

## **NSW CENTENARY OF FEDERATION COMMITTEE Barton Lectures**

THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES. RECOGNITION OF THE PAST. RECONCILIATION IN THE FUTURE.

Barton Lecture No. 8

I would like to give my respect and honour the ancestors of the Eora, the Cadigal, the Gadigal and the Dharruk on whose lands I am about to speak.

Indigenous Peoples have occupied their lands since time immemorial, so far back into the beginnings of humanity that it is seemingly irrelevant whether it is 60,000 years or 100,000 years or a million years. The ancestors of peoples who owned and occupied these lands of the Sydney environ are not usurped by the presence of us, but are forever an integral part of our history and our future. Ironically, Customs House is also where the first flag of the colony was placed. What an auspicious site of significance as we look to the past to interpret our future.

As Oodgeroo Noonuccal of the lands of Minjerriba wrote so eloquently, 'Let No-one Say the Past is Dead, the Past is all about us and within...'. I would like to quote a poem of hers that resonates with the intention of these Barton Lectures.

"Understand, Old One"

Understand, old one,  
I mean no desecration  
Staring here with the learned ones  
At your opened grave.  
Now after hundreds of years gone  
The men of science coming with spade and knowledge  
Peer and probe, handle the yellow bones,  
To them specimens, to me  
More. Deeply moved am I.

Understand, old one,  
I mean no lack of reverence.  
It is with love  
I think of you so long ago laid here  
With tears and wailing.  
Strongly I feel your presence very near  
Haunting the old spot, watching  
As we disturb your bones. Poor ghost,  
I know, I know you will understand.

What if you came back now  
To our new world, the city roaring

There on the old peaceful camping place  
Of your red fires along the quiet water,  
How would you wonder  
At towering stone gunyas high in air  
Immense, incredible;  
Planes in the sky over, swarms of cars  
Like things frantic in flight.  
What if you came at night upon these miles  
Of clustered neon lights of all colours  
Like Christian newly come to his Heaven or Hell  
And your own people gone?  
Old one of so long ago,  
So many generations lie between us  
But cannot estrange. Your duty to your race  
Was with the simple past, mine  
Lies in the present and the coming days.

#### Oodgeroo of the Noonuccal of the land, Minjerriba

Recognition of the past calls for recognition of the people who have shaped what we are today as well as recognising that we today, will shape the future for those who follow us. It is what we do in the present that will determine the nature of the society we leave as our legacy to future generations, but more so, it is by our actions and deeds that the future will judge us. The future we hold in our mind's eye. We dare to imagine a world of infinite possibilities in which hope springs eternal, where experience makes us wiser and where we suspend our disbelief to believe in the moment of 'what if'. If recognition of the past equates with our wisdom and reconciliation is our hope for a shared future, then surely restitution is the journey toward our destination as a community and a nation.

Australia celebrates 100 years of Federation, however, the arrival of the Constitution does not necessarily equate with either a nation's maturity or wisdom about how the State may honour its contract with the people. Instead, Australia's early years of political organisation are evidence not of any real embodiment of democracy and a political philosophy, but a Leviathan where political ideology and hence its counterpart, political opportunism have governed as Australia's political *raison d'être*. However, Australia's unique geographical position and the relative isolation from the ancien regime have birthed a society where its members have offered a profound insight into how democracy is imagined and manifested. If we are capable of imagining that we are the sum total of our atomic parts, and we believe that Australia has reached a political maturity and wisdom, then recognition of the rights of those citizens who are disempowered by the State needs to be addressed as a matter of political principle; for then why should the State receive endorsement from those it so actively disempowers. Restitution is the State's responsibility to fulfill its charter to its citizens from whence it derives its very power. To deny or refute that restitution is a priority, is to perpetuate the myth of Australia's democracy while all the more consolidating the rise of an authoritarian State.

The beginning of Australia's Constitution took ten years from 1891 to 1901 and in that time, the self-proclaimed ruling elites and the squattocracy, managed to ensure that their powerbase was firmly entrenched, their economic interests consolidated, and their domination over Aborigines, Women and others was determined. Ironic then that the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in a parallel ten year period from 1991 to 2001, failed to garner the necessary endorsement from the same ruling elites, to ensure a document for reconciliation that would invest the moral and ethical attributes of nationhood.

