

# Tim Fischer Oration

Delivered by The Hon. John Anderson AC FTSE  
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I first met Tim Fischer in 1984 when I was 28 and he was 37.

I was struck by his wide-ranging curiosity, genuine interest in others, and his sheer energy. Two-minute Tim consistently filled 18 hours a day with two minutes slots! I was his deputy for six years, and his successor as leader of the National Party and Deputy Prime Minister for six years. He was intelligent, trustworthy, honourable, and warm – as well as endearingly cunning – and a man of simple, though not superficial, faith.

His most lasting legacy may well be that his authenticity, his genuineness, his openness, his character was sufficiently strong enough to cut through the cynicism and distrustfulness of our modern culture. In short, Tim was trusted because of the way he lived his life.

Whatever our personal qualities, both Tim and I managed one utterly brilliant decision in life. We both chose our parents very well. They were Australians – and country Australians at that! How could anyone deny the cleverness of our choice to be Australian citizens?

A nation blessed in every way, a nation of freedom, of prosperity, of opportunity...where a shy and awkward boy from the Riverina could become Deputy Prime Minister. A shy and awkward boy from Mullaley could become Deputy Prime Minister.

Mind you, I managed a touch more brilliance than Tim: I chose the moment of my arrival a little more wisely. He was an early baby-boomer, and I was a mid-baby-boomer, so I missed the travails of Vietnam, where of course he served with his usual courage and stoicism.

Nonetheless, I grew up in the shadow of war. My father served in the famous Ninth Division in the North African desert, so revered and feared by General Rommel who referred to them as the finest men that the British Empire had produced. He was horrendously wounded on the second day of Montgomery's great and ultimately successful pushback against the Africa Korps at El Alamein.

His mates were told that he would not survive his injuries – but he did, and I grew up with a father who was revered. People would visibly respond with respect to someone who was known as a courageous war hero who had seen unmentionable and terrible things. He himself never spoke of it all to me, even when I asked about his shattered leg and the pieces of shrapnel still rising to the surface of the skin on his left shoulder, and the deep scar across his stomach.

And I could only wonder in horror at the night-time screams when he'd wake up re-living at the moment when the Panzer found the range and he was yelling at a younger man to "get down, get down before you get hit!"

I was left with a profound appreciation of my freedoms and those who had risked, and all too often, given all for them. And I was convinced of the need forever to avoid naiveté and wishful thinking about the world. One has to deal with things as they are, not as you would necessarily like them to be, at the same time as you try to work towards a better world. And indeed, I've always believed that if you want peace you must prepare for war.

In order to understand the future, one must begin with a solid understanding of the past. Australians in the 1930s, when my father was growing up, were living in somewhat of a fool's paradise.

In the lead up to the First World War, a very young Australia of just four and a half million people recognised that serious global unrest was likely to lead to war. On a bipartisan basis, the newly federated country prepared deeply and thoroughly. They built an impressive army, and a tier two navy – complete with the first two of what was intended to be six submarines – ground-breaking technology at the time, but that did not deter our forebears.

When we celebrate Anzac Day every year, we often forget that that newly acquired naval power enabled tiny little Australia to secure the Southwest Pacific and make its homeland safe in the face of the enormous German presence in the Pacific.

By contrast, in the 1930s we not only had no submarines, we had no effective antisubmarine warfare capacity, which was to prove disastrous after the Japanese entered the war. We in our cleverness had not purchased Spitfires or Hurricanes, rather we had pursued industry policy and tried to build our own fighters – the Wirraway which proved hopelessly ineffective, and little more than a death-trap for the cream of our youth who so bravely tried to do something meaningful with them.

Perhaps it was understandable that after the horrors of World War I and the trenches, no one wanted to even countenance, let alone plan for, another war. Emotionalism and wishful thinking ruled over reason and analysis and, frankly, perhaps even courage.

