FATHER JULIAN EDMUND TENISON WOODS

The Occasional Sermon delivered by Father Edmund Campion on 7 October 1989, in St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, at a Special Mass to commemorate the centenary of the death of Father Woods.

Brothers and Sisters. Early this morning I went out to Waverley Cemetery where many of you have been already and I walked down the hill of that surely most picturesque of cemeteries — down the hill of the cemetery to a tall, stately basalt monument and, by the dawn's early light, I read the inscription on the monument:

Of your charity
pray for the soul of
Reverend J.E.Tenison Woods
died October 7,1889
Aged 57 years
Eternal rest grant to him,O Lord
Let perpetual light shine on him.
In te Domine speravi non confundar in aeternum.
(In thee Lord I have trusted.I shall not be lost eternally.)

Then I realised someone had been there before me for, on the tomb of JulianTenison Woods, someone had left a bouquet of bush flowers and I thought what fitting tribute for this man who knew the bush and knew the botany of the bush. How fitting the readings today were too with their botanical references.

Standing there early this morning I thought of all the tributes that will be paid to Julian today across Australia and in New Zealand. I thought of those who have already paid their tributes and on whom we rely — George O'Neill, Margaret Press, Thomas Boland, Marie Foale, Anne Player, JanTranter, Isabel Hepburn, William Modystack and all the others who have been captured by this — can I use an overworked word and yet use it accurately? — this unique Christian man. I thought this afternoon how we, in our turn, would be paying our tribute to Julian Tenison Woods.

To whom are we paying that tribute? Well, the monument at Waverley gives us a clue because on the side of the monument, there is also another tablet which reads:

> "Commemorating the scientific work of the Reverend Julian Edmund Tenison Woods FGS, FLS, FRGS, Honorary member of the Royal Societies of New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, the Linnean Society of New South Wales and the New Zealand Institutes."

It goes on:

> "He achieved distinction as a scientist in the fields of geology, botany, palaeontology and zoology."

This is neither the time nor the occasion, nor am I the person to adequately assess the scientific work of Julian Tenison Woods but it stands there and it is recognised and finds its rightful place on his monument — on his tomb — at Waverley. But let me say this about Julian as a scientist. He read, as you know, his New Testament every day. Wherever he went he took a small New Testament and he tried to read a chapter a day. And in it, again and again, he found that terrible, puzzling and awesome parable of the talents, and he knew it applied to him. He had been greatly gifted by God and he knew that God would require an account of those gifts that he had been given and that one of those gifts was his science. And so he used his science and was recognised by his peers as a scientist. Hence his membership, as I just related, not only of the local scientific societies but the election to membership of the Geological Society, the Linnean Society and the Royal Geographical Society in England. His scientific writings were sought out and read and studied. That was part of his religious response to his talents for he saw his science as part of his religion — not as a matter of duty but, in studying the works of God, became to know the God of works. Like Gerard Manley Hopkins whose centenary we also celebrate this year, he found "grandeur", "glory in the grandeur" of God's works. He saw God "shining out" from the created universe and he gave thanks for it. So his science was part of his Eucharistic life, thanking God — rendering back to God — the gifts that He had given him.

Not only a scientist, he also had talents as a writer. He came, of course, from a journalistic family. He'd earned his living as a journalist and so he wrote. I've mentioned his scientific writings — the catalogue of them stretches to seven pages! but, as well as them

there were the writings for the popular press, magazines and his religious writings — the Southern Cross, the Chaplet. Wherever he went, he was writing — he was communicating — and he did it easily and freely as a member of the society where he found himself. So, his influence went out also, through his writings — it was another talent that he was able to use.

He was an educated man. We get our education in the late twentieth century by studying "subjects". In the nineteenth century, and earlier, people were educated by reading. He was a well-read man and so he found friends where you might find it strange that a Catholic priest would find friends — Adam Lindsay Gordon, Baron von Mueller and so on. Through his education, through his reading and writing and his science, he could exercise what everyone noticed — his talent for friendship. He belonged to that society in which he found himself — wherever he found himself — as a treasured member. He was, if you like, the very opposite — this Catholic priest — the very opposite of the bigot, the sectarian or, a term that hadn't been invented but the reality was there, a "ghetto" Catholic. He moved easily in open society — and he was criticised for it. But all of it was part of his religious giving thanks for the talents that God had given him. This morning, when I looked at the tablet at Waverley signalising his scientific achievements, I knew that it was found properly there. On what is basically a religious monument, his science was also given a place.