Perhaps the imperative of nationhood and the resolution of Australia's relationship with Indigenous people were not really part of the intention of the Federation of the Commonwealth. And thus, democracy is still an oxymoron for Australia. While espousing the superficial rhetoric of democracy such as majority rule and representative democracy, the continuing exclusion of Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders and other disempowered groups from the political process reveals how democracy is considered in the most narrow and insular of interpretations in Australia. Very different from the classical notion that, the State derives its power from the polity and that the individual and the group rely on the State as an agent to uphold and protect their rights and freedoms. The social contract is more than an administrative institution ensuring the functionality of its components; it is about notions of rights and freedoms, about the contract of entrusted autonomy .

If those who constitute the State are not prepared to act in a manner that enfranchises the polity then why should Aborigines as a polity, entrust their autonomy in such a dangerous institution. An institution that conducts itself on the whims of political opportunism and expediency and actively seeks to disenfranchise the rights, freedoms, and accordingly, the very existence of Indigenous people, has no validity.

If the State can manifest a democratic political philosophy ensuring the integrity of each of its members while refuting its ideological premise of opportunism, then it is paramount that the State seeks restitution as a political principle.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Australia is a unique and diverse nation affording a home to some 18 million people. Of that 18 million people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders constitute some 1.8% of the population. Yet, we have the profile of fourth world peoples. Our civil, political, economic, social and cultural record is a source of shame for such an affluent nation-State. 'Compared with other Australians, Indigenous people experience poorer health, limited employment opportunities, educational disadvantage and greater imprisonment'<sup>1</sup>. While we may wax lyrical about Australia as a nation, imbuing ourselves with a collective spirit about what it is to be 'Australian', it is ultimately Australia's conduct as a nation-State that will determine whether or not we have reached a political and civic maturity and wisdom.

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<sup>1</sup> Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 'Roadmap for Reconciliation' 2000

We are an imagined nation and identify as Australians due to what exists in our imaginations. We imagine that we are who we are as a people because we promulgate symbols, iconography, images and words that reinforce our sense of belonging, our sense of community and our sense of identity. That we choose to reaffirm our sense of identity in the public arena through participation with the wider community is indicative of some common held notions of what it is to be Australian today. What those notions are however exists in the realm of our imaginations- we continually negotiate and renegotiate with each other to determine and define these abstract notions. And yet we yearn for an imagined nation where we can transcend our interminable differences about our social structures, our beliefs, our prejudices and allow ourselves a moment of wonder at the richness of the society we have through the contribution of the many. We ask ourselves 'what if...' and fumble for an expression of what we may become as a nation.

The Centenary of Federation was perceived as a symbol for addressing Australia's uneasy relationship with Indigenous people. In 1994, the Centenary of Federation Advisory Committee published its report, *2001, A Report from Australia* emphasising the opportunity to redefine Australia's nationhood and highlighting that one of the most important issues was reconciliation. "It is imperative that there be an assessment of the progress made on reconciliation. Without meaningful progress in the reconciliation process there will be no truly national celebration."

What are we celebrating then in the Centenary of Federation in 2001?

We can celebrate the changing culture of Australia where the awareness of Indigenous People has increased. The rise of art and culture has highlighted the nature of Indigenous cultural paradigms. Stories, songs, dances and paintings manifest the interconnectedness of Indigenous art, culture, heritage, relationships to the land and the sea, and customary law where political, economic and social issues are interwoven. Today, it is not surprising to have a welcome to country, Indigenous dancers opening events, large international touring exhibitions or theatrical works, rock concerts and literature on the education curriculum. It is through art and culture that the identity and diversity of Indigenous people is asserted and that non-Indigenous Australians begin their journey. It is the beginning for the understanding of the world inhabited by Indigenous People as told by Indigenous people.

The Sydney 2000 Olympics intrigued all Australians, especially the Opening Ceremony. A statement of immense symbolic images- we stare transfixed and disbelieving that this is the sum total of who and what we are. The pageantry and beauty of the Australia we now live in amazed us. Some sections resonating so deeply with knowing that we were overwhelmed, as if, intoxicated with the scent of our essence as a nation. What a magnificent, complex, rich and mesmerising essence. That we were more than large kangaroos on bikes. We were entranced by the many elements of who we are- our relationship to the sea, the ancientness of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, the beauty of our land, the early beginnings of the

colony, the Tin Symphony, the arrival of migrants, our industry and finally a symbol that the working class and their energy had built this country we call home. 'The land and all within it are not and cannot be seen as divorced from humans and human society. The landscape is humanised, and humanity is read in terms of the land. There is a mapping of human history onto the land and a view of human life in terms of the landscape'<sup>2</sup>.

