

The War Over: It's Time to Seek and Save the Lost, to Plant, Revitalize, Rebuild

Bishop Edgar Addresses the 2023 Convention of The Anglican Diocese of South Carolina

“The war is over. It's time to seek and save the lost. It's time to plant and revitalize. It's time to hone and consistently renew our minds, to answer the hard questions of the day. And it's time to rebuild what is lost.”

By The Rt Revd Chip Edgar, Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of South Carolina

Following is the Convention address given by Bishop Chip Edgar at the 2023 Convention of the Anglican Diocese of South Carolina, held March 10-11 at the Cross Schools in Bluffton, SC. It has been edited for readability.

Heavenly Father, you gave your apostles grace truly to believe and to preach your word. Grant that we might love what they believed and preach what they taught through Christ our Lord.

I want to first greet my fellow bishops, Bishop Hathaway, Bishop Lawrence. I'm so grateful for you and your presence in this Diocese. I also want to remind you of and greet Bishop Allison. Bishop Allison is not with us. You might have heard that his daughter Alston died Wednesday evening. Please keep the Allison family in your prayers. The funeral will be held Thursday afternoon at 2:00 p.m. at St. Michael's Church in Charleston. And Bishop Skilton, also one of the bishops in our Diocese, I'm grateful for him and sad he could not be here.

Greetings to my brother and sister clergy. It is great to be with you. It's great to be gathered together like this from time to time and to remind each other, as we see each other, just how strong this diocese is. As I look out, I see an amazing group of clergy, and I'm blessed by you. I'm blessed to know you and to be working with you.

I'm grateful for, and want to greet, all of the delegates and lay folks who are here. It's wonderful to have you with us, to have you here worshipping with us today. It's a wonderful time as a diocese to be together. And I have to thank Father Chuck Owens and all the folks—the clergy and the people of Church of the Cross, Bluffton, who have done amazing work to get ready for us and for this occasion. Thank you all for all the hard work you have done to make this possible for us.

So, this is The Anglican Diocese of South Carolina! I am so blessed to be a part of this Diocese. I've been in the diocese for 402 days, 363 of those as your bishop. (It was easy to figure that out with the old "www.computer" at hand.)

I am excited for this convention because we have come to an end—well, almost the end. I see you, Good Shepherd. I see you, Old St. Andrews. I see you, Holy Cross, Stateburg, still waiting.

We've come to the end of the lawsuit, and I am eager to walk with you into the future that God has for us in gospel ministry in the Anglican Diocese. The churches, the people, the clergy of this great diocese, I think are ready to put all of that behind us and to move on unfettered into gospel ministry. So, what I hope to accomplish in the next few minutes is not so much to set an agenda for the coming year as it is to put forth some priorities that I hope we'll be living out over the course of the next—Lord willing—14 years or so, that I will be able to be bishop.

To do that, I want to begin by setting the stage for you. Last fall, there was yet another mass shooting. Looking back, I can't even remember which mass shooting it was. That's how things have gotten in the U.S. But the shooting had unfolded, and Bishop Woodliff-Stanley, the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina called. You know that I have spent a pretty substantial amount of time with her—in the company of our attorneys. I have to tell you; we've become friends. I think of Antonin Scalia and Ruth Bader Ginsburg—two people with very different worldviews, very different ways of seeing things who have managed to find friendship with each other. The friendship is not a diminishment of the big differences that we have between us. But she called, and asked if I would be willing to write an editorial with her for the newspaper about mass shootings. I think she was particularly interested in writing something about gun control.

Now, I've got to put my cards on the table. I'm not a big gun guy. I've gone hunting a few times, but guns don't play a big role in my life. Neither am I a very political guy. I'm not that interested in politics. It's okay with me whoever's President, I'll happily live my life. I view politics as a remarkably penultimate sort of endeavor, very far short of the work of the kingdom of God. I don't put a lot of effort in those things.

The Banquet at Belbury

What I told her when she asked me was that the biggest problem in doing something like that together was that I thought we saw things so differently. We understood what was happening in events like that in very different ways. She asked what I might mean by that, and I found myself talking about chapter 16 of C.S. Lewis's, *That Hideous Strength*. The chapter is called the Banquet at Belbury.