But then I went round to the other side of the monument and I saw the real reason why we are here today. Let me read this tablet to you:

> In memory of the Reverend Julian Edmund Tenison Woods who founded the Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart in 1866 at Penola, South Australia and the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration of the Sacred Heart in 1874 in Brisbane.

Yes. It ends there! I'm aware there are gaps — omissions — in that tablet and someone will have to put it right. Indeed when I looked at it I thought, as a church historian, it would make a fine examination question in a paper for Australian Church History — to simply set that tablet as an examination question and say, "correct this"! Don't tell my students I said that. Yes, of course, he's more than that tablet tells us. I thought of another tablet on the founder of a religious order. It says of him that he "begot sons and daughters". How true it was of

Julian Tenison Woods! We are the book — sitting in this Cathedral. We are the book of his religious achievements and, beyond us, stretch out not only thousands of modern-day Australians but literally, one can say, there are millions of Australian Christians who can claim paternity from Julian Tenison Woods. That vast family is his — the book of his achievements. That vast family is really what we are celebrating today — Julian Tenison Woods foundation. So much of that is worth remarking on in these days when education for the priesthood is surrounded by committees, and sub-committees and reports and documents. His formation was remarkably eclectic, wasn't it? He's the product of English Tractarian Converts, of English Passionists, of French Marists, of Austrian Jesuits and so on, and his own reading. He doesn't come out of any *one* mould. He is very much his own person who has taken many traditions and been made from many traditions. This veryeclectic formation that, in 1857, came to the altar and was ordained as a diocesan priest in South Australia at the age of 24. And so, out into the parish and what a parish! That vast mission — you can't really call it a parish — that vast mission of Penola. The estimates of its size range from 24,000 square miles to 35,000 square miles. The boundaries of his mission diminish or, rather, spread out the closer you get to them. So, at the age of 24, he goes out to the bush and becomes what we would call a "bush PP". There he serves for ten years, riding round the mission as others did at the time — one week to one place, two weeks to another, three to another and, every twice a year, a circuit of a hundred and fifty miles through the scrub country. Here he laid the foundations of his understanding of the needs of Australian Catholicism and the Australian people. He didn't sit in his church. He didn't really have a church — a congregation of about thirty in Penola. Instead he said he went out to the people and met them where they were — sleeping on the ground, sleeping in shepherds' huts, sleeping on squatters' properties. Here he always found a welcome. Margaret Press has said in her fine book about him that he was always welcome wherever he got to because he could speak well at dinner, he could tell a story, he could play music, he could entertain children, he could also teach and he could pray. He was welcome wherever he went.

And so, ten years as "a bush PP" and then, in 1867, a new bishop of Adelaide calls him up to Adelaide and puts him in charge of the new Catholic School System. I say "new" because here Julian Tenison Woods becomes a pioneer in Australian education — not just

Catholic education. He notices the fragmented state of education in Adelaide and he replaces it with a system — a system which is directed from the centre — where the centre determines what is taught, when it is taught, where it will be taught, who will be doing the teaching. And here, as you know, some flaws in his character become evident — where the liking for his own decisions overrides others' decisions. He makes enemies. But here too, his greatest contribution to our history is seen, for he brings to Adelaide the newly-born Sisterhood that he and Mary MacKillop had founded. In Adelaide they find their feet and they become established and soon are a force — a powerful force — in the Adelaide Diocese. It is, I think, no "pulpit rhetoric" to say that Australian Catholicism would not have been anything like what it was without the Tenison Woods — Mary MacKillop initiatives. He saw that, unlike Europe, what Australia needed were religious Sisters who were as mobile as gipsies, who could go where the need was, open a school and then, when the need folded because the farms had gone bankrupt or the mines had been worn out, they could fold their tents and move on somewhere else. And so, all over South Australia, Marie Foale has tracked the various places they'd been — sometimes for as little as a few months, others a few years, other places ten years but, on the move, mobile, ready to go where the need was.

