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Evangelical Anglicans and the Canterbury Settlement

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It seems appropriate that in this Canterbury anniversary year, and in this home of the Latimer Fellowship, the subject of my paper should be: 'Evangelical Anglicans and the Canterbury Settlement.'

This paper is no more than an excursion into the question: 'How significant was the contribution of Anglicans of evangelical persuasion to the founding of the Canterbury Settlement?'

My conclusions will be tentative, though they have been formulated with increasing confidence as my research has progressed. My hope is that what I have to say may clarify the historical scene a little for some, provoke curiosity to learn more on the part of others, and offer on behalf of us all a belated salute to those of various theological convictions who were our Canterbury founding fathers (and mothers!) in faith.

This paper may also be placed alongside a valuable Occasional Paper published this month and written by the Rev. Michael Blain on 'The Canterbury Association: a study of its members' connections.' In this work of careful and extensive research Michael Blain has provided

detailed information about the men who made up the Canterbury Association, the parent body responsible for establishing the Canterbury Settlement. Although Michael at no point makes the claim in what he has written, nevertheless by focusing on the Tractarian and Anglo-Catholic connections of so many of the members of the Canterbury Association he confirms the myth that the founding of Canterbury and the Diocese of Christchurch was a largely Anglo-Catholic venture. Certainly, the contributor of the Foreword to this Occasional Paper seems reassured in this assumption by what Michael has written.

What I want to show tonight is that the new settlement in many ways merely reflected, neither more nor less, the unadorned character of the Church of England on the other side of the world in the early decades of the 19th century. Even more significantly, it will show that, at least until the 1870s, the Diocese that was established here avoided all the extremes of churchmanship and heat of controversies that were increasingly to disturb the English Church from around 1840 onward. Further, I will seek to show that without fanfare or fisticuffs, the evangelical revival had already placed its indelible imprint on the early pioneering decades of this new colony, just as in later decades the Oxford Movement would also by a similar gentle process of osmosis immutably refashion the nature of Canterbury Anglican architecture, church furnishing and worship.

H. T. Purchas in his book 'The English Church in New Zealand' (published in 1914) writes of the

first fifty years of the Anglican Church in colonial New Zealand as falling into three distinct periods. His description certainly rings true for Canterbury.

The first stage he calls the 'blue gum period', the pioneering stage marked by large sheep runs and isolated farms with homesteads alongside home paddocks, all protected by blue gum trees. In this period rural worship mostly took place in a station owner's home or in an adjoining woolshed, often without musical accompaniment, and sometimes at quite short notice, whenever the bishop, a missionary or a lay reader turned up with little prior warning.

The second stage he describes as the 'pine tree period', when large runs were broken down into smaller farms, and much of the hill country bush cleared for small holdings, a time when the Canterbury plains became flecked with short shelter belts of *pinus insignis*. In this period worship in the country was often held in schoolrooms used by several denominations.

The third stage, running through to the First World War, Purchas called the 'macrocarpa period', a time when rural townships multiplied and small Anglican church buildings were being erected in every village and community, usually in both their design and furnishings incorporating the more tasteful of the latest innovations from England. The larger and more enterprising of these country churches even included harmoniums or organs, and frequently supported small, robed choirs. A clergyman living in an adjacent parsonage led the services.¹

In general terms, we can say that through the blue gum and pine tree periods the Church in Canterbury reflected a piety and practice still significantly shaped by the evangelical revival of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The macrocarpa period however increasingly reflected the impact on the Church in England of the later Oxford Movement. In Canterbury, apart perhaps from the Parish of Kaiapoi, the ripples of

this impact were largely accepted in a mild and undemonstrative way, as though the contributions from this English renewal of Anglican worship had first been sifted, sorted and sized up before they reached the shores of Pegasus Bay and became assimilated into the worship of the colonial Church. More of this later in this article.

