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The Kenneth Cable Inaugural Lecture

*Australian Anglicanism and Australian History:
the need for a synthesis*

Delivered at St James' Church, Sydney on the 10th of September 2004

by

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I was surprised, touched and delighted when Father Peter Kurti contacted me to ask if I would speak on this occasion. For me it was a great honour and privilege to have been invited to deliver, in this the church to which Dr Ken Cable was so deeply attached, the first of the annual lectures designed to commemorate his life and achievements. All of us here will have been touched in some way by Ken. My association with him goes back to 1950 when he lectured in the second year Modern European History course at the University of Sydney. Subsequently he became a colleague, a friend, a source of intellectual inspiration and a mentor who did much to help my career. For all this I am profoundly grateful and I welcome the opportunity to do something to help perpetuate his memory.

Ken was a committed Anglican and one sign of his commitment lay in his continued efforts to increase his own understanding of the church's history and to share his immense knowledge with others. This he did mainly through his university courses, supervision of postgraduate students, conference papers and public lectures and important articles and contributions to books.¹ Few could rival the effortless way in which Ken carried out supervision and lecturing or indeed measure up to the skills he displayed in both spheres. Not surprisingly, Ken quickly established himself as the doyen of Anglican historians in Australia and he continued to occupy this position throughout his life. Yet it is important to remember that, in addition to being a leading authority on Australian Anglicanism, Ken was also an expert in other fields of history. He was in fact a scholar of singular erudition, capable of running courses and lecturing with authority in an unusually wide range of fields, amongst them Australian history. It was his ability to bring this wider expertise to bear on Australian Anglicanism that gave his work in this field its real significance. He used his knowledge of Australian history to illuminate the study of Anglicanism and his understanding of Anglicanism to explain major aspects of Australia's past. It seems appropriate this evening, therefore, to enlarge on his approach, to explore some of the connections between Australian Anglicanism and Australian history and to show why it is important not only for writers of national history, but also for the leaders of the church, to

¹ See especially Judd, S., and Cable, K., *Sydney Anglicans: A History of the Diocese*, Anglican Information Office, Sydney, 1987. For a list of Ken Cable's publications see Kaye, B., (ed), *Anglicanism in Australia: a history*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2002. Ken also contributed numerous articles on bishops and clergy to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* and was awarded a Medal for his outstanding contributions by the *ADB* in 2002.

take these links more fully into account. Let me begin with a brief historiographical introduction.

Ken Cable entered the field of Anglican history in 1952 with the completion of his seminal and widely read Master of Arts thesis dealing with the policy of the Church of England towards education in New South Wales before 1880. At that stage the church was viewed as a mere appendage by national historians and in institutional, or biographical, terms by writers of church history. Since then, however, there has been an increased awareness among historians of Anglicanism of the need to relate their subject to broader themes in Australian history. This largely reflects moves made within the academic community during the 1960s to promote the systematic and scholarly study of religious history.² Such moves were given a boost by Professor Manning Clark whose early volumes dealt with the interplay of religious and secular forces in Australia. Anglicanism has benefited greatly from this. There now exists a growing volume of postgraduate theses and journal articles on particular aspects of Australian Anglicanism, together with publications by writers such as Drs David Hilliard, Colin Holden, Bruce Kaye, Robert Withycombe and Bishop Tom Frame.³ What these authors have in common is the fact that they locate their subject firmly within the contours of Australia's past.

Unfortunately, this literature does not appear to have registered to any significant extent with writers of national history. Major advances have been made in this field as interest has moved from the political to the social and cultural arena and as issues such as race, gender and ethnicity have come to the fore. Yet the role of Anglicanism continues for the most part to be pushed to one side. This is the more regrettable given that the Church of England has been part of the fabric of Australian life since 1788 and that it has throughout possessed a substantial following and close links with the Anglo-Saxon ascendancy which, until recently, has provided it with a means of exerting considerable influence. Such references as are made to the church are normally few in number and are generally limited to specific themes such as education. The broader impact of Anglicanism does not

² Mansfield, B., 'Thinking about Australian Religious History', *Journal of Religious History*, 15, 1989, pp. 330–44, O'Farrell, P., 'Writing the General History of Australian Religion', *Journal of Religious History*, 9, 1976, pp. 65–73.

³ For a comprehensive bibliography see Kaye, *Anglicanism in Australia*, pp. 351–84. The principal writings of the authors mentioned either appear in footnotes or are listed under 'Further Reading' at the end of this lecture.

feature in academic histories of Australia or, for the most part in works that deal with the way in which society and culture have been formed.⁴ Even the recent perceptive treatment of the English in Australia by James Jupp, scarcely does justice to the role of Anglicanism in shaping the attitudes of this particular group.⁵ Australia is still depicted in most histories largely as the product of secular forces – a view that pervades the teaching of history in universities and schools. To the extent that religion features it is largely the faith of the Roman Catholic church whose role in preserving the culture of the Irish minority gave it special significance.⁶ Catholicism, liberalism, nationalism, socialism and feminism have alike attracted attention. Not so the ‘ism’ that bears the prefix ‘Anglican’. That the role of this particular ‘ism’ has escaped attention arises in part from the tendency to view the Anglican church, unlike its Roman Catholic counterpart, exclusively as a religious body and to overlook the fact that it was also a cultural force. The focus this evening will be on the cultural dimensions of Anglicanism.

