

REMARKS ON BEHALF OF THE ALUMNI AT AN OCCASION TO FAREWELL TO DR DON MARKWELL AS WARDEN OF ST PAUL'S COLLEGE

Warden, Vice-Chancellor, High Table, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a privilege to speak on behalf of the alumni, to farewell only our 11th Warden in our first 160 years or so of history. Tonight is a time - very briefly - to reflect on the current Warden and his term here.

The last such farewell I attended was in this Hall for Warden Peter Bennie in 1984: he quoted Shakespeare saying 'parting is such sweet sorrow' and so it is.

In that same year, a younger Don Markwell, having studied economics, law and international relations, was completing his doctorate at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, setting out on a path which made him as fine a scholar and as distinguished an educator as any College Head anywhere. His publications cover such diverse questions as how to promote order and peace in the international society of states, the role of conventions in constitutional systems, and the path of higher education for the 21st century.

Fundamentally, by his scholarship, experience and example, he has influenced many university students for the better, including here.

He is however the antithesis of a scholar living in an ivory tower, ignorant of the wider world and resistant to all change. I first met him when he advised the Australian Attorney-General in relation to national security law and constitutional law and policy. He clearly had the respect of all in Parliament House, from Prime Minister Turnbull down. In Attorney-General Brandis' own valedictory speech to the Senate he said of the Warden:

He is a constitutional scholar of international reputation. ... The government was immensely fortunate to have him in its service. There is literally nobody in Australia with a more thorough, scholarly knowledge of the constitutional precedents.^{Hn}

He brought that experience to bear in the frankly astonishing achievement of shepherding a new St Paul's College Act – replacing the 1850s version – through Parliament without a single division, that is, on

the voices. If you think that is unremarkable, then, like Humphrey Bogart's character in Casablanca, you have been misinformed.

As the first Warden who is not a clergyman, he also made the inspired and very successful appointment of Father Antony Weiss as College Chaplain.

That brings me to the topic of cultural renewal and change, a process the next Warden will continue-and we know that not least because the public advertisements for the next Warden so state.

To quote a famous American judge, David Souter:

'Is there any one of us who has not lived through moments, or years, of longing for a world without ambiguity, and for the stability of something unchangeable in human institutions?'¹

That is indeed a common longing, and when it concerns the institutions of a happy young adulthood, seen through the sometimes-unreliable lens of memory, it is a very strong emotion- many of us ask why shouldn't the college always be as it was, or at least seemed, when we were young?

Warden Max Thomas had the advantage of being a College alumnus, the only one so far, which meant that when people said there was an immutable college tradition - for example that there had always been live elephants at the college formal - I kid you not that was tried on me when I was sub-warden to Max and being worried about the havoc elephants could cause - he said 'perhaps it was, but not this year'!

It is the digital age in which we live which presents so many challenges. In the last two centuries the unwise remark or the foolish act, at most, lived only in memory, but now it can live for ever on social media, to be viewed by your family, or your prospective employer or the media, and not only to your serious disadvantage - loss of job or reputation are not uncommon results - but to the serious perhaps terminal disadvantage of the college itself.

So although the college was never some lawless free-for-all, it is no longer enough to say as Warden Felix Arnott said 'there are no rules, but if

¹ <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2010/05/text-of-justice-david-souters-speech/>

you break any you will be sent down.' The College and its administration and its residents will and must be more accountable and transparent, and the Council through its commitment to cultural change understands there is no turning back. This will be one of your greatest legacies, Warden.

None of that means our college does not and cannot remain a marvellous place to live and study and have fun and make life-long friendships.

So to conclude, we say to our Warden, we are sorry you are going, you will be missed, and even now, but ever more as time goes on, we will recognize your lasting and significant legacy for the college and all who live here.

If as Shakespeare understood parting is painful, our sorrow in it is tempered by the fact that it is not farewell but only until we meet again: so on behalf of the alumni, we thank you and we wish you well, until we meet again.