The Church in England in 1850 as the Pilgrims leave for Lyttelton

The project to plant a selected slice of English society on the other side of the world, a community that would have the Anglican faith as its stock and well-endowed education as its lifeblood, came to fruition right at the junction of the two greatest renewal movements in the Church of England since the Reformation. By 1850, the Oxford Movement was replacing the evangelical revival as the creative force for renewal in the Church of England. Since around 1730 the evangelical revival and its Methodist counterpart had changed the face and reinvigorated the heart of religion in Great Britain. But a century later evangelicalism had peaked, and by 1850 it was beginning to run out of fire. From the 1870s, it was acquiring a public image as a movement distinguished more for what it stood against than for what it stood for, a movement of conservatism and protest against change more than a source of fresh spiritual life and vigour.

In 1850, the Oxford Movement was only just beginning to move into its ritualist phase. The early members of the Movement were known as 'Tractarians', named as such because of their open support of the sentiments expressed in a series of 'Tracts for the Times', published between 1834 and 1841. These had been organised in the University city of Oxford, hence the later term 'Oxford Movement.' The early Tractarians were not primarily concerned with robes and ritual. In fact, some even of the writers of these tracts were not at all in sympathy with

the direction their successors in the Oxford Movement were beginning to take.² One historian writing of this period observes: 'The original Tractarians were, in fact, very conservative in all outward and public observances. Keble and Newman preached in black gowns, according to the custom of the time, and celebrated Holy Communion in surplice and hood at the north end of the altar.' This writer goes on to remark that the distinctive Anglo-Catholic customs - the eastward posture for celebration, the wearing of Eucharistic vestments, the lighting of candles on the altar, and the use of wafers - these were not observed by the early leaders of the Oxford Movement.³

What then gave rise to the Tractarians? In 1833, the same year as the greatest of the social reform triumphs of the evangelicals - the passing through Parliament of the Act to emancipate all slaves in British territories - a sermon was preached in Oxford by John Keble, who was to become one of the early leaders of the Oxford Movement. It was the annual 'Assize Sermon', and the subject was 'National Apostasy.' In this sermon John Keble accused the British Parliament of deliberately disavowing the sovereignty of God. His reason for such a devastating and public attack on the Government was a recent Act it had passed known as 'The Irish Church Measure.' This Act was designed to re-organise the Anglican Church in Ireland, and it was the last straw for many who had been watching the spiritual independence of the Church and its freedom from State control being steadily whittled away. This sermon was a rallying call to all who shared this concern to re-assert the mystical nature of the Church and to reclaim its independence from the State. It also led directly to the writing of the series of Tracts which set out to reaffirm the divine nature of the Church, its historic continuity with the commission and authority given by Christ to the Apostles, and the unbroken apostolic succession now residing in the Bishops of the Church.

It was only later that these convictions were advanced further and applied to the architecture, worship, and sacraments of the Church. In 1839, the Cambridge-based Camden Society⁴ was founded to promote church design and decorations that reflected this high view of the Church. This style became known as 'Gothic revival' and was widely promoted here in Canterbury from an early date by the leading church architect in the settlement, B. W. Mountfort. Back in England, after 1850, a new generation of ritualists began to advocate the expression of Tractarian doctrines of the Church and its sacraments in more Catholic ceremonies and clerical vestments. But even before this some extremists, including John Henry Newman, had realised that the logic of their convictions led them inexorably to convert to Roman Catholicism. Newman became a Roman Catholic in 1845, and he was immediately followed by a large-scale secession of other clergy and some socially high-placed laity. This did not go unnoticed by many of those who were contemplating migrating to the new colony.

All this, then, was background to the selection of clergy and laity, settlers and emigrants, to form the proposed Canterbury Settlement. In 1848 the Canterbury Association was formed to plan the venture. Now the point that Michael Blain makes strongly (yet not unfairly), and a point that other historians also observe, is that many of those who made up the Canterbury Association were Tractarians. By my calculations out of the 40 original members of the Association⁵ nine were openly Tractarians, while only three can be clearly identified as evangelicals i.e. the two Sumner brothers, John Bird who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1848 and who was President of the Association, and Charles Richard who was Bishop of Winchester. The third was the outspoken evangelical, Lord Ashley, who in 1851 became the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury. He was virulently opposed to all Catholic renewal, Anglican or Papalist. Over the total brief life of

the Canterbury Association from 1848 to 1852, there were in all 84 members of the Association, and Michael Blain's evidence suggests that an even higher proportion of those later members had at least sympathy for the Tractarian position.