This of course was not simply an Australian problem. The famous Oxford pledge in February 1933, a debate at the Oxford Union Society in England, saw the motion that “this house will under no circumstances fight for its King and country” passed by 275 votes against 153.

Winston Churchill always maintained that the so-called Oxford Pledge, encouraged Hitler to believe that the West was becoming soft and degenerate, and that its young people no longer believed that their culture and its values were worth defending.

He wrote later that year that any society which failed to pass on to its young the story of their culture – its heroes, its religion – was in effect saying that that culture was null and void, thus leaving its young people without direction and meaning and purpose in life, and open to Karl Marx's dictum that a people deprived of their history are easily persuaded.

Churchill perceived that there were massive external forces which were being aided and abetted by the internal forces that were opposed to the leadership of the free world – in fact at war with its underlying values and precepts, and determined to overcome them.

Today, Walter Russell Mead powerfully makes the point that both Russia and China now believe that the West is so internally divided and degenerate that it is collapsing. By contrast, Churchill believed that Britain still had moral fibre, when in his 1940 'Battle of Britain' address he predicted a British victory because, in his words, "we are the most united of all the nations...and because we have been nurtured in freedom and individual responsibility and are the products, not of totalitarian uniformity but of tolerance and variety."

Freedom, individual responsibility, tolerance, and variety. I'll return to these shortly. World War II was, as we all know now, a very close-run thing. None of us would be here if it were not for the courage of that one man Churchill at a critical time in history, and yet he had suffered rejection, mocking, even cancellation by the BBC, until it was realised that, despite all his manifold failings, he was the right and only person. His leadership and character gave what Britain and the free world so desperately needed.

It is worth noting that just six years after the Oxford Pledge, young men like my father, rejected the sentiments of the Oxford Pledge – if you like, the elitist opinion of the day, and went out and put all they could into fighting for freedom for the countries they lived in.

To return to the Churchill quote from earlier, unity, freedom, individual responsibility, tolerance, and variety: these, for Churchill, would crush the head of Nazism. Indeed, they did. But 80 years on and Western society appears to be losing the very strengths that Churchill praised, and at a time when new geo-political forces of evil are rising.

A 2019 Australian National University study showed that trust in our institutions and satisfaction with our democracy has hit an all-time low. In 2007 there was a record high level of satisfaction in how well Australia's democracy was working – 86%. But in 2019 it had nose-dived to 59%. Most worryingly, in another ANU survey, trust in our parliamentary system itself has halved from 56% in 1981 to 28% in 2018.

No modern society – certainly not one as multicultural as Australia – is going to have uniformity of thinking on the big questions of life and justice, but it is an existential imperative that we do agree on the procedure with which we work through our disagreements. Our procedure is parliamentary democracy. What is its alternative other than tyranny or civil violence?

How Did We Get Here? In his most recent book *The Magna Carta of Liberty*, Os Guinness runs through a list of steps that, since WWII, have led us to our present situation. First, there was a shift in our moral centre of gravity after WWII. Because we defeated tyranny and began to enjoy an historically unprecedented economic boom, the meaning of life became liberty and prosperity, and increasingly less our duties to family, country, and God.

Citizenship in the West became less about what we could do for our country, and more about what our country could do for us. I think it is fair to read Menzies' immortal 'Forgotten People' speech – 80 years old this year – as largely a rallying cry to not let this spirit of duty die.

Second, is a lack of emphasis in our educational system not just on civic understanding – how our political society works – but on civic appreciation – why we should love our political

system, notwithstanding its flaws. If the thought of our teachers teaching children to love our political system strikes us as quaint, this demonstrates how powerful the forces of ideological cynicism have been in our education system.

Third, our historical amnesia. Australians have a deep appreciation of the ANZAC heritage, but beyond that, things get vague. We do have an education system that is obsessed with our history, but only the worst aspects of it. Google-search what education officials and policymakers have said about historical ignorance among Australians and you'll find that they're solely concerned with Indigenous history and massacres.

