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The Church of England in Australia

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THE Church of England in Australia is too frequently assessed, both from within its own ranks and by the outsider, on a population basis. In every State throughout the Commonwealth according to the census returns, the distribution per cent of population according to religion gives the Church of England 39%, the highest being in Tasmania with 48%, and the lowest in South Australia, 29%. The next denomination claims 20%, Roman Catholicism. But these government figures are no indication of the strength, cohesion and influence of the respective Churches. It is freely accepted that the dominant religious body is the Roman Catholic Church, in politics, property and social service.

The Church of England came to Australia as a State religion with the first convict contingent in 1788. The first chaplains, Richard Johnson and his successor, Samuel Marsden, had chequered relations with the administration which, on the whole, was somewhat unfavourably disposed to true religion and virtue, but in 1813-36 important changes came. First, the Bishopric of Calcutta was founded in 1814, and ten years later the Archdeaconry of New South Wales was constituted, subject and subordinate to the jurisdiction, spiritual and ecclesiastical, of the Bishop of Calcutta. Archbishop Lowther Clarke says there is no record of any episcopal function having been performed by the Bishop of Calcutta in Australia. The second Archdeacon was W. G. Broughton, appointed in 1829 by the Duke of Wellington. In that year there were eight Churches and twelve clergymen in Australia, the latter being largely chaplains of penal establishments. The arrival of free settlers in increasing numbers developed the good lands in the south-east of the continent. Many of them were sincerely religious and with the development of the nation came the progress of the Church. Archdeacon Broughton, an active, energetic man, visited England, and his story as given there of the spiritual destitution of Australia, led to the formation by Letters Patent of the Bishopric of Australia in 1836. At this time there were seventeen Churches in the whole of the Continent. The Bishopric of Tasmania was created in 1842, but great changes came in 1847, when the Diocese of Australia was divided into Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Newcastle. The development continued throughout the boom times of the latter half of the century when gold and wool brought so much prosperity, so that with the creation of St. Arnaud in 1926 the total number of Bishoprics reached twenty-five, and there they have stayed.

At an important meeting in 1850, the six bishops, amongst other matters, affirmed the necessity of Provincial and Diocesan Synods, and they recommended the inclusion of the laity in such Synods to consult and decide with the clergy all questions affecting the temporalities of the Church. This was a momentous decision, in agreement with the

spirit of the times in these young colonies which had just received permission from Westminster to form representative governments. Mr. Gladstone was heart and soul in the movement and had advised all colonial churches to "organize themselves on the basis of voluntary consensual compact, which was the basis on which the Church of Christ rested from the first". After much consultation with the wisest and best of Church leaders in England, the Archbishop of Canterbury himself introduced a Bill permitting members of the Church of England in the dominions beyond the seas to manage, under certain restrictions, their own ecclesiastical affairs. When this Bill was rejected by the Commons, Bishop Perry of Melbourne acted on his own initiative and obtained from the Victorian Parliament the Church Act, 1854. Other States followed in due course, after some hesitation, and these Church Acts remain in substance the same to this day.

The twentieth century has witnessed the attempt to unify the constitution of the Church in Australia along the lines of political federation achieved in 1901. But not much success has been achieved for various reasons. Australia is a vast country sparsely inhabited, except for population concentrations around the capital cities which themselves are hundreds of miles apart. Until the very recent years of air travel, each population unit developed very much along its own lines, and to-day, the difference in mind and outlook is far greater between Melbourne and Sydney than between London and York; even more than between London and Edinburgh. This obtains practically everywhere even amongst the smaller units. There is a large body of opinion in Western Australia and Tasmania convinced that political federation has actually been deleterious to the economic development of those states. With the passage of the years, certain dioceses have become practically "monochrome" in ecclesiastical outlook. And this heightens tension rather than eases it. A hundred years ago when the first steps of ecclesiastical self-government were made, Australia led the way in the movement of associating the laity with the clergy in the direct government of the Church, but succeeding generations have not been able to reach unanimity on the next steps to be taken concerning the limiting safeguards then imposed. All provincial constitutions are tied to the doctrine and practice of the Church of England at the time when their Church Acts were passed, and the chequered career of Prayer Book Revision in England represents the dilemma of the Church in Australia. It is generally recognized that the 1662 Prayer Book needs adaptation and expanding for Australian conditions, but a large body of Church opinion is rightly wary of the impulsive hot-heads of the Oxford Movement. There is even a great body of Church people who consider, like all who set up homeland traditions in a new country, that the Church of the mother country came alarmingly near to forsaking the right old ways in 1928. Nevil Shute, the English novelist now settled in Australia, has sensed this trend and foresees that England will move further to the Left while the Dominions will verge to the Right.

This strong divergence of opinion as to the nature and authority of the Church is seen in the failure of General Synod for more than twenty years to come to any agreement on a constitution for the whole Church of England in Australia as one unit of the Anglican Communion.

