

**'On Living an Unexamined Life: Prolegomena and Method in Ecclesiology for Australian Anglicans', in G. Preece and S. C. Holt (ed.), *The Bible and the Business of Life : Essays in Honour of Robert J Banks's Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, Hindmarsh, S. Aust.: ATF Press, 2004).**

During the second half of the twentieth century there was a renewed debate about the growth of institutional elements in early Christianity. The question was most notably debated in terms of the emergence of “early Catholicism” in Christianity. The marks of this early Catholicism were those indicators which anticipated the coming growth of the institutions and customs which came to mark the great church of the third century. Behind this debate lurked the issue of the way in which the study of the New Testament texts was either consciously or unconsciously, properly or improperly influenced by the ecclesial commitments of the modern interpreter. Clearly it was easier for a Lutheran to see this emerging “catholic” tendency to be a compromise on the pristine Pauline gospel.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand Roman Catholic scholars might have been expected to welcome the identification in the earliest layers of the Christian material of signs of the coming institutional church. However, newly liberated in their work by the effects of Vatican II they did not always so express themselves. On one notorious occasion the meeting of the Roman Catholic German speaking New Testament scholars actually passed a resolution expressing their view about the apostolic succession of ministerial order not going back to Jesus himself.<sup>2</sup> Much of this discussion was overtaken by the growing influence of the social sciences on New Testament studies, especially anthropology, and historical sociology. These companion disciplines offered a quite different interpretative lens through which to examine the New Testament sources.

Tied in with this hermeneutical point is a question about evaluation and notions of development not just in doctrine, but also in terms of legitimate, or more or less approvable, institutional patterns and customs. Does the flourishing and consolidation of institutional patterns lead us to think that this is the oak tree growing out of the acorn of the apostolic preaching, or are these weeds that are confusing and choking that gospel, or is something else altogether going on here.

It seems to me that there is an important question of levels involved here. That is to say, that there are some things which in their more general form we would want to affirm strongly, but that in their more specific delineation we might not want to be so committed to. There is a very good example of this in that exemplar of Anglican thinking, Richard Hooker. At a crucial point in his discussion of the sacraments he suggests that it does not help to go into too much specificity in our argument. He acknowledges that there are clear and specific views on the question but that he does not want to go into too much detail in his exposition of the nature of the sacraments, and in particular the nature of the Holy Communion.

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<sup>1</sup> This tone appears to underlie the contributions of Ernst Kasemann, see for example, Kasemann, Ernst. "Paul and Early Catholicism." In *New Testament Questions of Today*, 237-51. (London: SCM Press, 1969). See also Kaye, BN. "Lightfoot and Baur on Early Christianity." *Novum Testamentum* 26 (1984): 193-224.

<sup>2</sup> For an account of this see Kaye, BN. "Recent Roman Catholic New Testament Research." *Churchman* 84 (1975): 246-56.

All things considered and compared with that success which truth hath hitherto had by so bitter conflicts with errors in this point, shall I which that men would more give themselves to meditate with silence what we have by the sacrament, and less to dispute of the manner how? ...

Take that therefore wherein all agree, and then consider by itself what cause why the rest in question should not rather be left as superfluous than urged necessary.

[Lawes 5.67.3,7]

The doctrine of the Trinity is much used these days as a model for all sorts of things, not least the nature of the church. It serves a number of different purposes on the assumption that somehow the church ought to reflect the nature of the God who has brought it into existence. In itself that strikes me as a remarkably adventurous assumption unless it is quite significantly qualified. Mirislav Volf has tried to show how this works for two theologians and argues in the direction of a community conception of God and a remarkably free church looking ecclesiology.<sup>3</sup> My point is not that Volf is covering up his own presuppositions. Actually he hints at them fairly clearly, but rather that his book draws attention to the ambiguity of the idea that ecclesiology is somehow able to be read off a doctrine of God. For my part I would rather see the doctrine of the trinity as a control mechanism which sets out the character of God in relation to the focal points of his revelation and redemption. Thus, while the christological debates showed that the Christian truth could not be contained in any precise formulation but had to be set out in terms of frameworks within which we are to understand a number of key and essential truths about the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ, so the doctrine of the Trinity is an extension of that same process. It sets out a salvation history framework within which we can see how God is both present and revealing and also has definitively been present and revealed in the Son.