To claim that mainstream historians have largely disregarded Anglicanism is not to prove that they are at fault in doing so. The case has to be sustained and to do this it is necessary to look more closely at what the church sought to achieve for Australia. Rather than attempt to cover the whole period since 1788 I shall concentrate on the twentieth century when the opportunity arose for the church to help create a new nation. This was a task to which church leaders responded enthusiastically. They had thrown their weight behind the federation movement, welcoming it as a means of removing the obstacles that prevented a people, linked by culture and heritage, fulfilling their destiny.⁷ Already, in 1872 the church had established a federal structure of its own in the shape of a General Synod composed of bishops and elected representatives of the clergy and laity from every Australian diocese.⁸ Some churchmen believed that the

⁴ See for example: Greenwood, G. (ed), *Australia A Social and Political History*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1955, *The Oxford History of Australia*, vols. 2–5, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992. The book by Goldberg, S. and Smith F. (eds), *Australian Cultural History*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1988, forms an exception and contains a valuable chapter on Anglicanism by David Hilliard.

⁵ Jupp, J., *The English in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004.

⁶ See especially O’Farrell, P., *The Catholic Church and Community in Australia: A History*, Nelson, Sydney, 1997, *The Irish in Australia*, New South Wales University Press, Sydney, 1987.

⁷ Fletcher, B.H., ‘The Anglican Church and Australian Federation’, *The Anglican Historical Society Journal Diocese of Sydney*, 45, 2001, pp. 6–17.

⁸ Border, R., *Church and State in Australia, 1788–1872, A Constitutional Study of the Church of England in Australia*, SPCK, London, 1961, Fletcher B.H. ‘Evangelicalism and the Establishment of General Synod, 1865–1872’, *LUCAS: An Evangelical History Review*, 30, December 2001, pp. 5–33.

formation of this body gave a spur to the federal movement and all recognized that once federation was achieved a nation would gradually come into being. It was the church's duty to ensure that the new nation rested on Christian principles. These beliefs were particularly potent in the first six decades or so of the century and it is that period which will first receive attention.

Anglicanism is a by-word for religious diversity. Each of its differing forms of belief, 'low and lazy, broad and hazy, high and crazy', were represented in Australia, stretching as Bishop Burgmann put it, from 'left of Geneva to right of Rome'. Where matters of nationhood were concerned disagreement did exist but there was, at least until the 1960s, broad consensus as to the direction Australia should take. The comments made by church leaders during this period made it clear that they did possess a concept of nationhood. This was partly rooted in scripture but it was also strongly influenced by the experiences of the parent body in England. Here the church, while affirming its catholicity, had assumed a national form during the Reformation and had used the influence stemming from its established status to play a major role in shaping first the monarchical and then the nation state. The Church of England depicted itself as the soul of the Anglo-Saxon race and believed that its divine mission was to guide the destiny of that race no matter where it was located. It was this belief that inspired the Australian church with the conviction that it bore responsibility for the future of Australia.⁹

But how was the church to carry out its mission? During the second half of the nineteenth century church and state had been separated in each of the Australian colonies and this principle was enshrined in the Commonwealth constitution. Throughout the twentieth century the Anglican church existed as a voluntary organisation which placed it at a disadvantage compared to its parent body. Its bishops did not sit in state and federal parliaments and, although many lay Anglicans were prominent in political life they owed their position, not to their membership of the church, but to that of a particular party. Their actions as parliamentarians were determined more by party demands than by the decisions of synods or the views of bishops. The church in fact made no attempt to impose political views of any kind on its followers and by choice aligned itself with no political party, believing that

⁹ Fletcher, B.H., 'Anglicanism and Nationalism in Australia 1901–1962', *Journal of Religious History*, 23, 1999, pp. 213–33.

to do so would create serious problems, given that Anglicans were to be found across the whole political spectrum. From the outset it left the formulation of policy to parliamentarians. Its task was to exert moral pressure normally of a general kind but more specific when issues of particular concern arose. Action of this kind could be important but it was also indirect and uncertain in outcome. Moreover, it was more likely to be effective at the state level than in the national sphere. Individual dioceses sometimes mounted campaigns to bring about reform within their own states. But the church as a whole lacked any effective means of exerting influence on the federal government. General Synod met only at five yearly intervals and its capacity to speak on behalf of the church was greatly reduced by the fact that real power lay in the hands of bishops and their synods. Efforts to give General Synod legislative power and to build a cathedral and locate the primacy in Canberra where it could catch the ear of the national government, foundered on the rock of diocesanism.

