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HOW ANGLICANISM SHAPED THE NATION



EARLIER IN his career Brian Fletcher's research interests focused on colonial Australia, an area in which he's well published. Following his appointment as Bicentennial Chair of Australian History at the University of Sydney, his interests shifted towards history as a social force, an area in which he's equally well published. The shift explains why his latest book isn't a history of Australian Anglicanism since Western contact. It's about that church in the lead-up to Federation, and its place in Australia since. Fletcher builds on two studies that influenced him: *Australian Anglicanism* (2002), edited by Bruce Kaye, and *Anglicans in Australia* (2007), authored by Tom Frame.

Fletcher wants to counter a public image, fostered by an uninformed media, and equally uninformed authors of general and popular books, of a church turning inward, nationally and globally, divorcing itself from society, and becoming ineffectual if not suicidal. He also wants to counter the trend among secular historians, who still dominate the academy, of intentionally marginalising, or unconsciously overlooking, the history and role of religion in Australia. His objective is to present a balanced historical perspective. Two major themes run through his book. First is the way the church negotiated the complex challenges of its ecclesiological diversity. Second is the part the church played in shaping the nation after Federation.

Chapter 1, "Anglicanism and Australian Federation", describes how the church administered its affairs before 1901. In the late nineteenth century, the church was a collection of independent dioceses, each within a colony. Every diocese had a synod, headed by a bishop, with two houses, clerical and lay; however, the church was encour-

aged to assume national responsibility, following the British government's refusal to continue appointing bishops and creating sees, after two Privy Council judgments cast doubt on the legality of that process.

A General Synod was called in 1872, composed of all bishops and elected representatives, clerical and lay, from every Australian diocese. Seven General Synods met between 1872 and 1902, to consider ways of assuming responsibilities previously managed from London and Canterbury. Other aspects of the church's life were discussed, including: prayer book revision, the Athanasian Creed, oversight of mission, and a national theological college.

A Church Congress was called in 1882, to complement General Synod by providing a forum that allowed every church member, clerical or lay, to say anything they wished, and listen to invited speakers on key issues. The idea was to encourage a free exchange of opinion as one means of discerning the church's mind. Three Congresses were held between 1882 and 1898 at which wide-ranging subjects were discussed, including: how the different branches of Christianity could be brought together, the growth and implications of biblical criticism, the rise of modern science, religious education in schools, temperance, Sunday observance in society as a whole, missionary work among the marginalised, and the church's relationship with the working class.

The move towards national governance exacerbated divisions among the church's five ecclesiologies, each of which is distinct, although they are often conflated in the popular mind: High and Low Churchmen, who have existed since the sixteenth century; Evangelicals, who emerged in the eighteenth century; Anglo-Catholics, who emerged in the nineteenth century; and Broad Churchmen. In England, the spectrum of these ecclesiologies could be found in practically every diocese, which diffused tensions among them; however, for historical and geographical reasons, Australian dioceses were more monochrome and isolated and inward-

RELIGION

The Place of Anglicanism in Australia: Church, Society and Nation,
by Brian Fletcher;
Broughton Publishing, 2008, \$49.95.

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looking. The most noticeable differences were between Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics. Evangelicals focused on the authority of the laity, as well as the clergy, and believed it was vital for each diocese to remain autonomous as a safeguard against outside interference. Anglo-Catholics focused on the authority of the episcopate and promoted a national church with plenary authority over dioceses. While the church presented a united front towards the idea of Federation, behind which there was a strong Christian impulse, parochialism and diocesanism were hard to overcome.

Chapter 2, "Church, Nation and Empire to 1914", illustrates the ways in which ecclesiological differences between dioceses prevented the church from successfully modelling its national structure on the new federal structure; however, this didn't undermine the church's determination to shape the emerging nation. Although the church wasn't established in Australia, as it was in England, the example of the parent church, which had played a major part in forming the English nation, influenced churchmen of all persuasions.