Now, before I push into that, I just have to say, years ago, a lot of years ago, I was Canon Pastor at the Cathedral in Orlando, Florida, and the Dean called me into his office one day, and said, "I've been invited to give the commencement address at the big high school in Orlando. What would you do if you got the opportunity to do a commencement address?" And we talked a little bit, and I threw an idea out, and then a few months later, he called me in again, and he said, "Hey, I don't know if you know, but I've been given the opportunity to speak at this commencement. Here's what I think I'm going to do." And he parroted the

idea that I gave him right back to me. At first, I thought he was joking. And then I realized he was not joking, and he had completely forgotten that I had given him the idea. So, what I'm afraid of is that I don't know where the idea came from, but probably one of you sitting in here is thinking to yourself, "I gave you that idea," and I just don't remember. So, to whom I owe the hat tip? Hat tip!

But I said to her, "I think of Chapter 16 of *That Hideous Strength*. The Banquet at Belbury."

If you've never read *That Hideous Strength*, I want to commend it to you. I think it is important, and increasingly important in the season in which we find ourselves living. Lewis wrote that book in 1945 as the final book in his Space trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*. It seems like what he was doing was working on this space trilogy, and then decided that he needed to put his book, *The Abolition of Man*—which he always maintained was the most important work he had ever done—he decided to put *The Abolition of Man* into a story form, and what came was *That Hideous Strength*.

Now, it's part of his space trilogy, but *That Hideous Strength* is not set on Mars or Venus or anything like that, but in the fictional English college of Bracton, part of the University of Edgestow. Trouble is brewing at Bracton College, and a young couple named Mark and Jane Stutter get caught up in things that are happening. Mark is trying to work his way up the faculty ladder, and Jane is a PhD student. Their marriage struggles throughout the whole story, but it endures. And that's one of the most important features of *That Hideous Strength*. That's key.

Bracton is considering selling a portion of Bragdon Wood, an ancient woodland on their campus that was believed to be the resting place of the great wizard Merlin. And they're going to sell Bragdon Wood to the NICE. The National Institute of Coordinated Experiments. The NICE is not nice.

But over the course of the story, the NICE recruits Mark to work for them. As he gets more and more involved, and his life grows more and more troubled. And Jane finds her way to, and begins to get involved in, the Community of St. Anne, a sort of religious community where virtues are taken very seriously, and they're lived out well amongst a people. The Community of St. Anne is led by a man named Ransom. Ransom is the connection, really, for *That Hideous Strength* to the other stories of the Space Trilogy.

Well, as conflict continues to grow, and the story gets more and more difficult, NICE disdains any sort of objective moral code which might obligate their behavior to the people with whom they work. Basically, the idea is, can you get somebody to do what you want them to do? Do you have the capacity to manipulate them and force them to do the things that you wish to do? Well, if so, then you can do it. If you have the power, that's all that's required. You can make people do what you want to do. You can do to people what you want to do to them. The head of NICE is a guy named Francois Alcasan and he is just that, a head; he is disembodied. He had gone to the guillotine in a previous age and he's now the head of this horrific institute.

As the story unfolds, we finally come to chapter 16. It's the culmination of the entire book and it's where Merlin, a wizard, is still alive. He's not buried at Bragdon Wood. He's actually been working and influencing the Community of St Anne. He and Ransom are in cahoots together. But Merlin is at this great banquet and he pronounces a sort of Curse of Babel on the group. They begin to speak gibberish. They can't understand each other. One of the things that Lewis is pointing us towards is that as subjectivism begins to take hold, we begin to be able to understand each other less and less. We change the things that language means. We decide for ourselves what they mean. And so, chaos and confusion unfold. And it comes to a climactic conclusion when a woman takes a pistol out of her purse, shoots the speaker and mayhem and bedlam break out and everybody kills each other. The animals on which NICE have been doing experiments get set free and they come in and slaughter a lot of people. It is an absolutely horrible scene of slaughter.

It's unlike anything else Lewis ever wrote anywhere else, and it is horrible and ugly. When everything quiets down, the smoke clears, Mark flees to where Jane is at St Anne's, and she has, in spite of all the difficulties of their marriage, been readying herself and a place for him so that they could carry on their married life together.