More than any other denomination, however, the church drew strength from its connections with the establishment. It was strongly represented among politicians, in the judiciary, the professions, the business community and the upper echelons of rural society. Indeed, as its educational policies showed, the church sought to cultivate and produce such people. Unlike the Roman Catholic church it progressively abandoned claims to control the education of its own children and accepted the concept of state run schools to which clergy had access and in which Christian beliefs of a non doctrinal kind were taught. It concentrated its own efforts on running Sunday schools for the mass of its children and providing a handful of fee paying primary and secondary schools accessible mainly to the wealthy and aimed at fashioning the nation's leaders. Education thus provided the church with yet another weapon in its efforts to exert influence.

Important too was the fact that Australia, although a child of the Enlightenment and of the post French Revolution era, regarded itself as a Christian nation even though worship was a rarity for many citizens. The secular press reported regularly on the activities of the various denominations and used occasions such as Christmas and Easter to deliver homilies to its readers. Leading dailies in every capital city published full reports of synod proceedings and remain the best source for the debates that took place on these occasions. This provided the church with valuable publicity which it also gained from its own agencies. Practically every

diocese had a church newspaper and at the national level there existed the widely circulated *Church Standard* which in 1914 succeeded the *Church Commonwealth*, continuing in circulation until 1954 when the *Anglican* came into being. Although Anglo-Catholic in leaning, the *Church Standard*, like its predecessor, contained reports from every diocese together with articles and presidential addresses to synods by bishops of every hue. In addition to the press there existed the Men's and Mother's Unions which established links across Australia, together with other organisations devoted to the interests of young people and missionary work. Another source of influence so far as youth was concerned came from the Sunday school movement which catered for large numbers of children. Despite the weaknesses of General Synod, therefore, the church did possess ways of bringing its weight to bear on the nation.

The concept of nationhood which church leaders sought to develop in Australia before the 1960s did not rest on a co-ordinated programme carefully worked out through consultation. To some extent it was influenced by the church's experiences in Australia, but more important was the impact of a shared heritage that was deeply implanted in bishops whether they had been born in Australia or, as was more often the case, in England. Their attitudes had been shaped during a period in which fears that Britain might lose ground to newly emerging competitors such as Germany, Italy and the United States, resulted in a premium being placed on the empire. These views were shared by Australians who set great store by the imperial connection.

Given these circumstances it was scarcely surprising that the Australian church's concept of nationhood should have been placed within an imperial framework.¹⁰ Other empires, including that of Rome, were based on exploitation and subjugation and some churchmen perceived elements of both within the British Empire. But the dominant opinion was that it acted as a force for good, bringing benefit to all its members and the world. Such attitudes were confirmed by the way in which the empire, with its connotations of subjugation, was transformed into a Commonwealth of free and equal peoples. It was vital for Australia to remain part of this body not least because it rested on Christian principles and would prevent Australian nationalism becoming aggressive and chauvinistic. This belief was affirmed

¹⁰ Withycombe, R.S.M., 'Australian Anglicans and Imperial Identity 1900–1914', *Journal of Religious History*, 25, 2001, pp. 286–305.

over and again and it helps explain the support given by leading churchmen to organizations such as the Round Table Movement and the Royal Empire (later Commonwealth) Institute which were founded in Britain to tighten the bonds of empire. Foremost amongst those who espoused this cause was the Sydney cleric, Canon Bertie Boyce, an ardent imperial federationist who was instrumental in introducing Empire Day to Australia in 1905.¹¹

It was Britain that deserved credit for creating the value system on which the empire rested and it was from Britain that church leaders drew many of their key aspirations for Australia. While by no means uncritical of the mother country, they had been brought up to value the way in which this nation had acted as a model for less fortunate peoples.¹² Britain was noted for its championing of liberty, individual rights, constitutional monarchy, parliamentary government and the common law. British rule had brought these benefits to the Australian colonies during the nineteenth century and they were already deeply enshrined in the community. The church's task was to protect and nurture them and ensure that they continued to form the cornerstone of the new nation.

The chief threat to democratic values came from outside Australia. German 'Kaiserism' was identified as the enemy during World War 1 and then, more worryingly, came the totalitarian regimes in communist Russia, fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. All three regimes were roundly condemned by the church because they exalted the state at the expense of the individual and, in the case of Soviet Russia, denied the existence of God. Communism became a more direct threat to Australia after the allied victory in World War II. The growing strength of the Australian Communist Party was vociferously opposed by the Anglican church, but divisions appeared when the Menzies government attempted to outlaw the party in 1951. While some church leaders viewed this as a contravention of democratic principles, others argued that democracy sometimes had to resort to undemocratic methods to protect itself.

Abstract ideas were not in themselves sufficient to preserve the values prized by the church. Important too was the need to ensure that Australia

¹¹ French, M., "One People One Destiny": A Question of Loyalty: The Origins of Empire Day in New South Wales, 1900–1905, *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 61, 1975, pp. 236–46.