The church's vision of nationhood reflected imperial sentiment and a belief that the new nation had an important role to play in the empire. There was wide support for the constitutional monarchy and the Westminster system. Hierarchical order was assumed and the church was structured around bishops, without whom it couldn't function, even in Evangelical dioceses. While the church didn't object to party politics in the parliamentary sphere, political parties were believed to be secular and divisive. As the church was founded on an acceptance of diversity, organising it into a political force would weaken its prophetic role.

When it came to race and immigration, the church was ambivalent. It rejected white supremacy but still desired a nation peopled primarily by men and women of British origin. It condemned the expulsion of Kanakas and expressed concerns over the dictation test included in the Immigration Act of 1901. When it came to the social and economic order, the church welcomed the pension, basic wage, protective tariffs, and creation of an open society, while maintaining its traditional stance on marriage and family. The church was wary of tampering with capitalism, and was conscious of its poor relations with the working class, and its associations with the employing class, but felt socialism was a secular ideology that needed to be kept in check. The church believed indigenous culture was incapable of withstanding the inroads of Western civilisation, acknowledged that we destroyed the environment in which indigenous people alone could naturally exist, and felt indigenous people had a unique claim on the sympathy and service of the church.

Fletcher argues that, despite its ecclesiological divisions, and lack of a strong central government, the church's vision for the nation was democratic and just

and reinforced the broader vision of the Australian people. That broader vision didn't go far enough, though, since the church's vision rested on moral foundations grounded in scripture. Clearly, much of what the church sought to achieve didn't accord with the wishes of the whole community. This gave rise to tensions, which persisted during the First World War, when the church found itself at one with the nation in its struggle to win victory, while simultaneously uncovering much that fell short of Christian ideals.

CHAPTER 3, "The Anglican Church and World War I", highlights the church's response to a period when the new nation was preoccupied with war, filial affection, and the desire to protect the mother country and ensure the empire remained dominant in world affairs. Church leaders saw Australian involvement as a national responsibility and lobbied for a Yes vote in two conscription referenda. We don't know how their lobbying was accepted by the laity, but both referenda failed, and recent research sheds light on the way Evangelicals responded to the war in a manner consistent with their distinctive ecclesiology. We do know that around 60,000 Australians were killed, tens of thousands were wounded or permanently incapacitated, and longstanding tensions between Protestants and Catholics came to the fore, exacerbating rifts in society.

The church hierarchy interpreted the lack of support for conscription as a sign that Australians were still unprepared for moral citizenship. Their response was an appeal, not to the nation but to individual dioceses and parishes, for a spiritual re-examination that included repenting the sins of self-indulgence, greed, intemperance, impurity and gambling, the effects of which were compounded by the social dislocation and family disruption caused by the war.

Many of these problems arose from behaviours accepted as normal among the working class, which exacerbated the fraught relationship between the church and that class. Also, while the church was sympathetic to the true spirit of unionism, most of its leaders were unsympathetic to the industrial unrest that occurred when the government tried to improve productivity during the war. Overall, though, the war was a period in which the church tried to understand the social and industrial systems more fully and improve its relations with workers.

The war interfered with General Synod, which had to be deferred, leaving important business unaddressed, thus highlighting the persistent inadequacies of that body. The war also brought doctrinal tensions to the fore, which revolved around ecclesiological differences. While relatives and friends wanted to remember loved ones, and offer prayers for their souls, prayers for the dead touched deep-rooted sensitivities. Evangelicals stressed the Thirty-Nine Articles, which condemned

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purgatory as unscriptural and repugnant to God's word. Anglo-Catholics didn't stress these Articles, which allowed them to be more pastorally sensitive.

The war had positive and negative effects. There was a degree of disillusionment among Evangelicals who had failed to bring about a spirit of national repentance and were confronted by a traumatised society that led many to question the relevance of religious faith. Also, some clergymen felt the church had been used by the political establishment to prosecute the war. Overall, though, the church had drawn closer to the nation, as a result of what it did for ordinary men and women on the home and military fronts, and if pessimism existed in some quarters there was also a degree of optimism and a willingness to view setbacks as challenges. The end of the war saw the church resuming its self-allotted task of nation building in a spirit of greater assuredness.