For many Australians, it was a watermark occasion. Endless media commentaries expounded that we had reached a level of maturity as a nation. We watched as athletes strove for their personal best, and when Cathy Freeman ran, Australia literally stood still for forty nine seconds. The Closing Ceremony was all the more telling for its symbolism- when Midnight Oil took off their garments and revealed the word 'sorry' repeated several times we cheered in agreeance, that they had done so without the awareness of those in authority resonated in the psyche of many. Christine Anu and Yothu Yindu succinctly articulated for us, our love for our land and our most pressing issue of a treaty. We laughed when larger than life symbols of modern Australia threaded together seemingly disparate elements of who we are...from cupie dolls to Mambo. The Olympics saw many Australians in theatres and boardrooms, in offices and on the streets, transfixed as day after day of the Olympics, something unveiled about their Australia, our Australia. Yet we are all these things and more.

We are capable of recognising that there is a great deal of unresolved business in the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia: The Reconciliation walk across the bridge was a symbol of one of the most fundamental issues we face as Australians. Half a million people crossed the Sydney Harbour Bridge. People came from all walks of life to state that they are a visible symbol for reconciliation. Under clear blue skies emblazoned with the word 'sorry' they joined hands with fellow Australians and breathed life into the nation; an echo of the *Sea of Hands* exhibition which toured the length and breadth of Australia. A potent symbol of the desire of many Australians for Reconciliation, seemingly anonymous by their absence yet very much present in the landscape of Australia's deliberations on reconciliation. Across Australia, many people signed the 'sorry' books to articulate what the State was incapable of saying. That Australians had engaged for some ten years in the countless workshops held throughout the country about how we may move forward in this country to calling ourselves a united Australia, is testimony to the fact, that we know we have serious work to do before we are ever truly comfortable about who and what we are.

We examined our prejudices, stereotypes and history to formalise our disparate and common goals into a document that would be presented to the government as a symbol of the deliberations of its citizens, articulating the formal position of the people. That document began with a future hope envisioning, 'A United Australia which respects this land of ours, values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and provides justice and equity for all'. Reconciliation has stirred a nation's conscience. It is a symbol that we want to achieve as a reality for our community and our nation. That this

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<sup>2</sup> Anderson, Christopher 'My Country, My Painting' 1990

document now lies in some government office gathering dust is an insult to the polity. People put government into power and as it follows, they can remove governments from power. To date, the people have instructed the government that this issue is a substantive principle and a central issue for the nation.

If reconciliation is perceived as attainable in the future, we need to ask ourselves- how long and which aspect of reconciliation? It is not enough to believe that the formal responses can wait and languish, and be subject to political opportunism. The social justice imperative of reconciliation requires action now as it did in 2000. It requires the formal acceptance of the civil, political, economic, social and cultural changes necessary to ensure that a united Australia is a reflection of our respect for our land and seas, our valuing of the heritage of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders and that we are, a just and equitable nation-State. If we take care of all of these aspects of the reconciliation process, then the reveal in the future will be the society we have created. The future belongs to our children and it is they who will be the beneficiaries of our moral and ethical legacy. Reconciliation will be our political high watermark as a nation.

Let the symbols of the future resonate with truth and substance. Let us not let them become a cynical dismissive exercise of bread and circuses for the nation. We are a decent people and we are not fools. When the rest of the world is tearing itself apart from cultural and racial power plays, let us have the courage to demand that we are the sum total of our many parts, we are united through our diversity.

For reconciliation, the focus needs to be on institutional, structural, collaborative, cooperative reform. It is about a fundamental shift from welfare to basic rights, from dependence to autonomy, from government assistance to power. Central to this is Indigenous self-determination. It is not about mimicking non-Indigenous determinations of what is good for us; it is about the right to determine our future as a fundamental premise of asserting our authority and autonomy as Indigenous peoples.