What Lewis wants us to see is that the evil of subjectivism always ends in chaos and confusion in death and destruction. It turns on itself, it consumes itself, it collapses. Meanwhile, the Good, just by being good, endures.

Now, all through the story, in the Community of St. Anne there has been a skeptic, a man named Andrew MacPhee. Throughout the story, as the tension has been mounting and as the evil nature and intent of NICE grows ever clearer, he has been urging his brothers and sisters of the Community of St Anne to do something. "We have to take up arms, we have to try to defeat the NICE, we have to foil their plans. We have to do something." And so, when at the end the dust settles, McPhee turns to Ransom, the hero of the story, and says, "Well, it could be right, good, history without mentioning you or me or most of those present. I'd be greatly obliged if anyone could tell me what we have done – always apart from the feeding of pigs and raising some very decent vegetables here."

At the end of the story, they're told that they have been in the middle of a great cosmic battle, that the fate of all life is in their hands and that, for a time at least, they have won. But MacPhee can't even tell what it is they've done, other than the everyday chores about them. They danced a bit. They helped a young couple rediscover each other in their marriage. But what have they done?

That was the question. And Ransom answers simply, "You've done what was required of you. You obeyed and waited. It will often happen like that."

Creating the World as it Should Be

Now, I know where I owe this hat tip: this is to Brian McGreevy. He shared this with me in a class he was teaching. It's an article by Matt Mikalatos. He, I think, graduated from Seattle Pacific University. He's a regular commenter on a science fiction blog called Tor.com, that I had never run across before—not

being a science fiction fan. But commenting on *That Hideous Strength*, and particularly on this point, Mikalatos says, “The point is that part of contributing to the cosmic war raging around us is not necessarily to take up weapons and fight so much as it is to create the world as it should be. We need to make holy spaces, feed the animals, take care of the gardens, (echoing Adam and Eve and their call in garden). He goes on to say, a healthy marriage does more to save the world than marching into town to fight the bad guys. A group of neighbors who love each other and are at peace with others (as much as in us lies) can create spaces for righteousness to take root in the world and finally win over the forces of evil.

So that's what I'm thinking when Bishop Woodliff Stanley invites me to join this article. I'm thinking that what we're seeing going on around us is a sort of slow motion, stretched across a continent, Banquet at Belbury, when confusion has finally grown such that people simply cannot understand each other, don't know their place in the world, and violence is the only possible outcome.

So, if I'm right, if I'm even close to right in that assessment, the question becomes, “What are we to do?” Or better, “Who are we to be?” So, we find ourselves in 2023, it's my turn to be the bishop of this Diocese. And as this time begins to unfold, we find ourselves at the end of a very long road. Again, almost at the end—I'm with you three churches. I'm not forgetting that it's still hanging out there for you.

My predecessor, and I'm so grateful to say, dear friend, Bishop Mark Lawrence—may his name ever be honored among us—is back in the saddle with us. He spent his episcopacy fighting a good fight so that his successors, me and all who will follow, wouldn't have to. It's now given to us to get ourselves back to the task of being the church. So now that we're finally—not quite finally—free, two things I want to hold before you: something to *do*, something *not* to do.

First, we need to set ourselves to creating the world that should be establishing communities where righteousness can take root. We have to do and get serious more and more about church planting.

Church Planting

I saw recently that states like California, Illinois and New York have been losing about 300,000 people a year for the last several years. And it seems to me that they've all decided to move to South Carolina. And in many of the places where this movement is happening and houses are being built and communities are growing up, we don't have parishes, and we need to have parishes. We need to have those places in those communities where righteousness can take root and grow.

In 1923, the Diocese of South Carolina was divided into two dioceses, and there's a boundary that runs right down the middle of the state, but we're no longer obligated to that boundary, and I think we need to explore what church planting across our entire state might look like. There are places like Aiken and Edgefield and Columbia and Greenwood that need churches, need good, healthy Anglican churches. Perhaps we don't get to that in 2023 or even 2024, but we need to set our sights on it, and we will need to explore what working cooperatively with our brothers and sisters in the Diocese of Carolinas might look like.

And so we're beginning. I want to ask and challenge our Canon for Church Planting, Todd Simonis, and their Canon for Church Planting, Seth Cain—both of them amazingly gifted guys, great guys who would do a great job—I want them to begin to a conversation about what it looks like for us to cooperate on planting churches all over the state.