¹² For criticisms see especially Holden, C., *Gothic Foundations and Rising Damp, or Prophets and Rebels: The Contribution of the Liberal Intellectual Tradition in Australian Anglicanism to Australian Culture*, Marshall Memorial Lecture, Trinity College, Melbourne, 2001.

continued to be peopled migrants whose beliefs had been shaped in Britain. For this purpose it was desirable to maintain the White Australia policy which was embodied in the first major legislative enactment of the Commonwealth parliament.¹³ Some misgivings about the Act were expressed by the Adelaide synod and later by Bishop Gilbert White of Carpentaria and others. But most church leaders believed that every nation had the right to determine the composition of its population and there were also fears that a mixture of races might generate tension and result in miscegenation. There was, however, a strong desire to avoid any suggestion that churchmen believed in racial superiority. Moreover, it was agreed that migrants from neighbouring regions where land was scarce and poverty endemic, could scarcely be excluded so long as Australia's empty spaces remained unfilled. This made it the more important to attract migrants from Britain whose presence was also necessary if the church was to retain its own pre-eminence. During the inter-war years the church, worked closely with organizations established by the English church to promote empire settlement. Chaplains were appointed to migrant ships and parishes were asked to nominate migrants and welcome them on arrival. In the early 1950's strong support was given to the 'Bring out a Briton' campaign.

Besides taking steps to shape the composition of Australia's population the church also had views about the basis on which society should rest. Socialism presented difficulties because, while having something in common with Christianity, it was secular in inspiration. For some churchman the solution was to Christianise socialism. Amongst those to do so were bishops such as J.E.Mercer of Hobart, Ernest Burgmann of Canberra/Goulburn and J.S.Moyes of Armidale, together with clergy like Canon Farnham Maynard of St Peter's, Eastern Hill, Melbourne. Their beliefs were to be found at work in the social gospel movement of the 1930s and the Christian Social Order Movement of the 1940s.¹⁴ More generally, however, church leaders believed that social justice was best achieved through a capitalist system based on mutual understanding between employers and employees. Each needed to acknowledge the rights of the other and to behave with forbearance. While employers should respect their workers and safeguard their wellbeing, workers needed to

¹³ For attitudes to White Australia see Fletcher, 'Anglicanism and Nationalism in Australia', pp. 223–5.

¹⁴ Mansfield J., 'The Social Gospel and the Church of England in New South Wales in the 1930s', *Journal of Religious History*, 13, 1986, pp. 411–33, 'The Christian Social Order Movement, 1943–1951', *Journal of Religious History*, 15, 1988, pp. 109–27.

behave responsibly, engaging in negotiations and avoiding the strike weapon when problems arose.

The Anglican church, therefore, sought to make Australia an outpost of British civilization, linked to the empire, democratic in temper and supportive of the principles of social justice. These were mainstream Australian values but the church approached them from a religious standpoint and gave them a Christian imprimatur. It valued the empire not because it promised material advantage but because, like the League of Nations, it rested on Christian principles. The origins of democracy, Bishop Batty of Newcastle claimed, were to be found not in the Greek city states but in the Christian belief that all were equal in the sight of God. In similar vein the idea of social justice derived less from socialist thought than from the Christian concept of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. Christian teaching was the touchstone against which all the nation's values needed to be judged. The idea of having a crowned head of state was also influenced by the fact that the monarch was supreme head of the church.

Such views also influenced Anglican attitudes towards World Wars 1 and 11. It would be misleading to assume that the Anglican response to the outbreak of hostilities was based entirely on abstract principles. Dr John Moses has shown how, contrary to what earlier historians claimed, church leaders closely monitored developments in Europe before 1914 and had a detailed grasp of what was going on.¹⁵ The same was no less true of the situation before 1939. Present too, however, was the conviction that underlying these crises was a struggle between nations that affirmed Christian principles and those that did not. Kaiserism and fascism were alike depicted as denying basic Christian values. The forces which they represented had to be overcome if these values were to survive. All had to be willing to make sacrifices for the common good and men had to be prepared to lay down their lives if necessary. Not surprisingly, most Anglican leaders threw their weight behind moves by the government of W. M. Hughes in 1916 and 1917 to introduce conscription.¹⁶

¹⁵ Moses J.A., 'Australian Anglican Leaders and the Great War, 1914–1918: The "Prussian Menace", Conscription and National Solidarity', *Journal of Religious History*, 25, 2001, pp.306–23.

¹⁶ McKernan, M, *Australian Churches at War: Attitudes and Activities of the Major Churches, 1914–1918*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1980, Lindner, R.D., *The Long Tragedy: Australian Evangelical Christians and the Great War, 1914–1918*, OpenBook, Adelaide, 2000.

