

Launch of *Not Helpful* by the Right Reverend George Browning

Speech by Acting Justice Richard Refshauge

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting, and whose sovereignty has never been ceded, and pay my respects to their elders, past present and emerging. I commit myself to personal acts of reconciliation.

A week or so ago, my wife, Barbara, and I were delighted to attend the wonderful performance by John Bell of "One Man in His Time", a personal, funny and moving evening of Shakespeare with the greatest living exponent of the Bard of Avon.

He gave a fabulous rendition of many famous speeches created by the Elizabethan playwright, showing how modern so many were and actually spoke to our time. I was proud to remember quite a few, which I found I could recite - perhaps my education was better than I thought!

Some required a little exegesis, a process that we Christians understand especially in these days of controversy about women in ministry, rampant usury, same-sex marriage and the blessings of such unions.

While not wishing to consign our distinguished author and Guest of Honour to the grave just yet, but recognising that we are, at least in part, in launching these memoirs, looking at Bishop George Browning's legacy, I could not help but think of the words that Shakespeare put in the mouth of Marc Anthony, "The evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones", but which Bell did not declaim, nor interpret. Thinking about it, I decided that Shakespeare was wrong in this generalisation; indeed, often we find that careful thought and distance enhances the legacy of so many and we appreciate what they actually have done and the contribution that they have made.

I rather prefer the epitaph for Sir Christopher Wren, "Si monumnetum requiris, circumspice" or, in what my Latin master, the late exquisite Professor Kay Masterman, would describe as Pig Latin, "If you want to find a monument, Sir, come spy, see".

In this chapel of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, that is an entirely fitting comment on the contribution made by Bishop George to this city, this Diocese, the Australian Church, indeed, to Australia.

This memoir is a fascinating and instructive journey through Bishop George's life and work and an illuminating window into his personal history, how he came to the positions that he occupied and the views that he espoused.

As I said in my Foreword, which I was honoured to have been asked to write and proud to have contributed, it was inspiring to see how he so valued and respected his fellow human beings that he could learn from them and their experiences to form the thoughtful positions that he took. It was a great education to see how he could come to many positions after

wrestling with issues and respecting the need to realise that “now we see through a glass darkly”, so as to form a provisional view but one clearly formed through careful consideration of reason and theology.

This, and his abiding faith, which shines through the book so strongly, with the commitment to his Lord Jesus Christ, led to his success and important leadership in many ways.

I think of what he did as Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn, too much to itemise, but especially of his early recognition of the need for action to address the sexual abuse of children through the scheme of Contact Officers throughout the Diocese, the growth and importance of Diocesan Schools, the creation of a vibrant, prayerful and creative Diocese with wonderful people trained and nurtured that came to enhance it and the wider Church - 7 Diocesan Bishops currently or in the recent past who spent significant periods here, as well as people from the Diocese in senior Church positions, such as assistant bishops and Archdeacons here and elsewhere, leaders of national church agencies and other positions - then, not least his speaking truth to power in national affairs, his leadership in environmental protection and enhancement and, of course, the cause of my reference to the Wren epitaph, the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, an amazing, influential, unique and effective institution, that was essentially his vision and creation, with the impressive support that he garnered.

This is the man about whom you will gain insight when reading this book. You will understand and appreciate the work he did and the thoughts he had which underpinned that work and why he was as prominent and his work as significant as he and it was.

It is a good read. I recommend it without hesitation. It is honest and clear-sighted; no series of insider stories that can only be understood by the cognoscenti. It is an accessible trip through the interesting life of a devoted Christian and important Australian, who appreciated the gifts of God, and which actually centrally includes the creation of the world and the people chosen to inhabit it, and a person who was committed to enhancing, protecting and celebrating these gifts and not at all hesitant about saying what he thought to the great as well to the rest of us.

We are certainly lucky to have this impressive contribution to the biography of important Christians and grateful that it is no stuffy read but an inspiring and energising discernment of his personal history, life and thought.