Yet, of those 40 original members of the Canterbury Association, it should also be noted that the largest single group by far identified themselves as 'High Church.' This requires some explanation. We are accustomed to assuming that 'high church' means Anglo-Catholic. Not necessarily so in 1850. The High Church party in the Church of England was older than even the evangelicals. It had existed right through the 18th century. Some of their deepest convictions corresponded closely to the sympathies of the Tractarians. In fact, many of the High Church group moved easily into becoming Tractarians. For example, High Churchmen of that time placed much weight on apostolic order and the authority of the visible Church, but they also added the importance of the observance of the Church's ordinances and loyalty to its liturgy. Compared with evangelicals, they tended to be stiff and emotionless both in their worship and in their expression of faith. Some of the Tractarians in fact disparaged some of the clergy in this tradition with the tag 'high and dry.'

But for some clergy of the old High Church school, ritualism represented as much a breach of Anglican rubrical discipline as had earlier evangelical irregularities. For example, Bishop Charles Longley as Bishop of Ripon, in later years Archbishop of Canterbury, was an original member of the Canterbury Association. Standing in the High Church tradition, he was at the same time a subscriber to the Parker Society. An anti-ritualist, he resolutely opposed the introduction of any Romanizing practices in his own diocese.

By the late 1850s, as Bishop Harper was settling into his role in the new Diocese of Christchurch on the other side of the world, the old High Churchmen were expressing fears that ritualist

excesses were discrediting the liturgical renewal which they claimed they had been primarily responsible for initiating, a renewal that they insisted had begun to be accepted even by many Low Churchmen.⁶ And they felt that in these excesses there was a disloyalty to the Ornaments Rubric that threatened the unity and integrity of the Church of England. A reputable historian of this period, reflecting on Tractarian clergy, wryly points out 'the discrepancy between high episcopal theory and an almost Congregational or Presbyterian practice ... so much a feature of later Anglo-Catholicism.'⁷

Perhaps a distinction between Tractarian, High Church and evangelical Anglicans in the mid-nineteenth century can be expressed simply in this way: the Tractarians were hostile to Dissenters, negative about the Reformation, and drawn to Roman Catholicism; the High Church were hostile to both Dissenters and their sympathisers and to Roman Catholics and their sympathisers, while valuing the order that came out of the Elizabethan Settlement; Evangelicals however were warm towards Dissenters, hostile to all forms of Catholicism, and looked back with pride to the Reformation.

'A Regular Puseyite Affair?'

At the time of the Canterbury Settlement some critics dismissed the project as 'a regular Puseyite affair.' (Dr Pusey, able theologian, biblical scholar and an early leader of the Oxford Movement, was a major contributor to the 'Tracts for the Times.' A loyal member of the Church of England to the end, he was a Catholic fundamentalist in his theology.⁸

Was this description merited? How much real influence did the dominantly High Church and Tractarian Canterbury Association have in shaping the character of the Church in the Canterbury Settlement?

There are good grounds for concluding that the theological preferences of members of the Canterbury Association in fact had little effect in

shaping the theological character of the new Diocese of Christchurch. To support this statement, I make the following four observations.

Firstly, of the forty original members of the Canterbury Association, eleven were paid up members of the distinctly Protestant 'Parker Society.'⁹ This society was formed in 1840 to print and promote the writings of 'the Fathers and early Writers of the Reformed English Church.' The subscription list at times reads like a roll call of the evangelical party, though it also clearly includes many who would not call themselves evangelicals but who were sympathetic to the Reformation and the Elizabethan Settlement. In the light of this, one must even question the suggestion of there being a dominance of a Tractarian mindset in the Canterbury Association.