In retrospect one can see that some of the church's attitudes, although prompted by the highest motives, were open to question. Particularly was this so with the Aboriginal people. No one could doubt the strength or sincerity of the missionary impulse that had been present from the earliest days of white settlement. There was a widespread belief that Australia had been brought into being partly so that the indigenous peoples and surrounding region could experience the blessings of Christianity.¹⁷ The church worked hard to achieve this goal and also to assist non-Christian peoples, such as the Chinese, in Australia. Bishops in outlying parts placed the plight of the Aborigines high on their agenda and there was genuine concern at the way in which they had been treated. Two Anglican priests, the renowned anthropologist, Professor A.P.Elkin of Sydney University and his colleague Dr Arthur Capell, did much to heighten church, government and community understanding of Aboriginal culture.¹⁸ Yet it was white values that the church upheld and assimilation was believed to offer the only hope of survival for the Aborigines. This gave rise to well-meaning attempts (now commonly regarded as misguided) to place young Aborigines with white families. The concept of the nation as upheld by the church was a white concept and this reinforced in yet another way prevailing community attitudes.

It could not be argued, however, that church and community intersected equally at all levels of society. Admittedly, the church was present in every part of Australia and took pride in being an inclusive body with a universal message. Statistical evidence relating to total membership and to the use made of the church for the rites of passage, suggests that it did spread its net widely. Every effort was made to ensure that this was so. Yet there were also indications of a failure to penetrate the working class to the extent that was true of other social groups.¹⁹ Many workers were of Irish descent and found their faith in the Roman Catholic church. Moreover, a relatively high level of education was required to appreciate the complexities of Anglican liturgy and to grasp the meaning of the beautiful but somewhat archaic language used in the *Book of Common Prayer* and the King James Bible. Added to this, synods and other decision making bodies tended to be

¹⁷ Harris, J., *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope*, Albatross Books, Sydney, 1994.

¹⁸ Wise, T., *The Self-Made Anthropologist: A Life of A.P.Elkin*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1995.

¹⁹ Kaldor, P.A., *A Gulf Too Deep: The Protestant Churches and the Working Class in Australia*, Board of Missions, Uniting Church in New South Wales, Sydney, 1983, Mol, H., *Religion in Australia: A Sociological Investigation*, Nelson, London, 1971.

dominated in cities and towns by business and professional men, particularly lawyers, and in country dioceses by the gentry. In reality, but not in intent, as many church leaders sadly acknowledged, Anglicanism was a faith for the upwardly mobile and for those who were already comfortably situated. For such people it provided a badge of respectability as well as a means of grace. Respectability of the middle class variety lacked appeal to the workers, many of whom did not take kindly to the 'wowsery' image of the church and the condemnation, particularly by low churchmen and evangelicals, of the pleasures of drink and gambling. Socialism was seen by many workers to offer more than Anglicanism.

Far more serious than the inability of the church to accommodate itself to working class culture is what appears to have occurred in its relationship with Australian society since the 1960s. This we must now consider before drawing any general conclusions about Anglicanism and society in Australia.²⁰ Of key importance to what has occurred over the last four decades or so is a profound shift in the relationship between Britain and Australia. While retaining close ties of friendship, accepting the monarch as the head of state and preserving some of the old economic links, the two nations have followed divergent paths since World War II. While post-imperial Britain linked its fortunes to Europe, Australia turned increasingly to the Asia Pacific region and looked to the United States of America for its defence needs. The emergence of multi-cultural societies in Britain and Australia resulted in ties of sentiment and kinship losing their potency. Added to this was the growing strength of Australian nationalism which had earlier removed the last vestiges of economic and constitutional colonialism and now challenged the hegemony of British culture, replacing it with cultural forms deriving from Australia's own past.

Professor Callum Brown, in his disturbing book, *The Death of Christian Britain*, has argued that the social and cultural changes that transformed Britain after the 1960s, linked as they were to a pervasive form of secularism, brought about a collapse of the value system that was needed to sustain Christianity.²¹ Whether the situation was as desperate as he claims is open to question but it is nonetheless clear that all denominations

²⁰ For what follows see especially Fletcher, B.H., 'Anglicanism and National Identity in Australia Since 1962', *Journal of Religious History*, 25, October 2001, pp. 324–45 and Hilliard D., 'Pluralism and New Alignments in Society and Church, 1967 to the Present', in Kaye (ed), *Anglicanism in Australia*, pp. 124–50.

²¹ Brown, C.G., *The Death of Christian Britain, Understanding Secularisation 1800–2000*, Routledge, London, 2001.

suffered a severe decline. The same was true in Australia where the rising tide of secularism and the presence of faiths outside the Christian fold, brought the nation to the point at which, while still acknowledging God, it ceased to regard itself as Christian or indeed to draw its moral beliefs from the Christian faith. This made the church's task more complex and so too did the fact that it was confronted by cultures, Christian and otherwise to which it was not easy to relate. Moreover, the continued fall in membership resulted in the church slipping into second place in 1986 behind a Roman Catholic church that had benefitted from post war migration patterns and the rise in the social status of the Irish. From being the largest and most influential branch of the Christian faith, the Anglican church seemed in danger of becoming a sect. Its influence was further eroded by its inability to attract adults at Sunday worship and children to Sunday school.