The ruthless focus on the darker moments of our history, with no attempt to explain the positive achievements, has the effect of encouraging our children to believe that they are the inheritors of a nightmarish culture that is not worth defending, in the view of Frank Furedi.

The Humanities and Social Sciences national curriculum review draft document of 2021 illustrates the problem. A word search of the draft national curriculum returns the number of times the following words were used:

Western (civilisation)—5

Christian—12

European—26

British/English—28

Asia—129

Aboriginal/Indigenous/First Nations People—177

Sadly, former heroes like Captain James Cook, David Livingstone, and William Wilberforce are likely to be either completely ignored or held under intense suspicion for their contribution to colonialism, as though discovering one sin – by modern standards – is sufficient to blot out all righteousness from our forebears. Wilberforce, by the way, led the greatest human rights movement of all times – the abolition of the black African slave trade – and was, inconveniently, a wealthy, privileged, white male, driven by his profound personal Christian faith.

Fourth, the growing generational and economic divide. Sound economic management is a highly moral imperative if we are to avoid intergenerational injustice. In March 1996, just a few meters away from where I stand here tonight, John Howard told the incoming Cabinet that we were going to pay down the national debt and end the intergenerational theft. I well recall the moment of dread when I realised that in addition to Peter Costello, John Fahey, Jim Short, and Michael Wooldridge, thanks to Tim having nominated me, I was to be a member of that razor gang. The work was grinding beyond belief, but Australia continues to live off the balance sheet that we bequeathed the nation.

I believe that Western governments, cowering before our culturally polarized societies empowered by social media, have responded poorly to the GFC and Covid. We are now are in danger of doing the same in response to climate change, in that those policies have rewarded asset-holders and the wealthy over the young and more vulnerable members in our societies.

In the Australian context, for example, a serious housing affordability crisis has developed, increasingly turning the Australian dream into a fantasy. This crisis has profound knock-on effects on family formation and the quality of care that children receive in their early years.

In an essay entitled 'Welcome to the End of Democracy', American demographer, Joel Kotkin singles out Australia in particular for once being uniquely egalitarian in terms of home and land ownership. But now Kotkin reports a sharp decline in home ownership for 24-35 year olds from 60% to 45% between 1981 and 2016. And we know what direction things have gone in since 2016.

These same young Australians were also forced to make tremendous sacrifices for the older generation during the Covid pandemic. They will be left with the economic cost of the lockdowns. What effect will this have on young citizens' esteem for the institutions under which they live? Just like the cynicism generated by the Vietnam War was easily exploited by neo-Marxists, so today's downward social mobility will be an opportunity to sell statist fantasies like Universal Basic Incomes and the raft of policies that roughly make up what many call the Great Reset. On top of all this, according to Joel Kotkin, surveys suggest that around half of all young people think the planet is doomed by climate change.

Fifth, the rise of neo-Marxist and postmodern ideology – often called “wokeness”. Wokeness is a direct attack on what Churchill above called “variety”, that is, different ways of thinking and living. Os Guinness catalogues the development of this ideology which came to dominate our universities and then shape culture more broadly.

Centrally, he notes the evolution of Marxist theory from primarily economic to cultural; going from calling for an economic revolution to overthrow capitalism, to a cultural Marxist-postmodern revolution to overthrow Western civilisation via universities and other culture-shaping institutions.

The phase of this development that we are now living through involves companies and Big Tech oligarchs who have adopted the woke ideals and aims of the neo-Marxist and postmodern theorists. Large social media platforms like Twitter, Youtube, and Facebook regularly censor and suppress opinions that run counter to their latest mantras.

The buzzwords of this Great Awakening, “inclusivity” and “diversity”, turn out in reality mean their exact opposite. Let's take the recent Manly Sea Eagles controversy. The Manly Sea Eagles management wanted the team to be inclusive. Well, the way to be inclusive is to simply not exclude. It's not rocket science.