Secondly, when Captain Joseph Thomas surveyed the site of Christchurch and named its streets and squares, he gave the three main squares the names of Latimer Square, Cranmer Square and Ridley (later renamed Cathedral) Square. Naming such prominent parts of the new city after the martyr bishops of the Reformation does not sound like the decision of an organisation greatly under Tractarian influence and bearing an anti-Reformation bias. Yet at the same time Thomas was not insensitive to the importance of the Association and its members. They were taken into account in his surveying exercises. In the first sketch map of Canterbury, that he produced in 1849, he included no less than 33 members of the Management Committee of that time in naming prominent features of the area allocated to the Canterbury Settlement.¹⁰

Thirdly, in choosing the clergy who would accompany the pilgrims to Canterbury on the first four ships sent out by the Association, not one with clearly Tractarian views was included in their number.¹¹ Peter Nockles, author of the

standard text on Anglo-Catholicism, 'The Oxford Movement in Context', in assessing the appeal of Tractarianism to the average English man or woman, concludes: 'The often hostile, popular response to the Oxford Movement suggests that John Bull was not on the side of the Tractarians.'¹² It is also evident from reading the early issues of the 'Lyttleton Times' that 'from the first, the ideas of the Canterbury colonists had little affinity with the ideas of those who had conceived and organised the settlement'¹³

Fourthly, after three false starts, the successful nomination of Henry John Chitty Harper to be the first Bishop of Christchurch was notable for the fact that he could not be identified overtly as a member of any one of the church parties. The Bishop-designate, notes Stephen Parr in his Canterbury Pilgrimage, was to 'be free from either Puseyism or Evangelicalism or any other 'ism', and the clergy were chosen for 'the moderation of their opinions.'¹⁴

All the evidence points to the selection of the membership of the Canterbury Association being not so much a Puseyite conspiracy (to give a particular theological colour to the transplanted Church and society) as a deliberate ploy to give public credibility to the project through 'the lending of their names.'¹⁵ Even the evangelical Sumner brothers and the assertive Lord Ashley's role in the settlement of Canterbury are recalled today only in the seaside suburb and North Canterbury river that bear their names. Much the same can be said for Lord Lyttelton, the Earl of Lincoln, the Earl of Ellesmere, Bishop Coleridge, Lord Courtenay, Francis Charteris, Sir William Heathcote (who converted to Rome in 1850), the Rev. Samuel Hinds, or the eminent old-school High Churchman, Dean Hook.

The Evangelical Revival and The Church in Canterbury

Yet there are still indications that in fact the evangelical revival imperceptibly influenced the character of the Anglican Church brought to

Canterbury to as great an extent as, in a more perceptible way and at a later date, the Oxford Movement changed the nature of colonial worship. The early pilgrims and the clergy who accompanied them brought with them a spirituality that showed the unmistakable imprint of the evangelical revival - such as, their high regard for the Scriptures and its place in worship, a preference for simplicity in the ordering of their church services, the practice of family prayers in many clergy and settler homes¹⁶, an emphasis on personal faith in Christ, the importance placed on the quality of teaching and preaching ministries, a ready warmth in relationships with other denominations (even Roman Catholics), willingness to gather for worship and teaching in cottage meetings¹⁷, and (perhaps surprisingly to some who may have considered this in origin an Anglo-Catholic practice) a preference for weekly communion.

In Canterbury the Anglican Church during those first two decades was not marked by any overt 'party churchmanship' or litigation over robes and ritual, clerical dress and church doctrine, as the Church in England was experiencing over that same time. Was this a consequence of the wide acceptance of the evangelical legacy by the Canterbury settlers, along with an absence at that stage of any pronounced Tractarian teaching in this Colony? Or was it a result of the inclusive kind of leadership that Bishop Harper provided from the time of his arrival at the end of 1856? Or was it simply a pragmatic outcome of needing to adapt to a new and unfamiliar country, of having to face up to a frontier situation which called more for basic pioneering skills than it allowed for esoteric ecclesiastical eccentricities? We may never know.