It is these quite revolutionary developments - the erosion of British culture, the decline of Christian values and the fall in numbers and status - that prompt the question as to whether in any meaningful sense Anglicanism continues to count at the national level. Certainly, it was in no position to embrace the nation to the extent that had earlier been possible. Moreover, in recent years its position was further affected by developments that damaged its reputation. To accusations of involvement in the sexual abuse of children and controversy over the 'stolen generation', were added deep and painful internal divisions over the ordination of women, the treatment of homosexuals and the use of the laity to administer the eucharist. Reinforcing these divisions was the emergence in Australia and within the broader Anglican communion of an extreme form of evangelicalism that, in asserting the primacy of its own beliefs, challenged the very essence of Anglicanism. The whole situation was further complicated by the continuing inability of General Synod, even after its role had been strengthened in 1962 by a new constitution, to impose its will on the church.

Yet is the picture as bleak as at first sight appears to be the case? We may begin by observing that the church, far from closing its mind to the fact that society in Australia was being transformed, responded creatively. The first indications of this became evident in attitudes towards Australian nationalism. The fact that Australia was destined to become a nation in its own right had been accepted by Anglican leaders from the outset. Some, it is true were more outspoken in their advocacy of such a development than

others. Australian born bishops, beginning with J.F.Stretch and G.M.Long and extending to Ernest Burgmann and J.S.Moyes, went beyond mere acceptance.²² They took positive steps to heighten their countrymen's consciousness of the distinctiveness of their culture and the need to throw off the remaining remnants of colonial subordination. Such men contributed substantially to the formation of a sense of national consciousness and deserve more recognition for this than they have received from writers on nationalism.

These attitudes grew stronger after the 1960s when a new generation of Australian born bishops who had grown up during and after the war took control of the church. Their loyalty was primarily to Australia and they ceased to extol the merits of Britain and the Commonwealth. They continued to value the connection with Britain, but it was the land of their birth, rather than that from which their forbears came, that figured most prominently in their thought and aspirations. This was brought out clearly in the message preached by a succession of prominent churchmen including Bishop Shevill of North Queensland, R.W.Dann, the first Australian born Archbishop of Melbourne, his successor the noted historian and theologian, Archbishop Keith Rayner and the outspoken Bishop Bruce Wilson of Bathurst. Their nationalism was of a different variety to that evident earlier although they were still anxious to avoid anything resembling the destructive chauvinism so evident in pre-war Europe.

Such views were also widespread among clergy and laity, as was the conviction that if the church itself was to remain strong it needed to become more distinctively Australian. The origins of such a belief can be traced back to the debates which preceded the formation of General Synod in 1872 and it took an increasing hold with the passage of time, influencing not only Australian born Anglicans but also those who came from Britain. Numerous efforts were made on General Synod to push the church in an Australian direction, but they were impeded by the discovery in 1911 that the church was tied legally to its parent body in such a way as to allow little freedom of action.²³ It took some half a century of intense negotiation and debate, occasionally rancorous but mostly conducted in a spirit of Christian goodwill, before the nexus was severed. Delay resulted from fears on the

²² Hempenstall, P., *The Meddlesome Priest: A Life of Ernest Burgmann*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1993.

²³ Davis, J., *Australian Anglicans and their Constitution*, Acorn Press, Canberra, 1993, Withycombe, R.S.M., 'Imperial Nexus and National Anglican Identity: The Australian 1911–1912 Legal Nexus Opinions Revisited', *Journal of Anglican Studies*, 2.1, 2004, pp. 62–80.

part of traditionalists and conservatives of the possible consequences of autonomy and the mutual suspicions of evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics, each of whom sought to prevent the other from gaining control of the church. A new constitution was finally approved by General Synod in 1955. Seven years later, after the necessary enabling legislation had been passed by all state governments, the constitution became law, opening the way for an Australian church to emerge.

Change occurred gradually and took varying forms, affecting church furnishings and architecture as well as senior diocesan and theological college appointments. Important too was the liturgy whose revision bore fruit in *An Australian Prayer Book* which appeared in 1978. Its significance lay in the fact that it was the first to be prepared by an Australian Liturgical Commission acting in consultation with the whole Australian church. Known popularly as the ‘bottle brush prayer book’, because it included sketches of Australian flora, its title included the word Australia and the cover was coloured green and gold.²⁴ The church’s own title was modified first by adding the words ‘in Australia’ to ‘Church of England’, and then by substituting ‘The Anglican Church’ for this last phrase and ‘of’ for ‘in’. In 1995 *A Prayer Book for Australia* took the original revision further down an Australian path. Besides having a much more distinctively Australian flavour and content, it acknowledged women as well as Aboriginal spirituality, although not to the extent that many would have liked. Such changes were also evident in a succession of hymnals mostly produced in association with other denominations.