Throughout the course of Australian history, every step towards the recognition of our rights to live and exist within our homelands has been fought for and fought hard. Every single day. Whether the right to be served in a shop or to have running water or a job; to the right to have title to our lands recognised, our culture recognised, our status as Indigenous people recognised, or recognition that we are citizens of the nation-State called Australia. We are focused on achieving not only collective rights as Indigenous People as recognised under International law, but also citizen rights as expounded under domestic law.

Why, if the Constitution took some mere ten years for realisation, has not a document for reconciliation been achieved in ten years?

At the beginning of 1891, when Edmund Barton and others began the push for a Constitution, Indigenous people had already lived through their first

centenary of struggle for recognition in their own lands under a foreign military regime. What that centenary represented then, is perhaps no different to what the Centenary of Federation represents today- Bread and Circuses under an authoritarian regime. As it was then, so it is now. There is no reserved seat at the table of power, for those seats are reserved as they have always been reserved throughout the course of Australian history, for those who derive their power from ensuring the continuation of inequitable relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Inequity that has as its basis, the war between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people where land and culture was and still is, the central issue.

These fundamental grievances will not vanish without restitution. Recognition of the past highlights that there were no treaties, no formal settlements, no compacts. Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders did not cede sovereignty to their lands and it is that issue that will remain a continuing source of dispute. In looking to the past for corroboration, I would ask, where are the Eora and the Cadigal; where are those peoples who watched the ships come in so long ago, and who are conspicuous by their absence in these times. Why do the Dharrug, the Wiradjiri, the Gamilaroi, the Pitjantjara, the Kooma, the Wik, the Wandji, the Gugu Yalandji, the Bundjalung, the Larrakia, the Noonuccal, the Indinji, the Walpiri, the Pintupi continually assert their identity and their culture?

In 1901 with the enactment of the Constitution and the consolidation of the economic and land interests of the ruling elites and the squattocracy- who obtained their status through the subjugation of Indigenous Peoples- the tome was written for an Australia where opportunism was the political *raison d'être* and democracy was a politically correct term derived from those bastions of English privilege and American self-interest. In 1901, Aborigines were living on missions and reserves akin to concentration camps, where their movements were controlled by the State; and it is the State and its control over Indigenous people that has been a continual motif to signify the relationship with Indigenous people. Essentially these relations have been about the State maintaining its controlling interests and in that rubric lies the foundation of why Indigenous people seek self-determination. Indigenous people controlling their interests is a fundamental tenet of restitution. Whether the State chooses to endorse that tenet or maintain its opportunistic interests is at the heart of Australia's current debate on reconciliation.

During this period, the State actively legislated for the establishment of Reserves and Missions throughout Australia. In the 1930's, the policy of assimilation was touted by the State. Indigenous Peoples were to be assimilated irrespective of their wishes. The emphasis being on those who were considered 'detrribalised'. Within this period, Indigenous resistance saw the emergence of *The Aborigines Progressive Association* established by Bill Ferguson, the petitioning of King George by William Cooper to have Aboriginal representatives in Parliament and the publishing of the first Aboriginal monthly newspaper *The Australian Abo Call*, by Jack Patten. It proclaimed January 26 as 'The Day of Mourning' and it listed a ten point plan that encompassed a call for rights including raising the status of Aborigines to

citizens under the Constitution. It was also the first exhibition by Albert Namatjira. Evocative rich watercolour landscapes articulating the vibrancy and brilliance of the land through the eyes of an Indigenous person. During these times, Australia became a signatory to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, in effect, declaring itself as an international member-State and subject to the responsibilities and obligations of upholding human rights- not only political and civil rights but also economic, social and cultural rights.

It was not until the 1967 referendum that Aborigines were recognised in the Constitution and accorded citizenship and the rights inherent, as citizens of a nation-State. 'Basic social rights such as the right to employment, education, training, a minimum income and access to basic health, housing and community services are integral to full participation and contribution to Australia's economic and social development.'<sup>3</sup> That it took some 67 years for citizenship is perhaps more indicative of the rate of change for any issues where Indigenous rights are concerned. Some 33 years later, we are still trying to have those basic citizenship rights upheld. Not so surprising then that the overturning of the legal fiction 'terra nullius' took some 200 years, and let me state categorically, it was at the behest of Indigenous people that these challenges have been made.