Notice how in all of this there was not one person who said they had been excluded from the team on the grounds of his sexuality? Not one. By the normal meaning of inclusive the Manly Sea Eagles were, in fact, already inclusive. But the actions of the team's management showed that woke inclusivity is actually to exclude and to impose uniformity over genuine diversity, thereby destroying what Churchill called variety. Remember, the Manly Sea Eagles were already a team of genuine racial, religious, and intellectual diversity: some players agreed with LGBT ideology, and some did not.

What was the result of this initiative of “diversity” and “inclusivity”? Seven players who were never ever accused of excluding or discriminating against anyone were excluded from playing because they did not want to celebrate this particular ideology. In other words, the team that ended up playing was not diverse at all, it was made up only of those who submitted to mandatory ideological uniformity.

Woke diversity and inclusivity is not about rights, or freedom, or diversity or inclusivity: in true Marxist-postmodern fashion, it’s about power. It’s about forcing a uniformity of thinking and acting on a whole culture through schools, corporations, universities, and, increasingly sports: the so-called “long march through the institutions”.

As an aside, might I note that it strikes me as more than passing strange, that the so-called “clever country” would on the one hand see the government rushing to assure our Pacific Island neighbours that Australia is their best and most reliable friend, while many of our elites are condemning the cream of their youth as “flogs” and “bigots” for their sincerely-held views. Views, which just a few short years ago, would have been considered entirely uncontroversial.

Is there a way out of our present situation? Perhaps.

What Should We Do?

Where will this all go?

One plausible scenario is that social polarization will die down as people’s basic needs are met and can perpetually indulge in sufficiently stimulating or numbing, distractions.

Leaning on Aldous Huxley a bit, Joel Kotkin wonders whether the future will be people working part time in a gig economy while being subsidised by some form of Universal Basic Income, and spending their lives for the most part consuming videos, drugs, or whatever keeps the dopamine levels high. We become pigs satisfied rather than Socrates dissatisfied, to borrow a phrase from John Stuart Mill.

Technology, not religion, becomes the opiate of the masses. This is not that far-fetched. Rod Dreher, in his latest work *Live Not By Lies*, drawing on Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, contends that the most subversive act against the emerging soft totalitarianism is simply to tell the truth. Jordan Peterson has the same message. And famously, Jesus Christ said “the truth will set you free.”

When we are told that there is a climate catastrophe, we say, climate challenge, yes, climate catastrophe, no. To say that there is a climate catastrophe such that we must rapidly revolutionise our economy and energy at great pain to those who can least bear it is, plainly and simply, dangerous. Bad policy, as Sri Lanka should demonstrate, may lead to nothing less than starvation. When we are told that there is no objective distinction between men and women, or that someone who simply identifies as one or the other is by virtue of that fact one or the other, we say no. We don’t say no because we feel differently, we say no because science and brute reality deems it not true.

When we are told that Western civilisation is little more than a series of crimes against all who

are not white, heterosexual males, we say no. Again, we say no not because of how we feel, but because history tells a much more interesting story of a civilisation like any individual of any race, deeply flawed yet capable of tremendous good.

When we are told that Indigenous Australians currently have no real voice and no real agency without some constitutionally enshrined voice to parliament – as the Uluru Statement from the Heart irresponsibly and demoralisingly states – we say no.

Telling the truth requires moral courage, and courage culture is the only effective weapon against woke cancel culture. Cancel culture thrives when those who have the power to stop bullies don't speak out. To speak out, of course, we have to turn up.

It will not just be a matter of telling the truth that forms part of the resistance. We live in an age of astonishing disengagement by far too many good citizens in the life of our nation. I suspect that without compulsory voting we'd have up to half the electorate not bothering to vote at all. I constantly meet disillusioned citizens who have belonged to political parties in the past that now say they do not want to be involved.

