

Week 2: History of the Anglican Church of Australia

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Maybe you've asked yourself the question of why is their argument and dissent in the Anglican Communion at present. Perhaps you imagine that there has been a golden age when the church was entirely at peace and discord hardly arose. However, such times have never existed for even in the early apostolic church differences existed among the apostles.

At present, differences exist among various branches of the church about women's ordination and the ordination of gays to the priesthood, to the episcopate and the solemnisation of unions among gays. These differences are not altogether surprising given the inclusive character of the Anglican Church, a character that has striven to embrace different, significant opinions on fundamental matters touching scripture, tradition and reason, a make-up that is partly explained by a study of the history¹ of the Anglican Church.

1. The Church of England

Mother church for Australian Anglicans is the Church of England (CofE) because the first Fleet brought CofE clergy to set up the church in 1788. Australian Anglican Churches are derived from the Church of England which started (1538) during the time of King Henry VIII (1491-1547) of England. The church *in* England had had a long history beginning as early as the third century (208AD!). But, in the 7th century all Christian groups in England submitted to the authority of the Bishop of Rome.

¹ It's unfortunate that history is not valued today because much of what happens today is connected to the past. Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it".

However, discontent over the general moral state of the papacy (1000-1500AD) brought the Roman Church into disrepute in many circles. Additionally, many argued that people should be able to hear the Church service in the common tongue and hear/read the Scriptures in their own language. Moreover, the Protestant Reformation (1517-1648) led by Martin Luther seriously challenged the power of the papacy in Europe.

a) Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, Elizabeth I

Henry Tudor VIII (1491-1547)² at first had no time for the Protestant Reformation but the circumstances surrounding the argument with the pope re his annulment to his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, softened his attitude. In order to get his annulment, Henry declared himself *Supreme Head*³ of the Church of England. However although the Protestant Reformation (1517-1648), started by Martin Luther's outrage about certain practices of the Roman Church in Germany was in full swing, Henry was not a Protestant but he did begin a process that would be consolidated in the later reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth I.

The Protestant Reformation greatly influenced Anne Boleyn, Henry's second wife (mother of Elizabeth I) who had some influence over Henry. Furthermore, the Reformation strongly swayed a quiet scholar, **Thomas Cranmer** (1489-1556, later martyred under Mary I) who was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury by Henry and influenced England's acceptance of Protestant thinking into the short reign (1547-1553) of **King Edward VI** (son of Jane Seymour, Henry's third wife) after Henry died. Cranmer's great achievements were the development of the English Prayer Book and the indelible stamp he placed on Anglican worship and belief in England.

After Edward VI's death, the short reign of **Mary I** (1553-1558) attempted to pull the country back into the Roman fold but her succession by the long reign of **Elizabeth I** (1558-1603) wrested the country again towards Reformation. In Elizabeth's time all

² See list of Kings and Queens of England relevant to this period on page 7.

³ Later Elizabeth I took the title of *Supreme Governor* which is still used by the English monarch to this day.

citizens were obliged to attend CofE worship services where the English Prayer Book was used.

The Church of England did not understand itself to be a new church but a *reformed* continuation of the catholic tradition, hence a Reformed Catholicism. A contemporary put it that just as a pruned tree is still the same tree as it was before it was pruned, so was the English Church the same church as the one before the Reformation. The wish to walk between the Roman Catholic and the Continental Genevan outlook produced the famous *via media*, or middle way of Anglicanism. Ideally Anglicanism is neither Anglo-Catholic nor Genevan (nor *Protestant*⁴ in the strict sense) but holds the two sides together in tension. This struggle between Reformed ideas and remaining Catholic practices and doctrine has become institutionalised in the Anglican Church and remains to this day, more than 450 years later. Hence, a unique feature of Anglicanism has been its desire to be inclusive of all its streams of churchmanship (Catholic, Reformed-Evangelical, Liberal, Charismatic).

i) James 1 and Charles 1

James 1 is famous for a number of reasons. When Elizabeth 1 died without children (Henry's long-time fear realised), James VI of Scotland also became James I of England and united the two kingdoms. James was a strong Protestant and anti-catholic, particularly after certain Catholics tried to assassinate him in the infamous Gunpowder Plot. During his reign, the King James Version of the bible was also produced in 1611.