On the other hand it has to be said that Schleiermacher and Barth were on the point when they argued that a systematic theology is bound to grow out of an ecclesiology.<sup>4</sup> In other words in terms of method these two areas of Christian thought are mutually enmeshed with each other. Another way of putting this might be to say that the cash value of the character of the God of Moses is to be seen in the ten commandments<sup>5</sup> and perhaps similarly the cash value of the God of Jesus is to be seen in the sermon on the mount. Clearly such aphorisms are inadequate in themselves, but they do point up the reality that the concepts and rationality we use to speak about God are at the very least shaped and moulded by the tradition to which we belong, even if they are not entirely dependent upon our belonging to such a tradition.<sup>6</sup>

Having said all that I return to a New Testament point which has been underlined in the social investigations of the last thirty years, namely that there is considerable variety in the character of the institutions which emerged in Pauline churches in the first, and indeed in the second generation. The pattern of institutional arrangements

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<sup>3</sup> Volf, M. *After Our Likeness. The Church as the Image of the Trinity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> See Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* and Barth, K, *Church Dogmatics*.

<sup>5</sup> See Hauerwas, S. *Sanctify Them in the Truth. Holiness Exemplified*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> For a critical examination of this point see MacIntyre, Alasdair C. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.

which emerged in Corinth and Philippi are markedly different. The social structure of the different communities whose lives are embedded in the New Testament documents in various ways and at various levels show considerable diversity. That diversity emerges in the Pauline churches under the guiding hand of the same apostle, so that it is not possible to say that Paul had a package on ecclesial arrangements of great specificity which he installed in all his churches.<sup>7</sup> Clearly that is not the case, and Robert Banks is one of the scholars who has alerted us to these issues.

Throughout the apostolic period there is a fundamental sense that the particular social circumstances of the Christians were not ultimately significant. The epistle to Diognetus puts the matter with striking clarity. Having identified himself as having been taught by apostles and now become a teacher of the heathen he declares,

For the distinction between Christians and other men is neither in country nor language nor customs. For they do not dwell in cities in some place of their own, nor do they use any strange variety of dialect, nor practice an extraordinary kind of life.... while living in Greek and barbarian cities, according as each obtained his lot, and following local customs, both in clothing and food and in the rest of life, they show forth the wonderful and confessedly strange character of the constitution of their own citizenship.<sup>8</sup>

It would be hard to find a clearer statement of the supernal definition of the Christian vocation and the secondary importance of the particular circumstances in which they are called to live out their vocation. The Christian's life is set in an arena of radical contingency.<sup>9</sup>

If this is so in any degree at all then it becomes apparent that the particularities of the institutional arrangements by which Christians seek to sustain their ecclesial lives must be subject to the same qualification. The point was made in a different way and in a slightly different context by JB Lightfoot in his essay on the Ministry which was published as an appendix in his commentary on Philippians.<sup>10</sup> The appendix shows all the marks of being shaped and influenced by the contemporary theological debates and it constitutes Lightfoot's most extended attack on what he saw as the sacerdotalism of his day. The last third of the essay is a sustained polemic on this point. However, the issue that he was addressing was whether the general pattern of ministry adopted in western Christianity, including Anglicanism, and in particular episcopacy, can be traced back to any authorisation of Jesus himself. His answer from an historical point of view is in the negative, but he does not thereby think that such a form of ministry should not be retained. Some of his readers thought he did mean that and so he had a collection of his statements made and published to show

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<sup>7</sup> See Kaye, Bruce. *Web of Meaning. The Role of Origins in Christian Faith*. Sydney: Aquila Press, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> The Epistle to Diognetus, V,1, quoted from the Loeb Library Edition, Lake, Kirsopp, ed. *The Apostolic Fathers with an English Translation by Kirsopp Lake*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965.