Each suggested draft of a constitution has been finally bogged down upon the question of the Appellate Tribunal. How shall the final Court of Appeal in the Church for faith and morals be constituted? Have the laity an inherent right to be associated with those who define the faith of the Church? Or is it only the clergy as the experts, and endowed with special authority because of the grace of orders?

An influential section, wearied by the hampering limitations of decisions by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, and maintaining that the Church is constituted by Spirit and not Common or Statutory Law of a semi-Anglican legislature, is naturally impatient lest the "Privy Council" attitude to the Church keep us as immobile in Australia as in England. About as equal a weight of opinion would develop Bishop Perry's thesis into the whole of Church life and maintain that, even though Synods in the early Church were apparently clerical only, the universal education of the twentieth century leads the Holy Spirit in the Church to pronounce that it is quite possible, and even desirable, for laymen to be associated with clerics in the highest Church courts, even in the trial of a clerk allegedly delinquent in faith and morals.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is said to have urged in his addresses before leading Church people during his 1951 tour in Australia, not to give up hoping that a satisfactory solution can be achieved in what has proved to be the impasse of a quarter of a century.

Church building in Australia has throughout the period been mainly utilitarian. Some of the older Churches, especially in New South Wales and Tasmania, have claims to architectural value, but just as our houses are quickly put up, and because of the movements of population after industry during these last forty years, as quickly superseded, so there is not the beauty in Church buildings there is in England. All the capital cities have impressive Cathedral Churches, Sydney's an architectural gem far too small, and Brisbane's unfinished. But the buildings erected in the present generation have been mostly in the red-brick tradition with pseudo-Gothic windows, quite an undistinguished feature in the landscape of both town and country.

The Australian Church has not produced any great weight of scholarship. Training for the ministry has improved in quality over the past twenty years. Moore College, Sydney, was founded in 1856, and each diocese and state has had to do its best to supplement the trickle of English trained clergy. The Lucas-Tooth scholarship has for a generation given Australian-trained postulants for the ministry an opportunity of three years at Oxford, and has been well used. The main method of training until very recent years was mostly along the lines of apprenticeship. Young men went out to the country districts where they read the services and received instruction from the Bishop of the Diocese and one or two of his clergy. It was common for a Bishop travelling to England to have in mind as the first urgent purpose of his visit to appeal to young men in the Home Church to come out to Australia and work their way into the ministry. Many who responded to this challenge have done good work. In spite of the strenuous attempts of Bishop Moorhouse of Melbourne (1876-86) to link up the best of his ordinands to the emerging University of Melbourne, to take

a degree was the exception rather than the rule. General Synod tried to provide a standard for non-matriculating students for the ministry by the establishment in 1891 of the Australian College of Theology which confers certificates in lieu of degrees (licentiate, scholar and fellow in Theology) thus avoiding the university nomenclature. Much sore feeling was recently caused by the change of the fellowship to a doctorate; but this has not been accepted everywhere because the resolutions of General Synod are operative only when the individual diocese formally accepts them. The past ten years, however, have witnessed not only the increasing efficiency of the Theological Colleges, e.g., Ridley, Melbourne, founded in 1910 for the training of an evangelical clergy and named after the Cambridge institution; but an increasing desire on the part of candidates for Holy Orders to read for a University degree, and quite a number of graduates have proceeded to England and gained higher degrees. In 1950 the Society of the Sacred Mission at Kelham founded a daughter house on the outskirts of Adelaide where postulants are tested and come under the training and discipline of such well known persons as Father A. G. Hebert. They are required to do the minimum of earning their living at "readerships" during the course of training which extends no less than five years. This is a challenge to those training institutions which maintain Reformation principles and practices; and it is being eagerly followed. The future is bright for the intellectual standing of Australian clergymen. It can be said that the average clergyman in Australia had to work harder than his brother in England until very recent years, and the peripatetic life combined with an inadequate intellectual training gave little opportunity to engage in necessary reading. There is an Australian Church Quarterly published, mainly Tractarian in character. Many clergy both contribute to and write for the *Reformed Theological Review* produced locally with Presbyterians and Methodists.

The Bush Brotherhood movement, supported enthusiastically from its inauguration by Bishop Winnington-Ingram, did much in the early years of this century to bring the ministrations of the church into the out-back areas, especially in Queensland, and in the present generation it practically dominates the episcopate by weight of numbers. In the early twenties, the evangelical leader, S. J. Kirkby, later Bishop, founded the Bush Church Aid Society which is still doing excellent work in finding and training men for the ministry who serve the sparsely populated areas.

Australia has not produced many poets, and it must be admitted that in hymn writing and hymnody, the Australian supplement to the Book of Common Praise (1947) reveals lack of talent; Bishop Pilcher, Bishop Gilbert White and Dean Aickin are not Australian-born, though Sir Robert Garran and Kenneth Henderson are. In 1903, however, Sydney Synod initiated the Australian Psalter, which proved to be merely the old Cathedral Psalter supplemented by extra tunes for the Canticles.