The use of an inclusive language and the recognition given to Aboriginal culture demonstrated in yet another way the willingness of the church to adjust to the new ethos. Ironically enough, by the time freedom of action had been gained in 1962, Australia’s sense of national identity was undergoing change.²⁵ Those within the church who had pressed so long for autonomy had thought of Australia not only as an outpost of Britain but as male oriented and white dominated. This corresponded to a reality that gradually disappeared after the 1960s giving rise within the community to a concept of the nation which placed women on the same footing as men, treated migrants of all creeds and backgrounds in the same way and gave

²⁴ Fletcher, B.H., ‘Re-Shaping Australian Anglicanism 1962–1978: From Book of Common Prayer to An Australian Prayer Book’, *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 85, 1999, pp. 120–38

²⁵ Alomes, S., *A Nation at Last? The Changing Character of Australian Nationalism 1880–1988*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1988.

the Aboriginal people a legal status equal to that of the whites. The consequence for the church was that becoming Australian now involved far more than had been anticipated by those who had worked for the severing of the legal nexus with the English church. That the church responded positively showed in yet another way its desire to remain as central to the nation as possible.

This objective found expression in a number of spheres. First there was the decision to ordain Aboriginal priests for work among tribal and urban Aborigines and to consecrate two Aboriginal bishops. Accompanying these last moves was a growing appreciation of Aboriginal spirituality which resulted in mission work taking the form more of a dialogue than of an attempt to impose Anglican beliefs on the indigenous people. Efforts were also made to reach out among migrants of non-British origin. Multi-cultural ministries were established, particularly in the Dioceses of Sydney and Melbourne where there were large non British migrant communities. By changing its liturgy and incorporating Aborigines and migrants from all backgrounds into its own life the church had brought itself into line with the nation. A similar end was achieved in 1992 when the first women priests were ordained. Admittedly this decision was not universally accepted but the bulk of the church had shown a willingness to open the door to women gaining the equality they already possessed in national life.²⁶ Much remained to be accomplished and the highly contentious and as yet unresolved issue of homosexuality remained a deep source of division. Nevertheless a start had been made and a new path had been mapped out.

What was important about the developments that had taken place in the church's life after the 1960s was the fact that they marked the abandonment of at least part of the mission which had previously inspired it. No longer did the church see itself as the protector of a heritage that originated in England, or view its task as that of imbuing a new nation with the values of an old one. A new situation had arisen in which the source of the church's inspiration in the cultural sphere lay not in England but in Australia. The whole relationship between church and nation had in fact been reversed leaving the latter in a dominant position. This might at first glance appear to justify the way in which present-day national historians have marginalized

²⁶ Porter, M., *Women in the Church: The Great Ordination Debate in Australia*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1989, Porter, M., (ed), *Fabric, Faith and Friendship: Women Changing Church and Society*, Desbooks, Melbourne, 1997.

the church. Could it not be argued that since World War 11 the church had contributed nothing of significance to the transforming of the nation. Moreover, even if one accepted the view that the church had played a creative role earlier, this was of no real significance because the nation which existed before the 1960s had largely disappeared and at best had become an anachronism. What was worse, if one accepted the black armband view of history the church, far from doing anything positive, had helped create something that had brought great harm to the environment and the indigenous people besides creating a society that abounded in injustice.

Before accepting such conclusions a number of general considerations need to be weighed. In the first place, whatever its shortcomings, the era of British dominance was one in which many of the core values so highly prized by modern-day Australians took shape. Amongst them were belief in social justice, the rights of the individual, the rule of law, parliamentary government and democratic institutions. Rowan Strong, in an important article, has recently argued that until the 1930s the church ‘maintained a culture of conservative political and social values’.²⁷ There is substance in this view but it is also important to stress that those values were of importance to Australia. But for the beliefs and institutions that took root then and later the transformation to a multicultural society may well have been marked by the tensions and even violence evident in other nations. For our purposes the important point to stress is that the values embodied in all of these beliefs were enshrined in the very nature of Anglicanism. The church by giving them strong support and religious sanctification helped to strengthen them. The fact that these values have been absorbed into the fabric of Australian life thus means that the church’s work has been of enduring significance.

Second it is important to stress that the church has by no means abandoned all of its responsibilities for the nation. Now that it no longer sees its task as that of protecting the British heritage it is able to concentrate on other matters of considerable importance. Throughout the church there is a greater concern for issues of social justice than was once so.²⁸ This was always an important element in the church’s thinking and actions but in

²⁷ Strong, Rowan, ‘An Antipodean Establishment: Institutional Anglicanism in Australia 1788–c.1934’, *Journal of Anglican Studies*, Vol. 1.1, August, 2003, pp. 61–90.

²⁸ Hollingworth, P., *Australians in Poverty*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1979, Moses, J.A. (ed), *Anglican Social Strategies from Burgmann to the Present*, Broughton Press, Brisbane, 1989.

recent decades it has come even more to the fore. In this sphere the Anglo-Catholics have been overtaken by the evangelicals although it is by no means they alone who play a role in this sphere. The overall result is to make the church look less conservative and more progressive than was earlier the case and to provide it with the opportunity to continue its work in reinforcing what has been going on in Australian society since the 1960. The change in the church's own attitudes, indeed, has contributed in some measure to the broader shifts that have taken place within the community as a whole. This again is something that needs to be taken into account by those who deal with the history of late twentieth century Australia.