But, by the 1870s, the situation had changed dramatically. Some of the newer clergy arriving from Great Britain were also importing along with their luggage and libraries ideas culled from the spiralling Oxford Movement. One of these, the Rev H. E. Carlyon of Kaiapoi, brought matters

to a head with novel Catholic teaching and sacramental practices that he was introducing to the Diocese. All this falls outside the period of this paper, but it did trigger a new era in the Diocese, marked by acrimony and controversy, in which evangelical Anglicans of that time came more to the fore.

John Grigg of Longbeach made stirring speeches of protest at Synod over 'Catholic innovations.' Dr A. C. Barker, the recorder of early Canterbury history on photographic plates, had arrived in December 1850 on the Charlotte Jane. In 1870 he wrote to a friend in England: 'I believe there is a good opening for a steady evangelical clergyman here - the high church has been tried and found wanting, though you must not breathe such an opinion here - true though it be.'¹⁸ The Rev H. C. M. Watson, an Orangeman and product of Moore College in Sydney, was Vicar of St John's Latimer Square from 1873 to 1901. He was at the forefront of the opposition to the Anglo-Catholic innovations. Other city clergy such as the Rev. George Cholmondeley of Opawa, and later the Rev. Jeremiah Chaffers-Welsh of Fendalton, added their voices on frequent occasions.

In 1876, those concerned that the official diocesan paper was at that time not taking a strong enough line in these matters started a new monthly publication. The 'Church Magazine', as it was called, ran for two years, while the controversy was at its height. An early editorial set out its purpose in these words: 'When the Canterbury settlement was founded, it was associated in the public mind with the exclusive prevalence of High Church views ... The truth is (whatever might have been the notions of our English founders), these things [such as 'candlesticks and other ritual nick-nacks'] never had any abiding hold on the Church in Canterbury. The High and Low tendencies were mingled in very even proportions ... There was not a church in the diocese where laymen or clergymen could not join in the Church service according to a well-recognised ceremonial, in

which all could join without the feeling they were implicated in practices or views of which they disapproved. Incontestably this is no longer the case.'

The article goes on to express regret for the importation of divisions and practices that were disturbing the peace of the Church in England at that time. This new magazine, the editorial stated, was intended 'calmly and quietly to abide by the principles of the Reformation.'

Even the official diocesan paper, which doubled also for a national Anglican publication, was critical of the extremes of Anglo-Catholicism intruding into the life of the dioceses at this time. An editorial at the end of 1877 stated: '... Mr Carlyon, from his first coming among us, identified himself with that section of the Church of England which is daily developing its essential more and more, and rapidly proving itself to be one of the most willful, unscrupulous, and turbulent parties which has ever brought scandal on the Church, and injured the cause of religion ...'¹⁹

But in the long run, despite either the ritualistic hopes of Mr Carlyon or the well-grounded fears of Mr Watson, the Diocese quietly accepted such changes in liturgical practice that seemed to make eminently good sense, and which appealed to the average worshipper as bringing greater dignity and order to the now settled Church. So, during this period, the Anglican Church, not only in Canterbury but throughout New Zealand, generally moved without rancour to accept the wearing of surplices²⁰ with stoles, candlesticks and flower vases on the Communion Table, altar frontals, bronze eagles as lecterns, the eastward position for communion, the widespread use of wafers, the mixed chalice, the use of a credence table, and a robed choir in a custom-designed chancel.

Endnotes

¹ H T Purchas, *New Zealand Church History*, pp. 220-1

Conclusion

I doubt whether there would have been any need for a Latimer Fellowship in the first two decades of the Canterbury Settlement. Issues demanding energy and attention were far more practical than theological. The young Church was largely insulated from the ritual storm clouds mounting in Great Britain. Even the depression of biblical higher criticism centered over Europe mostly amounted in Canterbury to little more than a rumour carried in occasional overseas mail and alluded to in occasional clergy Conferences. And in Bishop Harper the Diocese of Christchurch had a leader of undeniable godliness who had the confidence and respect of all.