Church Revitalization

But we can't just focus on churches that don't exist yet. We have to focus on our current churches. We need to undertake serious church revitalization. I believe it is possible that every single church in our diocese, whatever their current situation, whatever their location, whether they're in a big place or small place, every one of our churches can be strengthened to be a solid, self-sufficient place with an ASA (Average Sunday Attendance) of at least 75 or more, which is what I'm told is necessary to support a clergy person. I think that can happen even in our smallest towns. I figure if a town has 1200 people in it, we ought to be able to get 75 of them. And I want to help all of our smaller parishes and missions move toward that kind of independence and strength that will allow them to be those places of righteousness in their communities. I want to help and encourage the clergy in those places to do that work.

In sum, the first part of what we have to do with planting and revitalization is creating and strengthening communities for that kind of righteousness to take root.

The Education and Continuing Education of Our Clergy

Another task lies before us, and this is a biggie for me, is the education and the continuing education of our clergy. As our clergy face an increasing social, cultural, and theological challenge amid a factionalizing society, we need to make sure we're helping each other address these challenges with as much shared conviction as we can achieve, but certainly with shared vocabulary and assumptions about those things. Seminaries matter and seminary education matters.

I'm reminded of a story about Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his friend, Eberhard Bethge. In the midst of all of the trouble that was going on in 1930s Germany, Bonhoeffer was led to begin a seminary, the seminary at Finkenwalde, and it was considered a very radical move. People thought, some of his friends, Bethge even, thought he was crazy for trying to start his own seminary. And the story goes that Bethge came to visit him at Finkenwalde and they went out for a hike together. They came up on a ridge. On one side of which you could see the Finkenwalde seminary, on the other side was a Nazi training camp. And Bonhoeffer turned to his friend Bethge and said, "We have to be every bit as serious about what we do here as they are about what they do there."

And I believe that is the call for us in this generation. We have to be serious that we, and all the clergy we raise up, are trained and educated so that we can answer with a gospel informed answer the challenging questions that our society continues to throw at us. Part of that is going to be a renewed emphasis on continuing education for the clergy that are already ordained towards that.

One of the things we're going to do every year is to have a book we share together. I don't think you've been given it yet, but tomorrow at registration, all the clergy will be given two books, actually. The book I've chosen for us for this year is Michael Ward's *After Humanity*. It is a commentary and gloss on Lewis's *The Abolition of Man*. And because of the way the publisher is doing it, not only did we get a copy of the *After Humanity*, but you'll also get a copy of *The Abolition of Man*. Make sure you pick those up when you register tomorrow morning, Clergy, and when I come around to the deaneries we will spend some time, a morning together, talking about that book. So, for some of the deaneries I'm visiting sooner, I hate to tell you but you're going to have to get reading. Some of you have a little bit longer. But I want to spend time and have us grow together in continuing education.

Rebuilding the Diocese

Finally, we need to begin rebuilding the diocese.

Recently, I found myself looking at a memorial plaque for Bishop William Bell White Howe, who was the Sixth Bishop of the Diocese of South Carolina. He was bishop during the years following the Civil War. In part, his plaque reads,

"A Godly man, apt to teach, a clear reasoner in theology, persuasive in discourse, firm of purpose, gentle in manner, endearing himself to his flock."

Oh, I only hope that I can be known as something like that. But here's the bit I'm connected with in kind, though not by any means an extent, I don't think. It went on to say,

"He bore through anxious years the burden of the diocese overcoming difficulties and restoring losses."

Restoring Losses

Restoring losses. At the end of the legal battle of which we had been a part, we have suffered losses. We have lost several churches. In the wake of the Supreme Court decision of April 20th, not only did we lose parish property, but the diocese lost property as well, something like \$8 million in cash assets and probably over \$290,000,000 in real property. I think the biggest loss to us all commonly had to be St. Christopher Camp and Conference Center. It has long been the evangelistic center of our diocese, and we're going to have to work at beginning to rebuild that. I am so excited and so pleased with the progress that has been made so far with Camp Jubilee. It's a seed in the ground, that I trust will grow. We'll hear more about that tomorrow.

