when Christianity, even if you didn't go to church, was seen as true; then there was a time when it was just one of many truths. Now, according to the intelligentsia, it's dangerous and you shouldn't expose your children to it! And England's busily exporting the new atheism – the Richard Dawkinses of this world and the Christopher Hitchenses.

Christopher Hitchens wrote 'God is Not Great: Why Religion Poisons Everything'. Are you all aware of that book? He was in Sydney about twelve months ago. He was at the Opera House with the ABC (you can see how I love that organisation) I think it was them. They had this 'Dangerous Ideas Conference' you see. So here's one of their great heroes, Christopher Hitchens – a brilliant man who's against God – he's up there.

At the same time, ironically, I have to tell you (I'm an Anglican) the Anglican Church had an outreach thing called 'Thirty-nine Prominent Australians Talking About Their Christian Faith'. And they were prominent Australians (well, thirty-eight of them were – I was the thirty-ninth)! Remarkable men, from captains of industry to Peter Costello to sportsmen to scientists to medicos, proclaiming their belief in the resurrected Christ - while Christopher Hitchens is saying that only an imbecile believes in a resurrected Christ today!

I would have thought that that was a potential 'field day' for the media. Thirty-nine (thirty-eight plus one) prominent Australians saying they do believe while the Great Atheist is saying only an infantile believes. Isn't that rich ground? And yet the media, confronted with something unfortunate, like a whole lot of thinking, intelligent Australians who believe in a resurrected Christ – it's easier just to ignore it, isn't it? What have we come to?

Christopher Hitchens has a brother. His name's Peter. Peter was an atheist too. Then he went to live in Russia for quite a while and he saw what seventy or eighty years of atheistic Communist rule had done to the people, and he converted, and he's written a book called 'The Rage Against God' and in that he mounts incredibly powerfully, the argument that we are being blind and foolish beyond belief. He says we've silenced God; we've mocked Him, we've sidelined Him; we won't give Him a role in the public square. Must we learn it all again – that no society that says it can do it without God preserves its freedoms or lasts for very long? The brother of a great atheist; that's what he says; and he goes on to talk about some of the disastrous results – and again, he'd have seen them in Russia.

Do you know the first thing he nominates that's been so damaging out of all of this? The trashing of marriage. The trashing of family; and he argues very powerfully, and I agree with him because I can see it – I saw it in public life – your elite, your intelligentsia, the 'trendy', who are at the forefront of trashing traditional marriage and traditional family and seem only to speak for adults, and never for the interests of the children who have to grow up in some sort of environment, ladies and gentlemen, so they, in a way, are the least to suffer from the trashing of marriage. They can go and find a 'trophy bride', or a yacht, or a chalet in Switzerland to take their mind off the pain, but as it filters down through society the results are more and more and more devastating.

There is a little town not far from where I live which used to be a good, honest working town; it's now a social security town. The school has shrunk and shrunk. There's twelve kids in that primary school today; they have between them three mothers and five fathers.

Will those children – precious every one of them – be selfless givers to humanity, able to contribute to society; to take their place in our community and help us build a bigger, stronger community and families of their own? Or will they be people tragically locked into a cycle of welfare dependency and of deep need drawing on the rest of the community – I ask you?

They will be preoccupied with self and that is another enormous price we are paying for the abandonment of Christianity. Selflessness built our freedoms. Selfishness is destroying them.

One thing politicians know about is what you're thinking. They employ very sophisticated and expensive polling techniques to establish what you're thinking, so that they can tell you what you're thinking and hopefully you'll say, 'What a great leader!' Now the trouble is that, of course, nobody thinks the same thing anymore because we're breaking up as a society and it's almost impossible to find a 'common thread'

anymore but, the other people who know what you're thinking is the advertising industry and in particular the banks. Sorry, I'll offend everybody by the time I've finished this morning! And you may recall that advertisement that just had a big page and a hand pointing out of it 'Look after the most important person in the world – You'.

Stop and think about it for a moment. Isn't that what's ripping our society apart? Isn't it that very selfishness that we now idolise that so threatens our and our children's future? And more than just the fabric of our society; it spills over into economics. The thing that is really shattering us now is, of course, the GFC. We've been largely immuned from it in Australia. Now, it wasn't very long ago that I would have said that there'd been a good government that had a bit to do with that. I suppose if I'm honest it's China taking all our exports and all those sorts of things. But I think we're all aware that we've been very fortunate in this country but that the world is in deep, deep, deep trouble.

You've got once wealthy countries all over the world, once really wealthy countries so deeply 'in hock' that their responses will be one of three or a combination of three things; they'll have to massively wind back government services, and in a selfish age that's a very painful thing to do because no-one wants to lose anything; they'll have to raise taxes – ditto – or default on debt repayments. All of them threaten us; threaten those societies and the Western Alliance; indeed, the global outlook. That's something, ladies and gentlemen, that in an age when politicians want to say 'We'll make sure this never happens again, and we'll put in place the regulations that won't let the greedy bankers and so forth, do it again' that we're overlooking that the crisis has its roots in character failing and in moral failing; in greed and in poor judgment, and you can't legislate against those things.