Chapter 4, "External Peace and Internal Division", discusses the ways in which church leaders understood the need to be outward looking, as the perils of peace were too threatening to disregard. They felt the Treaty of Versailles was too punitive and liable to generate future tensions. They universally supported the League of Nations as embodying the spirit of Christ. They attended the Lambeth Conference in 1920, which brought them into direct contact with postwar Europe and global Anglican thinking. Ecumenical relations were high on the agenda. The central issue here was the validity of ordained ministry. Negotiations with Protestants floundered over episcopal consecration. Negotiations with Roman Catholics failed to convince the curia that Anglican orders were valid.

Australians still rejected much of what the church stood for. It was felt the horror of war was due to apostasy. Preventing another war meant listening to church teachings and striving for a more just social order. Resolution 74 of the Lambeth Conference, which was unanimously supported, called on the church to promote change in economic life. The deliberations of the Conference on Politics, Economics and Citizenship, held in Birmingham in 1924, attracted much publicity in Australia, even among the secular media. The church press published a wide range of articles about the need for economic change. Attempts were made to forge closer links with working-class organisations. It was felt socialism could be tolerated, and even accommodated, but communism had to be defeated.

The Australian church still wasn't legally independent of the English church and both were still subject to an English parliament and judiciary. This issue was played out in ironic ways. Anglo-Catholics, who normally supported centralised episcopal authority, wanted legal separation from the English church. Evangelicals, who normally supported decentralised clerical and lay authority, wanted to maintain legal attachment to the English

church, and therefore the English parliament and judiciary, as a way of preventing change in Australia. The issue took many twists and turns. By the time a Constitutional Convention met in 1926, Evangelicals supported legal separation once they suspected the English church of becoming more catholic. A draft Church of England in Australia Bill was prepared, but, after years of consultation and deliberation, an impasse was reached and it was agreed that nothing could be done until after the Lambeth Conference in 1930.

The inability of the church to decide whether or not to become autonomous was fully reported in the secular and religious press. The image of a divided church, unable to act constructively, didn't help its reputation, but attachment to Britain was still strong and most Australians saw nothing wrong with the church retaining its English connections, since this merely mirrored the Australian government's failure to implement the Statute of Westminster and its continued willingness to accept the Privy Council as the final court of appeal. More important was the way the church was at the forefront of promoting a new social order, and the new symbols of nationhood: the Digger, Anzac legend, and Anzac Day march. Here the church was associating itself with sentiments dear to the hearts of most Australians at the time.

CHAPTER 5, "Troubled Times: The 1930s", covers a difficult period in the church. Internal divisions weren't resolved. General Synod was hampered by its limited powers and the time it had to spend on the autonomy issue. The worst depression in Australia's history coincided with the emergence of totalitarian and militaristic regimes that threatened everything the church stood for.

During the 1930s, Anglo-Catholics became increasingly self-confident, crediting themselves with the major advances in theology, worship, biblical scholarship and social reform in the previous hundred years. While liberal Evangelicals were willing to concede much of this, conservative Evangelicals weren't and sought to bolster their cause, particularly in Sydney where they gained control of the decision-making processes of that large and influential diocese.

A committee of General Synod drafted a national constitution, which favoured Sydney. The draft was accepted at a Constitutional Convention in 1932 but the final say belonged to diocesan synods. Eighteen dioceses had to approve the draft before it could progress further, but only fourteen did so, while ten withheld approval until future drafts safeguarded episcopal authority. The committee amended the draft, to moderate concessions made to Evangelicals, but Evangelicals still felt the church could become too catholic. A new draft, which also contained concessions to Evangelicals, wasn't produced until July 1939. A few weeks later the nation entered a

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new world war with the autonomy issue unresolved.

Men and women in the church responded to the Depression through a network of religious orders, societies, confraternities, missions, brotherhoods and parishes, which cared for the needy and unemployed. While relief was given, the general feeling was that self-reliance ought to be encouraged and the real need was creating employment. The church leadership was equally critical of the Right and the Left, believing the Depression had spiritual roots. It was the result of wrongdoings that had resulted in war and a badly managed peace. While most Anglicans supported capitalism, there was a strong feeling it had deviated from Christianity.