Both he and his son, Charles I tended to live beyond their means and the latter came into direct conflict with parliament and was beheaded (1651) after the English Civil (1641-1651) between the parliament and the royalists. Oliver Cromwell, a puritan, then ruled until his death in 1658. The Anglican Church suffered grievously during this time with a Presbyterian structure being established and the 39 Articles of Religion laid aside for the Westminster Confession of Faith (1642-44). Although

⁴ Though it could be argued that the Anglican Church is Protestant meaning that its Articles subscribe to the full sufficiency of Scripture to delineate the way of salvation and that it believes in justification by faith alone (see Articles VI and XI).

Cromwell's own son succeeded him, within a short time the English decided to reinstate the monarchy under Charles II.

ii) Restoration Period (Charles II, James II, William and Mary of Orange)

Charles' reign (1649-1685) was characterised by seeking greater toleration for those not CofE, particularly Catholics. He was received into the RC church on his deathbed. He left no legitimate heir to be king after him so his brother, James VII of Scotland became King James II of England too (1685-1688). He was unpopular with many in parliament because he was seen as being too catholic, too biased towards the French and too dictatorial although he wanted freedom for his subjects to worship as they wanted. When James tried to reinstate the privileges of the Roman Church in 1688, he was deposed and William and Mary of the House of Orange were invited by parliament to be King and Queen of England. William and Mary of the House of Orange (1689-1702) who were strongly Protestant (anti-Roman) defeated James II in the famous *Battle of the Boyne* (1690) still commemorated in Northern Ireland today. England was inexorably moving towards a state that was parliament-centred rather than monarch-centred, more reformed and less puritan or Roman. The English monarchy even today is called in the Coronation Oath to defend the Reformed Protestant Church "by law established" and this means only that it rejects the spiritual oversight and domination of the bishop of Rome.

b) The Reverend Mr John Wesley (18th century)

One important feature that had been strongly emphasised by the Puritans had been purity of life. With the waning of their influence, a spiritual laxity affected the country. John Wesley (1703-1791) was an Anglican High⁵ churchman, a scholarly and studious man, who had a conversion experience in 1738 which set him on fire to see others converted to live new lives for Christ. We cannot underestimate the effect of John Wesley on England and Scotland. He travelled about 400, 000 km on foot and horseback, preached 40, 000 sermons and gave away approximately 30, 000 pounds during his long lifetime.

⁵ Inherited from his parents. Interestingly, his parents had a major conflict about acceptance of William III as Sovereign. The father, Samuel accepted William while Susannah's loyalties lay with the deposed James II. Samuel even separated from his wife over the issue because Susannah would not pray for the king in their daily prayers! However, he returned and from their eventual reunion John was born.

Although he stayed within the Anglican Church, his teaching spawned an independent *Methodist Church* (and various other holiness groups like the *Salvation Army*) plus 20th century Pentecostalism. Not only was Wesley an open-air preacher who called people to repentance, he advocated social reforms particularly in the area of slavery. Above all, John Wesley wanted to see the Anglican Church revived with new spiritual life infused into its decaying and dead moral fibre. John Wesley is important because it was partly his brand of Christianity that gained an early foothold in Australia.

c) High Church Developments: Tractarian Movement

Within the High⁶ Church in England during the 19th century, a significant movement began which wanted to reinvigorate the rituals of the Anglican Church so as to highlight the Catholic character of the Anglican Church. Moreover, the Movement was concerned that the State now controlled the Church which was believed to be a divine institution. This movement was known as the Tractarian Movement because it used tracts to publicise its message. The most famous of these Tractarians was John Henry Newman who left the Anglican Church and went over to Rome finally earning a Cardinal's hat. From 1833 (date of a famous sermon by John Keble) to 1933 some 1000 clergy left Anglicanism for Rome from its ranks. This movement, or adherents of its message, also found their way to Australia.