What was strange about that? Well, as he said and as many of his critics said, overseas Convents were large buildings behind big walls where ladies of middle and upper classes went. Not here. He was recruiting his people from the ordinary people. He was taking servants of the people from the people and he was giving them a religious formation so that they could go out and serve those people. He remained true to that decision despite his critics. The last circular letter he wrote at the end of his life said to his daughters, "It will be said that you are ladies and that people won't respect you unless they think you are ladies. This is a hateful piece of vanity. Pay your court to the poor and not to the rich, and never mind what is said". This they did and so,in the crises of the seventies and the eighties, the Catholics were able to respond to the challenges of secularism by erecting a school system and the spine of that system — the very central line of that system — were the Julian Tenison Woods/Mary MacKillop initiatives, so that in 1885, when the bishops of Australia met for their Plenary Council and took what I think is the single most important pastoral decision in the history of Australian Catholicism — namely

that, when a parish was opened, the first building to be built would be a school and only when the school got going would a church be built. So Australian Catholicism and Australian parishes centred around the school — not the church. The bishops, in 1885, were able to take that decision because of Julian Woods and Mary MacKillop. They write their names centrally into our history because the parish school becomes a central institution in Australian history.

Then in '71, he wasn't wanted anymore in Adelaide. Well, it's an old story, isn't it? The history of the Church is so often the history of the quarrels of good people but this story too, as you know, is clouded by clerical envy, priestly rivalry, human badness.

He came to Sydney in 1871 and now begins a new phase in his life. From 1871until 1883, in Tasmania and up and down the eastern coast of Australia, he becomes a parish missioner and this now for a dozen years proves to be his life — a roving priest, roving now through the parishes as once he'd roved through Penola. And what a life it was! — closing a mission one Sunday morning in one parish, opening another the same night in another parish — each day in the church from six in the morning until nine at night, with breaks simply for meals and rest — saying Mass, preaching, hearing confessions, giving guidance — for here, in the missions that he gave in the parishes, Julian found another talent . . .

He is also one of the great spiritual directors but so much of their work is written on water . . . so much of the work in the confessional can't be heard about but we know from stray letters that have turned up what a good director he was — how he could calm that most horrible of nineteenth century spiritual diseases — scruples. We know from his letters of direction — those that have survived — how he could put the oil of the gospel to troubled souls. He found now this new vocation in being a spiritual director. I think it's apposite that, at this period, in 1874, comes the founding of the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration — for that's the other side to Julian's spirituality — the side that we too continue to draw strength from.

But, by the 1880's, changes were coming to Australian Catholicism. The great religious orders were coming here . . . the Redemptorists, the Jesuits, and soon . . . and the welcome began to dry up for the itinerant secular priest — missioner. He was no longer wanted in certain dioceses, no longer invited back to parishes. His life as a missioner, by 1883, was over. The church could find little use for

him. He was aged 50 when this happened. At the age of 50 he was put on the shelf. It's then he was invited to the Malay States by one of his penitents to conduct a geological survey, and so from the years from 1883 to 1887 he is moving around the Malay States — Borneo, Sarawak . . . Japan, the Indian Archipelago and the Northern Territory, giving of his scientific talent and, at the same time, of course, celebrating Mass, preaching and hearing confessions.

There is one talent that God had given him that he took little care of — himself. The first talent we are all given is ourselves. His reckless use of his body broke that body and, in 1887, in the Northern Territory, he cracked up. He was invalided back to Sydney and he found his last home just a mile down the road — there, with Mrs. Abbot — and there, for the last two years of his life, again unwanted, unused, he prepared himself for death, which came on this day a hundred years ago . . .

And look at the crowds. Look at the achievements and look at them elsewhere across Australia today — this unwanted man, yet his children, his sons and daughters and, through you, those like myself who were taught by you and those who've been cared for in your hospitals and so on. Through you we all give tribute to this man today.

There's one last thing on that monument out there. It's down the bottom of the foot of the monument, and it's a book with four words written on it — Julian Woods' last four words. The words are:

God's Will be done

In death, as in life, Julian has the last word . . .

God's Will be done!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. .