There was no room at that time for awkward churchmanship differences; there was little room for niceties of theological distinctions. Until at least the 1870s, the Diocese was wholly consumed with extending its ministry, reaching isolated communities, ordering its considerable resources, and building its schools and churches.

We cannot claim any particular contribution from evangelical Anglicans as a party or as individuals in establishing the Canterbury Settlement, or in creating the Christchurch Diocese. But nor can Tractarians, or any other identifiable group, make similar claims for itself or its adherents. Like the rivers of Canterbury, today we stand at the confluence of many different streams that first rose at different points in the backcountry, well beyond the reach or knowledge of most people. Yet at the same time it is not claiming too much to assert that one of the principal contributory springs to which Anglicans in Canterbury today owe so much can be identified as that of the evangelical revival in Britain during the period 1730-1830.

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- ² P Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context*, p. 310
- ³ Horton-Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, Book I, p. 271,
- ⁴ Also, for a time known as the Ecclesiological Society.
- ⁵ Listed in Stephen Parr, *Canterbury Pilgrimage*, App. C.
- ⁶ Nockles. op. cit., p. 217.
- ⁷ Ibid. p. 310. 'Bishop Blomfield remarked in 1842 to Archbishop Howley that 'we [the bishops] have been worse treated by the Oxford writers than we have been by the Evangelical party in the whole course of our government in the Church.'
- ⁸ Stephen Neill, *Anglicanism*, pp. 272-3.
- ⁹ Checked against the 'List of Subscribers', appended to the Second Annual Report (for the year 1842), bound in with *The Remains of Edmund Grindal*, CUP Report, 1943. Original members' names also appearing here are: Archbishop Sumner, the Marquess of Cholmondeley, Bishop Blomfield, Bishop C R Sumner, Bishop Longley, Lord Lyttelton, Lord Ashley, H Goulburn MP, Dean Lyall, Archdeacon Hare, and Archdeacon Wilberforce.
- ¹⁰ Hight and Straubel, *A History of Canterbury*, Vol I, p. 121.
- ¹¹ Marie Peters, *Christchurch-St Michael's*, p. 37.
- ¹² p. 327.
- ¹³ Vol. I, pp. 183-4.
- ¹⁴ Ibid. p.21.
- ¹⁵ Writing of the shortcomings of the Canterbury Association in its management of the colonisation venture, Hight and Straubel comment: "The bishops, nobility, and landed gentry, who so impressively lent their names to the Canterbury project, had neither the disposition nor the capacity for committee work." Op. Cit. Vol. I, p. 159.
- ¹⁶ E.g., a practice followed at Mt Peel, Bromelaw, Mt Algidus and Rockwood stations, among others
- ¹⁷ Nockles, Op. Cit., p. 41.
- ¹⁸ Letter of Alfred Charles Barker, 20 January 1870, to Mat. (Folder 7, Item 134, Cant. Museum Archives.)
- ¹⁹ Editorial, *NZ Church News*, Dec. 1877, p.18.
- ²⁰ At the time the Canterbury pilgrims were departing from the nearby port of Plymouth to transplant Anglican Christianity on the other side of the world, the ecclesiastical tide in England was beginning to turn. Over the next 25 years the surplice gradually became the standard article of the clergy wear when leading services, including preaching. It was a slow process. It was not until Easter Day, 1871, that the Rev Mr Birch, the Rector of Prestwick, Manchester, who had previously been tutor to the Prince of Wales, wore a surplice for the first time in the pulpit. Six years later the men and boys who formed the Prestwick church choir also were put into surplices. This was about the time when a major flow of migrants to New Zealand was commencing, an influx of new settlers to Canterbury Province and the Diocese. Did some of these immigrants who were Anglicans bringing with them attitudes and ecclesiastical preferences that had been reshaped by the events and changes of the previous twenty years in the Church of England on the other side of the world? P. C. Hammond, *The Parson and the Victorian Parish*, pp. 108-9.