Two Church papers are issued, the *Australian Church Record* of conservative outlook, with a limited issue; and the recently reconstructed and re-named *Anglican* which is meeting a need in Australian Church journalism to off-set in some way the remarkably efficient

Roman Catholic journals published for their own adherents. In the field of broadcasting nothing has yet been achieved on the scale of the Roman Catholic 2SM operating from Sydney, but 2CH from the same city is controlled by a Committee of the non-Roman Churches for Sunday programmes. Anglicans, however, make a very effective contribution in the presentation of religious broadcasting from the Government stations which is distributed roughly on a population basis. The choirs of the various main cathedrals are heard over the air regularly, particularly St. Paul's, Melbourne, until the retirement of Dr. A. E. Floyd who for many years was the chief figure in church music throughout the Commonwealth.

In co-operative movements in the religious life of the country, the leaders of the Church of England are well to the fore. The Bible Society President in nearly every State is an Anglican leader, generally the Metropolitan. The World Council of Churches has an Australian section well supported and led by the Primate, the Archbishop of Sydney (Dr. Mowll); and the Archbishop of Melbourne (Dr. Booth) has accepted an invitation to attend the next World Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1954 in America.

In spite of the pressures of a rapidly expanding life and economy, and the need for constant building, the Australian Church has always been diligent in the evangelization of the nations. The second Chaplain to New South Wales, Samuel Marsden, constantly advocated the cause of the despised Aborigines before the authorities who found themselves in a terrible dilemma because white and black could mix no better than oil and water. Marsden also initiated the evangelization of the Maoris in New Zealand, himself making the journey several times to those islands to supervise and promote the work. In 1825 a committee of public minded and humanitarian citizens was formed for the amelioration of the hard lot of the Australian Aborigines, but the position progressively deteriorated until the whole race was practically driven from the good lands of the south-east to desolate country in the north and north-west. However, the tide has now turned. The Australian Board of Missions, brought into existence by the momentous 1850 meeting of the six Bishops, and the Church Missionary Society, finally constituted on a Commonwealth basis in 1916, have concentrated upon educating public opinion on behalf of the scattered remnant of the Aboriginal people, about 60,000 in 1920, so that Government now considers the welfare of the Aboriginal a social responsibility, and Mussolini's jibe now no longer holds true, "If you want to see what happens to native minorities under British rule, go and study the Australian Aborigine". But not only within the Commonwealth, but elsewhere, the Australian Church has shown a missionary responsibility. The evangelization of New Guinea received an impetus with the arrival of the first Bishop (Stone-Wigg) in 1898, and to-day the flourishing Church life in that diocese is a living witness to the power of Christ to save. The Church Missionary Society of Australia and Tasmania has ninety missionaries stationed throughout the world, mostly in the framework of the English C.M.S. network, except in the diocese of Central Tanganyika (East Africa) which, since its establishment in 1928, has been led by three Australians as Bishop and a team of

Australian missionaries. This year, the Primate (Dr. Mowll) after a tour on his return from the Travancore Conference, called upon the Church to consider the need for Australia, as the only wholly white nation in the Pacific, to consider its Christian good-neighbourliness with South East Asia, particularly because of fast closing doors in that area. This challenge has been enthusiastically received by all sections of the Church. One of the abiding results of the Second World War was to jolt the average Australian out of their complacency of isolationism into which he had fallen during this century when only Europe mattered in world affairs, and this awareness is reflected in the increasing missionary contributions which have been received over the past ten years, although the pound value has by no means maintained itself.

In the pioneering days of the last century, it was remarkable how many leading citizens could be numbered in the councils of the Church throughout the Commonwealth. They themselves would acquire sites for new churches and initiate the formation and financing of new bishoprics. The Synods would often be doughty battlegrounds where sides were taken vigorously and the layman's voice heard as frequently as the parson's, whether in matters of Church doctrine or finance. Judges, professional men and leading business men gave of their time, wisdom and resources in the service of the Church. There are not so many of them to-day and they are not so vocal where the faith of the Church is concerned. But it is to the credit of the Church of England in Australia that it associated the laity on an equal footing with the clergy in the direct management of all Church affairs two generations before June, 1920, when the Church Assembly (England) met for the first time, and this pioneering venture now stands the Church in good stead.

It is sometimes suggested that to call ourselves the Church of England is an anachromism and that perhaps Anglican or Episcopal would be more fitting, but the proposed alteration has not been well received because there seems to be no general desire amongst Church members to jettison the well-known and time-honoured description of the Church of our fathers which we affectionately, though perhaps illegally, call the Church of England in Australia, and which we know to be truly Catholic and Apostolic.

God, Who didst lead our fathers here,
And gave to them this spacious land,
We thank Thee for our heritage
Of bush and plain and golden sand.

Ours be the joy to take our stand
With banner of the Cross unfurl'd,
God's watchers o'er the ocean isles,
God's witness to the Eastern world.

DEAN AICKIN (Ob. 1937).

The author wishes to acknowledge his debt to Archbishop Lowther Clarke's "Constitutional Church Government".