It is evident then that Anglicanism intersected in a variety of ways with the Australian nation during the twentieth century. This, it is worth noting, was not a one way process. Even before the 1960s the church had been influenced by the society in which it found itself in Australia. Here it was located in a nation whose history was in many ways quite different to that of England - one that was less bound by tradition and more open and egalitarian. This affected the church's life and structures. Synodical government, embodying the elective principle and giving the laity a voice equal to that of the clergy, was introduced much earlier than was the case in England. The strength of diocesanism, which was a peculiarity of the Australian church, owed something to the tyranny of distance and to the fact that loyalty to their State was for long stronger among Australians than were national loyalties. This opens up yet another area in which nation and church have for long come together and which deserves attention.

More important than this, however, was the creative work which the church undertook on behalf of the nation. One cannot of course estimate its impact in the precise terms favoured by those who nowadays reject anything that cannot be expressed statistically. Nor should one assume that it was Anglicanism along among the different branches of the Christian church that helped shape Australia. Much of what the church stood for was favoured by other denominations, which worked hard and effectively to the same end and which, since the late 1940s, have influenced Anglican attitudes through membership of the World and Australian Council of Churches. Secular forces of an extremely important variety were also at work. The point that needs making, however, is that Anglicanism was an important force in its own right and that it deserves recognition as one

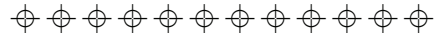
among several formative elements that it would be misleading to overlook when writing the history of Australia.

I have stressed the need for writers of national history to recognize this but it is no less important for the church to do the same. Amongst Australia's bishops and clergy are highly distinguished historians, some of whom are here this evening, but the church as a whole has unwittingly played into the hands of secularists by almost completely disregarding in its teachings the connections between church and society. In this it differs greatly from its English counterpart and also from other denominations, particularly the Roman Catholic church which, from the time of Cardinal Moran in the 1890s, recognized the need to highlight the part which Catholicism played in Australian life. The Anglican church as a corporate body has failed to match this and as a result ignorance of its life and work is widespread. Opportunities to ensure that the church features appropriately in the Australian history syllabus in schools have been largely thrown away and as a consequence children too grow up in a state of ignorance about Anglicanism.

Some may argue that this does not really matter – that what is important is not to spend time explaining what Anglicanism is all about but to focus on bringing people to Christ. Such a view overlooks the fact that Anglicanism is one of the great branches of the Christian communion and that it has set an example to other denominations by showing how the tension between diversity and unity within a single communion can be used creatively. This is something that needs bringing out especially a time the church is too often viewed negatively as being on the verge of extinction. Edward Norman, Chancellor of York Minster, has recently trenchantly criticized the church for having made itself terminally ill by replacing Revealed doctrine with humanist tenets. Typical of attitudes in Australia is a recent book which questions whether the church has become suicidal.²⁹ One means of restoring faith in Anglicanism is to ensure that its many important contributions to the nation, as well as to religious belief, are adequately portrayed. Not the least of the reasons for the church's loss of ground in Australia is the fact that it has placed itself in an historical vacuum, leaving its members unaware of what it has achieved for society. A closer synthesis

²⁹ Norman, E., *Secularisation: Sacred Values in a Godless World*, Continuum, London, 2002, *Anglican Difficulties: A New Syllabus of Errors*, (Morehouse Publishing, London, 2004, Miley, C., *The Suicidal Church: Can the Anglican Church be saved?*, Pluto Press, Annandale, 2002.

between Australian Anglicanism and Australian history is surely necessary if the faith of Anglicans is to be strengthened and the nation is to appreciate more fully how it has been formed.



Further Reading:

This lecture is based on extensive research in church and metropolitan newspapers, synod proceedings, private papers and other original records. Much of this has been used in my other publications, present and forthcoming but here in an effort to keep footnotes to a minimum I have referred only to secondary sources.

Those interested in pursuing some of the more general issues raised will find the following of great value:

- Frame, T., *A Church for a Nation: a History of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney 2000.
- Hempenstall, P., *The Meddlesome Priest: A Life of Ernest Burgmann*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1993.
- Hilliard, D., 'Anglicanism', *Australian Cultural History*, 7, 1988, pp. 65–82.
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- Hilliard, D., *Godliness and Good Order: a History of the Anglican Church in South Australia*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 1988.
- Holden C., *From Tories at Prayer to Socialists at Mass, St Peter's Eastern Hill, 1846-1990*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1996.
- Holden C., *Ritualist on a Tricycle: Frederick Goldsmith: Church, Nationalism and Society in Western Australia, 1880-1920*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1997.
- Holden, C., *Church in a Landscape: A History of the Diocese of Wangaratta*, Circa Books, Melbourne, 2002.
- Kaye, B.N (ed) *Anglicanism in Australia: a history*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2002.
- Kaye, B.N., *A Church without Walls: Being Anglican in Australia*, Dove, Melbourne, 1995.
- Kaye, B.N., 'Australian Identity and the Australian Church', Occasional Paper, No.1, Australian College of Theology, Sydney, 1997.

