

**The Rev. Dr W. J. Jobling: a Eulogy delivered at  
St Mary's Anglican Church, Waverley:  
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William Jeffree Jobling was born on 20 July 1941. He was brought up at Bondi, educated at Sydney High School and the University of Sydney, was Abbott Scholar of St Paul's College and studied at Moore College. Ordained in 1964, he served at Strathfield and Mount Isa, became Master in Holy Orders at Cranbrook School and, after several years of part-time lecturing, gained his PhD and was appointed a full-time member of the Sydney University staff, first in Semitic Studies and later in Religious Studies. He rose to the rank of Reader and, meantime, undertook important archaeological work in the Middle East which gained him visiting professorships and wide recognition. He wrote extensively on Semitic and theological subjects and a major book will soon be published. He married Lee and had two children and two grandchildren.

Such would be a typical *Who's Who* entry for Bill Jobling. To an historian—and Bill was a good historian—it tells something, mainly by reading between the lines. To the ordinary reader, it says only that here was a scholar and a clergyman of distinction. However useful it may be for the general record, this is not good enough for use here this morning. So let us begin again.

A few months ago, Bill read a paper to the Heretics, a theological dining and discussion club of which we have long been members. The paper was not about Hebrew syntax or Nabataean inscriptions or new methods in archaeology, though Bill could write with authority on all three. It was about surfing—not a conventional topic for a theological discussion group. It meant a lot to Bill.

He told us about Rev. Robert McKeown, rector of this church

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from 1884 to 1920 and a patriarchal figure in Waverley. He recounted that McKeown was a keen advocate of sea-bathing, believing that it refreshed the body and cleared the mind and was good for the soul. But the law prohibited bathing in the open sea from sunrise to sunset. So, one day, McKeown went down to Bondi, armed with a statutory declaration and accompanied by his solicitor, and deliberately flouted the law by swimming in the ocean in broad daylight. The result of this provocative action, along with similar ones taken by others at the time, was to get the law changed. Sydney's beaches were opened to the public and a whole new culture came into being.

Bill retailed this episode with as much verve as McKeown had put into his epoch-making protest. For him, it was not simply an impulsive action by an eccentric parson. McKeown, like Bill, was a liberal churchman, anxious to open up the world to God's gifts, striving to reconcile the faith to human joy, opposed to restrictions on the spirit and ready to withstand those who would enforce them. McKeown was a quiet, pleasant man but resolute and persistent—so was Bill. For Bill, McKeown's action was a theological matter of high significance. It is a tragic and telling parallel that Bill's final day should have included the Holy Communion here at St Mary's and a swim at North Bondi.

Bill Jobling was a man—to us here this morning, he still is and always will be—who went his own way, who stood up for the truth as he saw it. He was led into some unusual paths but there was a wholeness, an integrity, about his life.

There was young Bill, the student and sportsman at the finest of schools, Sydney High, for which he had an abiding affection. There was the earnest young man at St Stephen's, Bellevue Hill, influenced by a wise rector, Os Cooper, of whom he always spoke with respect. Then Sydney University, in its more civilized and less cluttered days, and his burgeoning love for Hebrew literature and language. And the Church: already Bill had decided that this would be his profession, his dedication. So he entered Moore College. Alongside Bill the scholar there now was Bill the catechist, learning the mysteries of Semitic culture and ministering to the needs of simple, religious folk at one and the same time. A stay at St Paul's College, prompted by its new Warden, Peter Bennie, helped him resolve many of his perplexities.

Then came ordination. As he told it to me, the examining chaplains asked Bill routine questions; Bill was never a man to give anyone routine answers. The chaplains' report was less than favourable. So Bill went to Archbishop Gough and asked to be ordained. The Archbishop said that report or no report he could ordain anyone he liked. He liked Bill. He ordained him. Bill, with his varied gifts, his resolute independence, always seemed to find people who could appreciate his qualities and put them to good use.

Clerical life, for Bill, meant not only the routine suburban curacy but also a spell as Priest-in-charge of what was coyly called 'Outer Mount Isa'. It was very outer—hundreds of miles of it. He soon learned about living rough—a useful training for the Middle East wilderness—and preaching the Gospel to rough people. And he learned to appreciate their values. There were few people with whom Bill could not get along—only those whom he found to be false or insubstantial.

An abrupt change then took place. Mark Bishop, the perceptive headmaster of Cranbrook, made Bill a Master in Holy Orders at his school. Bill blossomed as a teacher but there was still the lure of scholarship, of the Old Testament, its language, its culture and, increasingly, its historical setting. Gradually, Bill the teacher became Bill the academic, the scholar-lecturer. At first he taught part-time at Sydney University; after securing his PhD degree in 1975 the appointment became full-time. Initially he was with Semitic Studies, later he moved across to Religious Studies. The instructor of elementary classes became the supervisor, a very good one, of doctoral candidates.

Bill was not just a class-room man. The study of Semitic language and history is an ancient pursuit; and chiefly a documentary one. But what if the documents are written on stone—as the Ten Commandments had been? Like so many scholars of things Semitic, Bill took up the challenge. With the support of such Sydney scholars as Basil Hennessey, Bill became an archaeologist. He was not the unearther of great Middle Eastern monuments but the discoverer and transcriber and interpreter of inscriptions.

The Levant became as much as part of Bill's life as the local scene. Expeditions had to be organized, governments conciliated, financial sponsorship arranged. Bill soon acquired the tortuous

arts of Middle East diplomacy and won the friendship of many Australian foreign affairs people. It was hectic, exciting, frustrating, even dangerous. Bill was harassed by Bedouin and shot at in Beirut. But it all paid off. Year by year, his reputation grew. American and British scholars, originally lofty, became admirers. By the late 1980s, as one expedition followed another, Bill was acquiring international recognition; visiting fellowships and professorships were coming his way. His own University began to realize that it had an exceptional man on its campus.

For all this extraordinary activity, Bill's career—indeed, his inclination—was never that of the soaring specialist, rising high on a single skill. In his own Department, he taught many things. In his own study, he read many more. At the Heretics Club, he could read a paper on surfing; but he did discuss most issues as one who was fully abreast of their literature.

In his quiet, persistent way, Bill continued to serve as he had always served. He still taught basic skills to basic students. He contributed much reflective wisdom to his beloved college of St Paul, on whose Council he served for eighteen years. And he remained a priest. Archbishop Gough had judged better than his examining chaplains. Bill was a scholar-parson, in an ancient and noble line of such men. And he was a teaching parson, preaching in local churches, taking study and discussion groups, doing duty at the altar, even looking after the occasional parish. Bill perceived no inconsistency in these varied roles, this multiple vocation. How could he; he was a wholly consistent man. Nor could Bill have been the man, the teacher, the scholar, the priest that he was without the ever-present love and help of Lee, herself a scholar, to supplement and sustain him.

It is not my mandate this morning to present to you the entire man who was Bill Jobling. Others have spoken of his family and sporting life. I have tried simply to recall for you, to remind you of, Bill as scholar, teacher and cleric. But these three tell us a great deal about Bill and, when they are put together, they reveal to us the special way in which he carried them all, stamping each with his special mark. For all that so much was left unfinished, there was nothing that we would wish to see undone.

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