You actually need a cultural environment where people understand that your word should be your bond; that you should earn rather than seek instant gratification, on borrowed money, the things that you want. I'm not saying I'm against sensible use of debt. I'm not against that at all. I'm a good capitalist after all. But this is out of control and you won't fix it by regulation, and it wasn't just a few greedy bankers in the United States. What is revealed is that everywhere, governments and their citizens had been living beyond their means, and what it amounts to, of course, is a monstrous inter-generational theft, because we're putting our children's and our grandchildren's futures at risk. That in turn, of course, has further consequences. It threatens the whole of the Western Alliance that we are part of.

For years we've lived as a middle-ranking, wealthy and free nation as part of the most privileged alliance of nations on earth; probably that the world has ever seen, ultimately under the protective mantle, in recent decades, of economic, military, social, and I cringe a little when I say it, the cultural might of the United States. But the warning signs are all there; that it isn't going to continue much longer. And in the midst of all of this in a deep-seated sense of anxiety right across the western world, governments are failing. This is not a reference to Obama in any way politically or personally, but I don't think I've ever seen anything more ridiculous, more frightening or naïve or stupid than watching the way in which everyone salivated at the thought that this new American President Obama could 'save the world'.

Lemming-like, everyone, including the western press (except Heather) embraced this idea that if we just get rid of that other man and we put this new one in, it will all be fixed up. There was only one Messiah. The undue expectations placed on that man's shoulders were ridiculous – and we're doing the same thing in Australia, we're casting around for leadership because we want to be let out of it. But the problem is, ladies and gentlemen, as any good historian knows, you've got no hope of working out where to go if you can't work out where you are, and you can't work out where you are if you don't know where you've come from. That is our problem. So don't think any time soon some great western leader (who can be trusted anyway) is going to come along with the solutions to the problem, because it isn't going to happen until we collectively wake up to ourselves (in my judgment) and that doesn't look like happening any time soon. So it's a grim outlook in some ways.

I recently re-read, though, a little book called 'The End of Christendom'. It was written by Malcolm Muggeridge. Actually it wasn't written by him, it's a record of two lectures that he gave in America in 1978. Malcolm Muggeridge was one of those truly brilliant Englishmen. They do happen. And he was absolutely 'up there' with the C S Lewises of this world. He'd been a journalist and he'd lived in Russia in the heyday after the revolution when much of the West, let alone the Russians, thought this was the way to freedom; atheistic communism – 'we can do it better without God'. That was the Left Wing's version of how to do it without God; then you have the Right Wing's version, which is fascism.

They both visited unbelievable suffering of humanity. Remember Peter Hitchens? Think you can do it without God? Learn the lessons of history – you can't. He became firstly very cynical, and ultimately a Christian out of what he saw in Russia, and in 1978 in these two lectures; Pascal lectures in America; Pascal named in honour of a great French Catholic philosopher and thinker who wrote so powerfully about mankind, coined that term 'the glory and the scum' - the nobility that is the God image in us; the scum that comes from our fallen nature evident in all of us.

Sometimes we say 'I'm the good guy', that's what we do isn't it? They're the bad guys. No we're not. The Bible says that each of us are a combination of both; flawed hopelessly by sin. He became converted. He said 'Western society based in Christianity is moving away from everything I'm saying now'. He has a much greater mind than me so I'm only following in his footsteps really. He warned precisely what was happening, and thirty-three years on, everything he said would unfold is unfolding, albeit, I fear now, at an ever-accelerating rate. But, he said in the second lecture, 'This is no great cause for concern at one level. All societies rise and fall'.

Another great English mind, Arnold Toynbee, wrote that towards the end of his life in the 1970s. He said that of the twenty-three great civilisations that he had studied down through the ages, all had ultimately collapsed - not as a result of external takeover, but of internal decline, and the dying stages, very interestingly, the common theme, the dying stages of all the great civilisations were first selfishness and then a giving-over into apathy. 'I don't care. I'm not going to lift a finger for anybody else. Except that I demand that someone else fix my problems'.

So Muggeridge said 'Look, it may be that the West will fail, in fact it's probable that it will.' I hope he's wrong; I pray he's wrong and I'm sure you all do too but we've got to heed the warning signs and understand why it's happening. 'However', he said, 'That will not be the end of Christianity. It will not be. God will simply move on to new areas. He loves His creation and He will move on.' And he was repeatedly asked by journalists and cynics and so forth, 'What's your evidence for this?' And his evidence was very interesting. He said, 'Look at fifty or sixty years (at that time) of atheistic rule in Russia. It hasn't killed off Christianity'. A third of Russians at that stage still believed in Christianity and he pointed to people like Solzhenitsyn, the great thinker and Christian writer who found faith in a gulag salt mine prison.

He couldn't see what we can see, which is that Christianity, actually, is quite evidently, about to enter its most vibrant and wonderful stage globally. That is what is actually happening.