2. Anglican Church in Australia

The *Anglican Church of Australia* along with 38 other national Anglican provinces around the globe belongs to the worldwide *Anglican Communion* (75 million people) with each province being autonomous within that global communion. Each province has a primate. (In Australia, ours at present is The Most Right Reverend, Phillip Aspinall.)

No lofty religious issues of the Christian faith seemed to be involved in the establishment of a penal colony at Botany Bay in New South Wales (NSW).

⁶ High Church faction wants to emphasise its connection with the Catholic tradition and does this through ritual: the use of the Prayer Book and in higher churches more detailed rituals; bells and smells.

However, evangelical churchmen such as William Wilberforce of anti-slavery fame were behind moves to reach with the gospel convicts sent to New South Wales in 1788. Hence the first chaplain on the First Fleet was a Richard Johnson, an evangelical Anglican (criticised as a Methodist). He was followed later by Samuel Marsden who was also evangelical.

By 1836, the first Anglican Bishop of Australia was appointed, William Grant Broughton (1788-1853). He was not an evangelical but most of his clergy would have accepted themselves as evangelical or low-church. Broughton himself always looked to make decisions that were neither evangelical nor Tractarian in character.

a) An Australian Anglican Constitution (1962)

This Tractarian movement within Anglo-Catholicism had strong consequences in Australia producing much discord and rancour among different streams of churchmanship. This disunity made it extremely difficult to develop an Australian Constitution for the church which was sorely needed because the Australian Church's connection with its English counterpart was tenuous. For example, without such a Constitution, a new Prayer Book which some at least wanted, became impossible to consider because the *Australian High Court* had ruled that only the 1662 Prayer Book could be used in Australia as the Church was under the jurisdiction of England.

b) Anglican Factions

We speak of the Low Church, the Liberal (sometimes called 'broad church') and the High Church factions: the Low Church, well represented in Australia by the Sydney Diocese, is anti-sacramental and less attentive to ritual and the forms of the prayer book. (Evangelicals are either derived from the *Puritans*⁷ of the 16th C or the Evangelical Awakening in the 18th C under John Wesley.) The Sydney Diocese is however, strongly concerned about the Bible's teaching and evangelism. The High Church (more latterly *Anglo-Catholic*) faction is strongly sacramentalist, paying special attention to ritual and determined to hold to the tradition of the church (e.g., not usually keen to have women priests, or gays in ministry). The Liberals are

⁷ Puritans derived from following the teachings of John Calvin, the Reformer.

“progressives” who, following the Enlightenment Period’s (late 18th C) elevation of Reason, would want for example to see gay marriage and gay ordination in the church.⁸ The tensions among these three traditions are still with us today.

Even within these three major factions, there are divisions. Within the Anglo-Catholic Tradition, some adherents are extremely strong on the issue of the preaching of God’s Word (eg., Archbishop Rayner) though others believe the Holy Communion is sufficient for the congregation’s edification. Within the evangelical fold, there are charismatic⁹ (Fr Dennis Bennett, 1960¹⁰), traditional (John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, John Stott), open (Anglican Bishop of Durham, N. T. Wright) and conservative evangelical (Sydney Diocese?) sectors.

Addendum: Kings and Queens of England

Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, Elizabeth 1;
James I, Charles I (executed);
[Period of the Commonwealth, Oliver Cromwell, and Richard Cromwell];
Charles II, James II;
William and Mary of the House of Orange.

Discussion

1. Given that the famous philosopher Santayana said that, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” are there lessons the Anglican Church might learn from a careful study of its history? Discuss what these lessons might be.
2. In what way do you think the factions in the Anglican Church have helped or hindered the development of the Church and its witness in the world?
3. What do you see as the essential unity that all Anglicans share regardless of their factional interests?

⁸ Charismatics made their presence beginning in 1959 as part of the general Charismatic Renewal which affected many churches. They emphasise present-day experience of God’s presence and gifts of the Holy Spirit. They can be connected to either High or Low Church belief or practice but not usually Liberal.

⁹ Wikipedia records that Charismatics number 618 million in 2009, the largest number of Christians after the RCs. (Not all these Charismatics are Anglicans of course.)

¹⁰ Asked to resign after he announced that he had received the Holy Spirit. He was priest in an Episcopal Church of 2600!