The recognition of rights for Indigenous peoples is not only about the recognition of its citizenships rights but also about collective rights as Indigenous People. Those rights reflect the provisions for protection against actions which intend to deprive Indigenous peoples of their cultural integrity and against integration and assimilation, and is concerned with the right to maintain, practice and revitalise cultural traditions. It is about the right of Indigenous people to a distinct identity and culture including the right to control the education system and to educate in language. The State has had no interest in recognising and enshrining these rights, they have been dragged through history kicking and screaming.

During this period, the Gurindji struck for their rights and began a 7 year battle for their land, while the Federal Government gave the Nabalco mining company a 42 year lease to mine bauxite at Yirrkala. In 1969, the Commonwealth Office of Aboriginal Affairs was established while the first Aboriginal delegation went to New York and presented a statement on the condition of Australian Aborigines to the office of the United Nations Secretary-General.

The international arena is no stranger to Indigenous People or Australia.

In 1971 with the first census taking place, the Northern Territory ruled in the Gove Lands Rights Case that Aborigines, under Australian law, did not own the Arnhem land reserve, which effectively meant that Nabalco could mine there. The 1970's were an auspicious was an auspicious time. From the establishment of the Aboriginal Legal Services, the Medical Services, the first member of parliament- Neville Bonner and Evonne Goolagong's win at Wimbledon to the proclamation of the Queensland Aborigines Act. An Act

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<sup>3</sup> ATSIIC, 'Recognition, Rights and Reform- A Report to Government on Native Title Social Justice Measures 1995

which chartered how those living on reserves could have their culture and customs banned, their reading matter, mail, recreation, marital and sexual relationships censored; work and wages decreased and peoples' movements recorded. In 1972, the Tent Embassy was established on the lawns of Parliament House in Canberra and the world witnessed the actual brutality of the nation-State, where police clashes with Indigenous people screened across the world. The 1970's witnessed the rise of the land rights movement and Indigenous people challenged the right of State control over their homelands. In 1975, the *Racial Discrimination Act* came into force as the State enacted domestic legislation as a result of its international obligations under the *International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination*.

The 1980's saw the consolidation of the Indigenous platform domestically and internationally- the quest for rights, the emergence of Indigenous art and culture, the Long March and the Bicentennial. In 1992, Australia suddenly took a huge step towards adulthood. Nurtured for some ten years, Eddie Mabo's quest for recognition of rights proved to be a legal watermark for Australia. The historic decision of the High Court in its determinations of the *Mabo Case* shook the foundations upon which Australians had maintained their power base and notions of supremacy. That the High Court overturned the legal fiction of 'terra nullius' and recognised Indigenous property rights has reverberated through out the 1990's. What a telling lesson about Australia's maturity and wisdom.

The enactment of the *Native Title Act* of 1993 and its emphasis that freehold and leasehold grants extinguished native title was refuted by the decision of the High Court in *Wik* in 1996 whereby extinguishment was not guaranteed. This was swiftly followed by the 'Ten Point Plan' and the *Native Title Amendment Bill* in 1997 which sought to remove the right of Indigenous people to negotiate and proposed, extinguishment, of native title. . The *Racial Discrimination Act* served its polity well as the State had to contend with the fact that it could not legislate actively against its citizens on the basis of race. We witnessed one of the most bitterest power struggles between the State, the elites and Indigenous people.

We witnessed the vilification of Indigenous people, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the obscenity of mandatory sentencing on children which has been loudly condemned, the denial and diminution of the experiences of the Stolen Generation who were subjected to barbaric concepts dismissive of the fundamental relationship between parent and progeny, the emergence of the ugly face of racism, the denigration of the judiciary who are entrusted with the law of standards of how we shall conduct ourselves towards one another; the megalomania of the State, the ignorance and confusion of the polity, the contempt of international bodies that determine global moral and ethical standards for how we may co-exist as the mass of humanity and the fear of a nation-State. What a telling lesson. Telling indeed.

And yet, the restoration of Indigenous property rights enabled this country to move ahead. Indigenous people and pastoralists engaged in a dialogue and negotiated coexistence on the land through the development of regional agreements. An inter cultural dialogue where the interpretation of the world according to each of the subjective values of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can be accommodated. There is no dominant philosophy of interpretation. That oppositional and conflict al paradigm does not auger well for the concept of a united Australia- a nation that honours all its peoples. The accommodation of all Australian identities is paramount to nationhood as well as the premise that the nation upholds the rights of its members. Rights that are assumed by everyone in this room today, but that are no t enjoyed by Indigenous People en masse. Restitution is about recognising the present and ensuring that the present is a reflection of the maturity and wisdom we have garnered from our past.