The church was concerned by the rise of totalitarianism and militarism, both of which placed the state above the individual and exalted humans at the expense of God. While anti-Semitism existed in the church, it was another matter altogether to persecute Jews. Towards the end of the 1930s, the church expressed concerns and urged the government to accept Jewish refugees, and more migrants generally, foreshadowing changes to immigration policy after the war.

Developments in Europe altered the church's attitude towards nationalism, once seen as a necessary stage in human advancement. The only way to avoid totalitarianism and militarism was to maintain a dual loyalty to the empire as well as the nation. Because the empire was multi-racial, this dual loyalty re-focused the church's attention on racism, now thought to be ethical rather than biological, stemming from fear, greed, pride and economic rivalry. All races should have the opportunity to contribute to the growth of humanity. The idea that indigenous people were a dying race was now questioned, but assimilation was still believed to be the best means of protecting them. This belief would create serious problems in the future, both for indigenous people and for the church.

Chapter 6, "World War II and New Church Initiatives", considers the ways church leaders had been keeping their followers and the general public informed about militarism and totalitarianism since the late 1930s. They condemned the Italian occupation of Abyssinia, the Spanish Civil War, and the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and atrocities in China. Germany fell into a different category, since they had long felt the pigeons released in 1919 were coming home to roost. They still looked to the League of Nations, but its ineffectiveness encouraged a stronger attachment to the empire as the best hope of preserving peace. They found themselves on the side of the appeasers but recognised that war was legitimate and justified under certain circumstances.

Nazism was condemned as Nietzschean and pagan; a godless and racist ideology aimed at world domination. After the invasion of Manchuria, Japan's militarism and religion came under scrutiny and it was felt Christianity

would be in danger should Japan ever establish a sphere of influence over Australia. Opposition to communism saw church leaders condemning Russia as well as Germany, which created difficulties when Russia became an ally, but they maintained their focus on how to prevent communism from spreading to Australia.

Winning the war wouldn't automatically make Australia a better place, since the age had brought terror on itself because of its self-exaltation and godlessness. The restoration of the old order after the last war, with an accompanying laissez-faire, threw new light on the haphazardness of the capitalist epoch. If people were partly responsible, so was the church for failing to discharge its responsibilities. The focus was on countering enemy propaganda, pastoral outreach to the armed forces and civilian population, working towards a more religious and just social order, better relations with the working class, including indigenous people as productive citizens, expanding religious education in schools, condemning racism, and questioning the White Australia policy while simultaneously preserving the British heritage.

Internal divisions were still rife. There was a move to create a national see in Canberra, with an imposing Romanesque cathedral, but these plans weren't pursued partly because the Depression removed the possibility of funding them and partly because of diocesan provincialism. No progress was made towards removing the obstacles to autonomy.

Ecclesiological tensions were exacerbated by the Red Book case. The Bishop of Bathurst had authorised the use of a more catholic communion service in his diocese, bound in red covers, which Evangelicals in his diocese (and hence under his episcopal jurisdiction) objected to. They took him to the Supreme Court, backed by the wealth and might of the Diocese of Sydney, and the Red Book case wasn't resolved until his appeal to the High Court failed. This unfortunate saga shows the lengths to which Evangelicals will go, when their beliefs are threatened, in challenging episcopal power and bringing matters of a doctrinal nature before a civil court. At heart were two opposing visions of the church, episcopal and anti-episcopal: an Anglo-Catholic view of a church always being reformed but always needing further reform, and an Evangelical view that was against change, legalistic and anti-catholic.

CHAPTER 7, "Autonomy and Renewal", provides an overview of the slow and tortuous path to autonomy. In 1945 a fresh constitution was drafted, aimed at finding a way around the ecclesiological deadlock, but by the time General Synod met in 1950 only fourteen dioceses had accepted it, six had rejected it, and four delayed consideration.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, assisted in breaking the deadlock. During his tour of

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Australia in late 1950, he exhorted the church towards autonomy and even drafted his own version of a constitution. Some of his suggestions were rejected, others were accepted, and his draft was used as a basis to revise an existing draft, which was finally sent to the dioceses for comment in 1954. Fisher was merely a catalyst, though, for other forces at work during these years: fears that autonomy would weaken the imperial link had vanished, there was a strong feeling the church should keep pace with national sentiment, and no one in the church really wanted to see it fall apart.