<sup>9</sup> See the exposition of this point in relation to Barth in S. Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001), chapters 6 and 7

<sup>10</sup> Lightfoot, JB. *St Paul's Epistle to the Philippians. A Revised Text with Introduction, Notes and Dissertations*. London: MacMillan, 1868.

that he most certainly did not mean that. What he meant was that that way of legitimating a particular institutional arrangement was not available, and by implication not necessary.<sup>11</sup>

I want now to take this argument and apply it to an important and influential strand in the history of Australian Anglicanism, namely the involvement of Anglicans in education, particularly in the context of church state relations. I take this as a case study of the claim that ecclesiology in its particularities of polity and practice not only will be, but should be, shaped by the contingencies of the circumstances and experience of the particular church body. That does not mean that whatever history has produced must be seen as the work of providence and should thereby be assumed to be right and proper. On the contrary my illustration is meant to move in the opposite direction. For while the Diognetus point gives us courage to embrace the present, and thus also the past, as both the arena of our vocation and the presence of God while being also radically contingent, it calls us to adjust our relationship to that context in the light of the apostolic gospel, or as we might reasonably say, in the light of the control given to us in the Christian formulations of Christology and Trinity. Indeed my extended illustration is intended to provide a basis for saying that this aspect of Anglican experience in Australia has muted our understanding of our tradition and diminished our capacity to relate critically to the present context of our ecclesial life as a community belonging to a particular tradition of faith. But let me first lay out the experience of Australian Anglicans in this field and then return to what it might mean for an Australian Anglican ecclesiology.

## ANGLICANS AND EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

At each stage in the development of educational policy in Australia Anglicans have been compelled to engage in varying types of compromises. These compromises have been significantly shaped by the compromises made by their predecessors, as well as the changing social environment. Yet each decision was value driven and certainly had social values consequences. It is remarkable how those values have changed so dramatically in the course of history. The process went through four decisive changes in philosophy and practice, from an Anglican monopoly to the present policy of government sponsored privatisation of education. For the purpose of this illustration I shall follow the course of education in New South Wales.

### 1. The Beginnings - Anglican Church Education

When the colony of NSW was established it was assumed that the political ecclesiastical establishment of England would simply apply, with the qualification, of course, that the colony was essentially a military prison. Education was therefore assumed to be the responsibility of the Church of England. The Bigge report in 1815 led to significant changes in education. Under Thomas Scott the Church Schools

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<sup>11</sup> The collection of quotations was included in later editions of the Philippians commentary. For the context of this in Lightfoot's scholarly endeavour see Treloar, Geoffrey R. *Lightfoot the Historian : The Nature and Role of History in the Life and Thought of J B Lightfoot (1828-89) as Churchman and Scholar*, 1996, and Kaye, BN, and GR Treloar. "JB Lightfoot and New Testament Interpretation: An Unpublished Manuscript of 1885." *Durham University Journal* 21, no. 2 (1990): 161-75.

Corporation was established with an endowment of one seventh of all the land in the colony. This pattern applied until the Bourke Act in 1836.

The first phase therefore of education in the colony was by way of an Anglican monopoly. This education was not only conducted by the Anglican Church, it was specifically Anglican in character.

## 2. Transition - Church and State Education

The Church Act of Governor Bourke provided for government grants to each recognised church (Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and Anglican) on a more or less pro rata basis. This pattern flowed through to the provision of schools as well. By this Act the religious pluralism that existed in the colony was recognised, and the Anglican monopoly was destroyed.

In 1839 Governor Gipps tried to introduce a system of government schools. Broughton had opposed a similar scheme in 1836 along with the other Protestant churches. On this occasion he stood alone in opposing a scheme which did not provide for the teaching of the Anglican catechism. He claimed that the constitution gave to the Church of England the right to special protection. "I maintain, that under the constitution, she is entitled to look to the Government for the fullest measure of aid and encouragement."<sup>12</sup> The foundation of the constitution, he claimed, was the union of church and state. This was an arrangement in the interests of the citizens. "Their reason for connecting the throne so inseparably with this faith was their persuasion, that this faith was most consonant with truth and most friendly to liberty."<sup>13</sup>

Broughton's dramatic speech in the Legislative Council in August 1839 forced the governor to withdraw his plans for comprehensive government schools. However, the tide was running against Broughton's conception of the state. Indeed during the course of the 1840s he changed his mind completely and concluded that the Anglican Establishment in the form of the Royal Supremacy was dead and buried.<sup>14</sup> Thus in 1848 he was willing to compromise and see a dual pattern introduced with a system of National schools alongside the four main church systems. There would be a separate board for the national schools and another for the denominational schools.