Former Supreme Court Judge in the United Kingdom, Lord Jonathan Sumption, whom I recently had the honour of interviewing on my Conversations podcast, made the observation that in the 1950s and 60s the British Labor Party had over a million members, whilst the Conservatives had almost two million. Today, the Royal Bird Watchers Society of the United Kingdom has more members than both political parties combined.

If we are to have our say, we will only be credible when we remember that freedom also demands from us responsibility: the responsibility – the duty – to live in such a way that our actions don't result in the social problems that become a pretext for the state to expand into all areas of our lives to "save" us from ourselves. In other words, freedom cannot simply be doing what we want. It cannot even merely be defined as doing whatever we like as long as we don't harm others, because we have an almost infinite capacity to convince ourselves that our actions are harmless, when in fact they are not.

The decline of the family is a case in point. One way to help restore future generation's faith in great institutions is to be faithful in the very ones we enter into. Katy Faust and Stacy Manning's recent book *Them Before Us: Why We Need a Global Children's Rights Movement* exhaustively documents the harmful effects of the breakdown of the nuclear family on children from childhood all through adulthood.

Do we want less cynicism from future generations? Do we want to keep government as small as possible? One powerful way to accomplish both is to encourage a marriage culture built around the needs of children rather than the desires of parents.

I spoke earlier about the need for civics classes in Australian schools to not just teach how the system works but to cultivate a love for our system. But this won't do much good if young people find it nearly impossible to own anything once they enter into it as working, taxpaying adults.

To avoid Kotkin's dystopia in which people rent rather than own, legislators and policy makers

need to think creatively about housing affordability. For example, the post-Covid work-from-home culture is a great opportunity to develop the regions for people to move to – a sentiment I'm sure Tim Fischer would approve of. As people move and build, there will be work for tradesmen and others too. Private ownership will do more to persuade people against dystopian utopias than mere arguments against socialism. Marx rightly mocked lofty talk about property rights when, in his time, hardly anyone in Europe could own property.

In conclusion, let me circle back to my introductory remarks about Tim as a man of faith. Jesus said, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." ([Matt. 4:4](#)) Any critical assessment of the West will be found profoundly inadequate without acknowledgment of the crucial influence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

History reveals the boons of the West – prosperity, democracy, science, mass literacy, modern freedom, commitment to humility and service of others – emerged from Christianity. Indeed, Sir Robert Menzies said that "democracy is more than a machine; it is a spirit. It is based upon the Christian conception that there is in every human soul a spark of the divine."

For Menzies, democracy could work only if we remember that "with all their inequalities of mind and body, the souls of men stand equal in the sight of God". And so we must ask: Can the best of Western civilisation survive without its spiritual nourishment any more than a flower plucked from its soil? In the case of the West, including Australia in particular, the God that inspired many of our great feats of architecture, the rise of modern human rights and modern democracy, was no philosopher's God. He was the personal, redemptive God of Abraham, who became flesh in Jesus Christ.

Properly understood, the cross is the ultimate action of extraordinary love and service. Christianity demands of us the humility to use power only for the betterment of others, not for ourselves. Much as the demonstration of the cross was in stark contrast to the lust for domination that characterised the Roman Empire in the first century, so it still stands in stark contrast to the grasping for power that so marks our modern life.

How many aspirants to our nation's highest political office would even know that the term "Prime Minister" actually means "first servant": 'minister' – from the Latin meaning 'inferior' or 'servant'? Tim Fischer rose to one of the highest offices in the land seeking to use power for the benefit of others rather than himself.

It was through millions of people turning to Jesus that Western civilisation as we know it was achieved. And yet Jesus did not come to save civilisations, all of which he assured us would ultimately fade away, but to save individuals through faith in Him. May none of us miss this ultimate point. It was in this Christian milieu that character and service prevailed to give us what we now so enjoy, but tend to take for granted. It was this civilisation which blessed us with men of character like Tim Fischer. It is in this context that I stress the need for courage, truth, and engagement if we are to survive, as free people, the challenges of our age.