General Synod met again in 1955 to consider amendments and a final draft was sent to the dioceses. By 1957 the required eighteen dioceses had accepted the final draft, which was then submitted to the state and territory governments for approval. In spite of several attempts to thwart the approval process, the constitution came into effect on January 1, 1962. It wasn't an ideal document, it didn't solve ecclesiological differences, and individual dioceses could decide whether or not to accept the decisions of General Synod. But, in the words of Bishop Stephen Bayne, Executive Officer of the Anglican Communion, invited to Australia for the launch of the constitution, church unity wasn't made by such documents. "What the Constitution accomplished," he observed, "is up to the Church whose creature it is." His advice was taken seriously.

The world wasn't standing still and the church adapted to change. Anglo-Catholics were waning in influence, since many of the liturgical practices they had struggled for had been incorporated into mainstream Anglicanism, making them less distinctive and more limited. Evangelicals felt sufficiently secure to act more moderately. Vatican II opened the door to ecumenism, which undermined sectarianism in a quite remarkable way. Additional churches joined the World Council of Churches. Presbyterians and Congregationalists formed a World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Complex negotiations between the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches resulted in the creation of the Uniting Church. Apart from the more extreme Evangelicals, the church welcomed these developments.

The church was becoming more Australian and advances were made in its central governing agencies. The calibre of clerical and lay representatives on General Synod was high, and several national commissions and committees were appointed to investigate issues relating to the life of the church and its relationship with society: international affairs, liturgy, social justice, monitoring government legislation, mission, ecumenism, canon law, immigration, the media, and social responsibilities. The church's attitude towards Australia's involvement in Vietnam was no less divided than the broader community's, but stronger guidance was provided on forging relationships with China, and racism was condemned.

The government was urged to protect human rights, particularly in South Africa, adopt a more enlightened policy towards non-European migrants, and dismantle the White Australia policy.

Chapter 8, "Adapting to Social Change", suggests the last two decades of the twentieth century were more troubling for the church than anything it had hitherto experienced. The ties between Britain and Australia weakened, the composition of Australian society changed, Roman Catholics outnumbered Anglicans for the first time, the Commonwealth of Nations ceased to figure prominently in the Australian mind, there was a major shift in attitudes towards Christianity, and other faiths exerted a stronger social influence. The church already recognised that, in order to survive, it would need to become more Australian. A generational change was also taking place in the church: bishops, clergy and laity increasingly belonged to a segment of society whose ideas were shaped in the postwar era.

Advancing materialism posed problems. Economic prosperity brought benefits to a widening segment of the population, who now enjoyed a lifestyle that placed a premium on enjoyment. The media inculcated secular values, dismissed Christians as a moral minority who threatened human rights, and saw nothing in the church except dispute and scandal. Christianity lost its privileged status and a reverse discrimination saw other faiths treated with greater respect.

With regard to embracing indigenous people, while differences of opinion existed on land rights and reconciliation, there was considerable sympathy for both causes as a way of compensating for past wrongs. General Synod acknowledged the fundamental importance of indigenous spirituality to the church, stronger efforts were made to train and ordain indigenous clergy, and indigenous bishops were consecrated. With regard to embracing multiculturalism, General Synod appointed a standing committee to monitor and promote multiculturalism, and the number of ethnic congregations increased in metropolitan sees.

Nationally, the church began a ministry to homeless youth, created 130 low-fee schools for the poorer socio-economic groups, asked the trade unions for help with assisting the needy and helpless, and also asked Anglicans to avoid minimising their taxes. Internationally, General Synod was strongly committed to championing human rights, providing aid to developing countries, encouraging disarmament, checking nuclear proliferation, and promoting reconciliation on a global scale. Apartheid in South Africa was condemned, and Jews and Palestinians were urged to accept their mutual right to exist.