Revising Our Constitution and Canons

A little bit less fun work that we have to do is to turn our attention over the next few years to our Constitution and Canons. And I know everybody loves it when you think you have to work through revising Constitution and Canons. But one of the things we have discovered is that, as you know, Constitutions and Canons are layered. There are national Constitution and Canons, there are Diocesan Constitution and Canons, and there are Parish Bylaws, and they all are supposed to line up. Things that

are addressed in one don't have to be addressed in the others. Well, when we left TEC (the Episcopal Church), we left a national church that thought the best thing to do would be to put everything that could possibly be in their national canons. The net result being that our diocesan canons are somewhat thin. We moved into the Anglican Church of North America, whose philosophy is exactly the opposite of the Episcopal churches. In a principle called subsidiarity, The Anglican Church of North America believes that the national canons should be quite lean and that the dioceses should address more. So, we have found ourselves with huge gaping holes which our canons just don't address. There is a lot of work to be done and over the course of the next few years. Whenever you come to convention and probably some other meetings as well, we will have to get together and consider how do we rebuild and how do we do this work that is necessary for our canonical life together. So that's what's ahead of us to do. That's the first thing.

A Word of Caution

Now I want to offer a word of caution. Not that I see this in us, but I've learned this from others, and it may be important to just point it out and to tag it together as we go on in our life together.

We have now basically finished the battle to gain our independence from the Episcopal Church. We've suffered some losses, big losses. Think property, sure, but also think people, clergy and laity that surprised us when they decided not to be with us. They chose to stay in TEC instead of walking with us. Those are losses to our life, too. But we've had a common foe and a good cause that we believed in. Someone, something, over and against us, with whom we had to struggle. And that gave us a shared sense of identity. That's gone. We're free—again, three churches? Almost.

But now what? So, the second thing I want to talk about, having talked about things that we need to do, is something not to do.

In 2012, John Frame, who was a professor of systematic theology and philosophy at the Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida, published an article entitled *Machen's Warrior Children*.

For years at Princeton, a battle was fought against the liberalizing theology from nascent modernism to full blown liberalism. People like A.A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, and then finally, J. Gresham Machen, from about 1887 through 1923, they fought the good fight for the gospel in that place. Finally, in 1923, J. Gresham Machen led several faculty and many students out of Princeton to establish Westminster Theological Seminary, a very strong institution, great biblical and theological education.

But their theological battle with the Presbyterian Church over, "Frame contends Machen's Children were theological battlers. And when the battle against liberalism in the PCUSA appeared over, they found other theological battles to fight." He lists 21 things that since 1923 reformed theology in the United States has broken itself up over. He goes on, "The Machen movement was born in the controversy over liberal theology, and I have no doubt that Machen and his colleagues were right to reject this theology and to fight against it. But it's arguable that once the Machenites found themselves in a true church, they were unable to moderate their martial impulses."

Being a church without liberals to fight, they turned on one another. Perhaps even more damningly, Frame adds that “The balance of truth and love was not characteristic of the Machen movement.”

Now, it's important to be said that not everyone agrees with Frame's assessment. He's come under lots of criticism, but I want to keep that threat in mind.

We now need to be a diocese, not marked by our fighting ability, not hungry for the next enemy, but desiring to proclaim the gospel alone and to build those places where righteousness can take root, where the world as we want it to be begins to take hold.

The war is over. It's time to seek and save the lost. It's time to plant and revitalize. It's time to hone and consistently renew our minds, to answer the hard questions of the day. And it's time to rebuild what is lost.

It's time for us to commit to being that group of neighbors who love each other and are at peace with each other (as much as in us lies), to create a space for righteousness to take root in a world so that one day we win over the forces of evil. And I am so excited to report that it looks to me like that's who we are.

I don't know if you just saw the most recent issue of the *Jubilate Deo*, but amazing things are happening in this Diocese. Camp Jubilee is on! It is going strong, and all around our communities are working on buildings and capital campaigns and youth ministry and church planting and pilgrimages and mission trips, homeless ministry, support for pregnant women, food ministries, all kinds of things.

I mean, reading the *Jubilate Deo* got me so excited about what's going on in this Diocese. Amazing things! We are doing, what needs to be done. We need to continue and press on.

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