Thus in 1836 the Anglican monopoly had gone. Now in 1848 the monopoly of the churches had gone and there was a dual system of state schools and church schools. At each stage the Anglicans had made compromises on the previous position, but had maintained their involvement in education. Broughton's High Church principles drove him incessantly to see education as a key instrument in the mission of the church.

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<sup>12</sup> Broughton, WG. *Speech of the Lord Bishop of Australia in the Legislative Council Upon the Resolution for Establishing a System of General Education*. Sydney: James Tegg, 1839, p.11

<sup>13</sup> Broughton, p.12

<sup>14</sup> Kaye, B N. "Broughton and the Demise of the Royal Supremacy." *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 81 (1995): 39-51.

During the next two decades, however, the balance of funding between the denominational schools and the National schools changed. Also during this period Roman Catholic and Anglican attitudes changed, albeit in different directions. These changes led to the effective state monopoly of education established by the 1880 Education Act.

### **3. State Education**

In 1866 the Public Schools Act amalgamated the denominational and National schools boards under a Council of Education. The new arrangement had a built in bias against the denominational schools. Public schools were to have non-denominational religious instruction. Special religious instruction along denominational lines would be given by visiting clergy on a released time basis. In the light of what was to happen next it is important to notice the denominational schools which continued under this arrangement were open to all children. While a school might be administered by a church, no preference was given to the children from that church's membership.

In the period 1860-1880 the Roman Catholic Church dramatically changed its attitude to education. In 1864 Pius IX issued the Syllabus of Errors, which condemned any state monopoly of education. In NSW the Catholic Association for the Promotion of Religion and Education was formed in 1867. In Ireland the Irish Roman Catholic bishops condemned the Irish National System, which was similar to what operated in NSW. In 1878 Archbishop Vaughan and the Roman Catholic bishops waged a campaign for more aid and more independence for their schools.

At the same time there was a rising tide of liberal opinion in regard to social policies. All state aid to churches for church buildings and clergy stipends was stopped in 1862. It was in this context that the 1880 education Act was passed in NSW. Similar acts were passed in other states at about the same time. The New South Wales act set up a Department of Public Instruction which would be responsible for a complete school system through to the secondary level. Denominational instruction could be given by visiting clergy, and compulsory general non-dogmatic religious instruction would be given by the schools. All state aid to church schools would cease from 1882. The Act in Victoria did indeed provide for "free compulsory and secular education". In NSW there were to be school fees. It is important to notice here the term secular had not yet come to mean non-religious. Rather it meant not controlled by the church.

Here then, we have, for funding purposes, a state monopoly in education. The participation of the churches was still possible, but within a framework set by the state system.

The result was a determined effort by the Roman Catholic Church to establish and run their own system for their own people. The Anglicans sought to improve standards in a much reduced system of church schools. These schools tended to be high fee and secondary, and thus moved Anglican schools away from the working classes and concentrated them in the middle and professional classes of society. By and large, under the impetus of Barry in Sydney and Morehouse in Melbourne the Anglicans sought to participate in the state system. However they had now embarked upon a

dual commitment to what became upper middle class private schools and participation in the broader based state system. In the course of time the commitment to the private schools won out. This is the pattern of education which has dominated modern Australia and has had a profound affect on modern Australian attitudes and perceptions. The more recent changes in the last quarter of the twentieth century are yet to have their full cultural effect.

#### **4. Privatising Government Funded Education**

The 1950s saw changing educational ideas. The school population grew dramatically in this decade. The school leaving age was raised, comprehensive schools were developed to give expression to a more social and rounded concept of education. The Roman Catholic parochial school system was overwhelmed by the increased numbers, added to disproportionately for them by post war immigration. The demands of the new education syllabuses stretched their resources. The Roman Catholic Church mounted a campaign for state aid for their schools in this period. The whole situation cracked in 1962 with the strike of Roman Catholic schools in Goulburn, NSW.