Restitution requires measures that encompass prevention, education, protection and provision of effective remedies through institutional and structural mechanisms of the State to ensure that all benefit through participation. Restitution encompasses:

‘self-determination and the ability and resources to develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities on the basis of Indigenous knowledge and aspirations  
full equality of treatment for Indigenous Peoples’  
recognition of their status as the Indigenous peoples and original owners of the land  
recognition and protection of Indigenous cultures  
compensation for dispossession  
equitable access to government programs  
adequate resources to overcome disadvantage; and  
recognition of Indigenous sovereignty’<sup>4</sup>

The reform required highlights the following priorities:

‘major institutional and structural change, including Constitutional reform and recognition, regional self-government and regional agreements, and the negotiation of a treaty or comparable document which must address the issue of compensation;  
overcoming inequities and inefficiencies in service delivery, including the achievement of genuine access and equity in Commonwealth, State/Territory and Local Government programs and revised Commonwealth-State funding arrangements;  
full recognition of the social and cultural diversity of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, and the need for policies and programs to have the flexibility to enable them to be tailored to address more effectively the varying local circumstances and priorities of Indigenous communities and groups;

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<sup>4</sup> ATSiC, ‘Recognition, Rights and Reform: A Report to Government on Native Title Social Justice Measures 1995 p12

protection of rights through such means as recognition of customary laws, protection of intellectual and cultural property and recognition of Indigenous rights through a Bill of Rights.

practical measures to enhance opportunities for economic development and to achieve objectives such as improved public awareness of Indigenous cultures and Indigenous issues.’<sup>5</sup>

Concurrent with these events is Reconciliation and the National Strategies to sustain the reconciliation process, promote recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, overcome disadvantage and aim for economic independence. . In ten years we have witnessed the increasing awareness of the cultures, histories and rights of the First Peoples of Australia. That reconciliation is now a peoples movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century augers well for a future where we can discuss and debate in recognition of the fact that we shape our future. Today in Australia, a great debate rages about the moral and ethical position between ourselves and the wider world. All these reveal that we as Australians have reached our Rubicon and we need to be aware of what that means for the future. There is no turning back. None of us can go back to the old order.

We are engaged in one of the most dynamic dialogues of our times. In its wake, old orders will be challenged and deconstructed and new orders will rise and permeate the landscape of our consciousness. This is the age of ethics. We are confronted by a convergence of issues so profound that we will need to rethink and reassess our place in the world and our relationships to one another to negotiate the complex, interwoven and interdependent nature of our realities. Civil, political, economic, social cultural, scientific, technological and environmental paradigms will require our considered, informed, moral and ethical response- for each and every action- there will be a consequence, for each and every paradigm- there will be impact. What we decide to do will shape the legacy for future generations of this century.

What that legacy will be, will be a result of ideas that manifest themselves in cultural, intellectual and spiritual action. We can provide a Eucharist for humanity or a game of cynical Euchre. When we understand the nature of the events that are shaping us and the inherent philosophy informing that action then we will reach an understanding as to what our path may be and how we proceed down that path. It will take courage and leadership at a far more personal level than we have witnessed or assumed to date, it will take personal commitment- we must act the way we wish our society to become- if we acquiesce or abrogate our responsibility for involvement, then we will bring into effect a society that we cannot shun for we have created it willingly through, either, our action or inaction. The personal is indeed the political.

Reconciliation is essentially about how we reconcile our past to our future in recognition of our diversity and our hopes for a shared future, 'A United Australia which respects this land of ours, values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and provides justice and equity for all'. How do we

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<sup>5</sup> <sup>s</sup> *ibid*, p12

achieve a common standard by which we may begin to coexist and to realise a sense of nationhood in which our identity is a reflection of our culture, this I believe, is the challenge for our imagination and in our actions, the realisation of our humanity.

Only you can know the depth of your commitment to the future and I for one, want to know, how far we shall journey in this time together as Australians.

Come, let us talk together about our future.