It's terribly bad news for Mr Dawkins and Mr Hitchens and they must sob themselves to sleep every night, but this will not be a century of atheism. This will be a century of enormous ferment over beliefs and the values that are driven by beliefs; and by behaviour. The Chinese government understands that. They should. Ten to twelve percent of the Chinese population today are believed to be Bible-believing Christians. That is a hundred to a hundred and twenty million people!

Six percent, it's estimated, of India's population: I have a friend who heads up – gave away a business career, a very spectacularly successful one – to head up Alpha in Asia, not Australia, in Asia. Twelve

thousand churches in India today are offering Alpha courses and forty percent of the people who enrol in them remain in a church.

I'm here with Stuart Brooking, a very good friend of mine. He is the Executive Director of Overseas Counsel Australia. It's a mission organisation. We support colleges in the emerging world. There's an ad, Stuart, if anyone wants to talk to you afterwards! And I should acknowledge Jeremy German who's a very good friend from CMS - he's here as well. The people dedicated to mission; they would know what is happening.

In Indonesia, the most populous Moslem nation on earth right on our doorstep. There's a hundred Bible Colleges in Indonesia. Did you know that? Just been there, and for all of the ferment in that country there's a real interest in belief and some very strong Christian growth.

Africa: seventy percent Christianised. Now they say it's a mile wide and an inch deep – desperate need for good teachers. I heard the Bishop of Uganda the other day describing how he has several hundred parishes that he cannot fill with trained men and women. Enormous need, but an extraordinary response to the Christian gospel.

What should we say then, in the face of all this? Should we despair at the state of our culture? At one level – yes! But what should it drive us to do? Gird our loins to take up our cross and to reflect the Hope that is ours! I had Tim Costello say to this city a few years ago (I'm Patron of SU in Queensland; a role I love. I always love it when

Queenslanders are friendly to me, because I know how you feel about southerners in this state) and Tim Costello was saying 'You know, one of the things we don't understand any more; we've stripped our kids of hope. Our grandfathers hoped that if they ran the risk with their wives of coming out to this country and surviving the ship journey and then going out into the outback and building a life, they might develop a better future for their children, their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren. Our fathers', he said 'hoped that if they worked hard they'd have a comfortable retirement and be able to provide a better outlook for their children. Our children hope for a good time tonight.' And he had a point.

We must broaden our horizons and understand the Christian hope. There is real work to be done, firstly in this country. We must do everything we can firstly on our knees to encourage people, our fellow-Australians to come back to faith. As a very big part of that we need to recognise that as a multi-racial society – great thing – many of the people who come here are very open to the faith.

I have a young Chinese friend in Sydney. He's a Presbyterian Minister, he's only 31, but you know he has a thing called Rice. I said 'Why do you call it Rice?' and he said because I come from Asia and we like rice. I said 'What's Rice?' He said, 'Once a month we get young, mainly Asian believers together in the Sydney Entertainment Centre for a night of fellowship. Not a church. Just a night when we come together for some fun, share experiences, sing, pray, what-have-you.' I said 'How many do you get?' and he showed me a photograph. Auditorium full; he said eight to ten thousand people.

Wouldn't it be an incredible irony if we from a traditional Caucasian background who walk away from our faith and our culture and let it decay around us, have the whole situation picked up and retrieved for us by New Australians? God bless them if it happens, but we ought to be working with them in every way we can. And then there's the homelands they came from.

You know, the fascinating thing, the wonderful set of opportunities and responsibilities that arise for Australia stem largely from its geography. We're of the West, that's patently obvious, but we're not in it. We're in Asia, and Paul Kelly who's a journalist I respect enormously is the Editor-at-Large of the Australian. He wrote the other day that if Wayne Swann is right to say that Australia can ride (and he was

referring to economics, but let's face it, it needs to go much beyond that I believe, and a whole range of ways) ride the rise of Asia. He went on to say to stop and think about whether our values are in sync with Asia, and he referred to their hard work, to their commitment to their countries, to their family values and to rising religious faith.

That's what he wrote in the Australian just before Christmas and then he said, 'You must realise these values are anathema to many of the people who run the debate in Australia today.' And they are, but we know that they're right and we need to 'tap into it' and to work into it and to recognise that if that is where God is working, there are tremendous, strategic opportunities and responsibilities for us.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's been a great pleasure being with you. I seek to encourage you in that hope that in the midst of despair we need to recognise that God is building His Kingdom. He will not be mocked. He will not be thwarted. As Peter Hitchens says, that is a very stupid western idea that will only enjoy a very short currency, ladies and gentlemen, because in the end, we get our three score and ten; and our response in the midst of this must be to remember that God calls each one of us into a loving relationship with Himself through Jesus Christ.

We need, then, to use the gifts and talents that He has given us and which ultimately belong to Him to expand His kingdom here in our own country; here amongst those who come to us in our country and, I would suggest, wherever else we have the opportunity, but particularly in Asia. God bless you.

*Source: John Anderson - Former Deputy Prime Minister of Australia*