It was relatively easy for the church to identify with the nation in these ways, since the underlying issues didn't generate dissent of a traditional kind. But doctrinal

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disagreements, which had lain dormant for decades, resurfaced with the twin issues of ordaining women to the priesthood and equality for homosexuals and lesbians. When the church finally ruled that women's ordination was lawful, a large majority of dioceses accepted women priests. The issue of equality for homosexuals and lesbians was another matter altogether, which had global implications. The African and Asian churches had never been influenced by the Enlightenment, and had to field threats from more dominant faiths, such as Islam, which treated homosexuality and lesbianism as severely punishable offences. The Australian church couldn't agree on this issue and decided to delay a final judgment until a global consensus could be reached. However, a report prepared in 2001, by a group appointed by General Synod's doctrinal commission, contained papers by experts of differing viewpoints, who collectively arrived at conclusions that were understanding and sympathetic towards homosexuals and lesbians.

CHAPTER 9, "Anglicanism and the Shaping of the Australian Nation", summarises the strengths and weaknesses of the church, ending with an upbeat assessment. If many Australians hear of a church that has suffered a decline in fortune and lost its privileged status, a more nuanced examination tells a different story, at least to those on the inside. While internal tensions appear to have risen, and schism appears to be a threat, no one has pushed disagreements to the point where a split has actually occurred. Too much is at stake, there's a widespread desire to preserve unity, moderates are present in substantial numbers, and there's a preparedness to agree to differ. Since the 1990s, General Synod has used a conflict resolution process in its deliberations, and treats highly contentious issues in stages rather than attempting to resolve them at a single meeting. It has learned to operate more positively, thereby strengthening the national voice of the church.

Church attendance has undoubtedly fallen but a sizeable number of Anglicans still worship regularly. More importantly, attendance is now likely to indicate religious conviction rather than social convention or the weekly habit of those who aspire to upward mobility. Although the number of Australians identifying as Anglican has declined, in proportion to Roman Catholics, the overall total has increased since the 1960s, and as waiverers and nominals have disappeared, a leaner and more committed church has replaced the numerically over-inflated institution that existed for much of Australia's history.

If the church is portrayed as a middle-class institution, whose liturgy is more comprehensible to the better informed than the less educated, Fletcher argues that the reality doesn't equate with the image, and the church has a history of including a wider range of social classes and sub-populations than other denominations. If the church

is portrayed as excluding women, the voice of women is now being heard more than ever, from two women bishops, nearly 500 women priests, and a great many distinguished women among the laity. Finally, while it's too much to claim that, when considering national affairs, the church initiated moves that fundamentally altered the course of Australian history, it did play an important part in arguing and reinforcing the case for a number of key changes, particularly for independent nationhood. As Fletcher concludes:

Although present-day Australia falls well short of the aspirations that underlay the church's support for federation, the nation that subsequently emerged continues to bear the imprint of Anglicanism and owes much to its presence. This is surely a reason for pride and a caution against viewing Anglicanism in unduly negative terms. It is, indeed, in the context of its history and not merely in the light of current events that the church needs to be viewed.

Anglicanism forms part of the legacy bequeathed by British rule and stands alongside the common law, the Westminster system of government, and the English language as part of the heritage that has shaped modern Australia.

When viewed in this light, the church appears as a positive force, which deserves to be credited more for its creative attributes than criticised for its internal divisions. The church played a nation building role in twentieth-century Australia, and this feature of its life should be acknowledged more widely.

This is the most engaging book on Australian church history I've read since Michael Hogan's *The Sectarian Strand* (1987), which provides a necessary overview of the period before Fletcher's book begins. Hogan writes about Australian Christianity generally: why the Anglican church wasn't established in Australia, how the British supported the main denominations equally in Australia, mindful of the political consensus coalescing around religious emancipation in Britain, the important role the laity played in all denominations before clericalisation, and at what point Irish sectarianism was imported, in the second half of the nineteenth century, where it changed the face of Australian churches hitherto British in character. In Sydney, for Anglicans and Roman Catholics alike, this imported sectarianism had far-reaching consequences, transforming Broughton's Tractarian vision and Polding's Benedictine vision.

General readers who appreciate having popular misconceptions challenged by sound scholarship, presented in an accessible way, will find Hogan's history of Australian Christianity, and Fletcher's history of the place of Anglicanism in Australia, very useful. Both books are highly recommended.