At the same time Anglicans were in the process of changing their minds about state aid. For decades it had been a point of sectarian distinction, but in a series of steps Anglicans adjusted to the new realities. In 1964 the synod of the diocese of Sydney had two opposing reports on this subject, while at the same time the Anglican schools in the diocese had gone ahead and accepted the new Federal government grants without waiting for the synod to make up its mind.

What began as grants for science laboratories has now come to be a system of Federal Government funding of private schools. The constitutionality of this process was tested in the High Court, and found not to be an infringement of the "establishment" clause 116 of the constitution, basically on the grounds that it was not preferential to any religion.<sup>15</sup>

The consequence of this policy has been a huge proliferation of community schools, many of which have been established by religious groups. Many of these are Christian Community Schools designed to provide schooling for a tightly defined religious group. Anglicans have been very active in establishing new schools, but, on the whole, they have tended to be more open in their admissions arrangements.

From both the terms of the High Court judgement and the arguments in Anglican Synods, it is clear that the whole notion of the role of the state in education embodied in the 1880 Education acts has been completely thrown over. Anglicans justified their new attitude on the grounds that education was the responsibility of parents, and that parents should have the opportunity to choose to send their children to a school of their choice. A similar line of thought can be found in the High Court judgements.

I wish to focus in this illustration on the effect of the 1880 Act and the provision of General non dogmatic Religious Education in the school curriculum and the separate provision by the churches of denominational religious education. This structure

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<sup>15</sup> On the background to the constitutional position and its interpretation by the High Court see Kaye, BN. "An Australian Definition of Religion." *University of New South Wales Law Journal* 14, no. 2 (1992): 332-51.

carried with it some very important assumptions and at the same time inculcated those assumptions. The first and most significant assumption was that it was possible to make this kind of distinction at all. Roman Catholics objected to it on the ground that they thought education in all its aspects should be infused with and informed by Roman Catholic theology.

My point is not directed to a theory of education but rather to the nature of sub traditions in Christianity. Clearly it is the case that the major traditions of Christianity embrace the core creeds of early Christianity and the conciliar definitions of Christology and the Trinity. But just as clearly the differences between the traditions are more than just disagreements about patterns of ministry or ways in which church decisions are made. A Reformed or Anglican or Roman Catholic person will come to these credal and conciliar texts from a framework sufficiently different in its architecture to make the resulting practical meaning of the texts different. Differences between these three traditions on the matter of authority, and that means epistemology, mean that the idea that the field of theology can be divided up in the way envisaged in the 1880 drastically eclipses these fundamental issues.

There are two very important consequences of this smothering of the character of the discrete traditions, and I focus here on the Anglican case. The first is that the nature of the theological enterprise is compromised. It means that inevitably the field of enquiry is divided in a way that makes one theology and other peripheral matters, even matters of historical accident or of taste. It is this compromising of the theological enterprise and thus of the self understanding of Anglicans that leads Anglicans to say such things as Anglicans don't have any special beliefs. The distinctives are then looked for in organisational matters, and so ecumenical conversations tend to focus on the ordering and deployment of ministry because they are the obvious things that are done differently. The real problem here is not the different organisational arrangements, but the underlying different approaches to authority and epistemology which give those organisational matters significance. It means that ecclesiology becomes not a central issue of theological significance, but a peripheral matter of practicality and organisational taste. Any reading of medieval Anglicans or theologians or political theorists of the early modern period would make such a proposition about Anglicanism laughable. The problem is that this compromising of the theological endeavour has quite profound implications for the way in which Anglicans are even able to think about their own tradition and its place in the broader field of Christian faith.

The second consequence of this suppression of the real character of sub traditions in Christianity which has been facilitated by the way in which Anglicans have related to the state in the field of education is that it eclipses the intellectual resources needed to provide a critical engagement with the host society. Anglicans suffer especially in this arena because their self understanding has been complicated by the assumptions they have made over a long period of time about their place in Australia. By a combination of forces since the end of the nineteenth century Anglicans persisted in thinking that they were, even in an informal sense, the church of the social establishment. Roman Catholics on the other hand thought of themselves as the church of the dissenting minority. That both these mind sets had become irrelevant to modern Australia became evident in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Roman Catholics had been so successful social and culturally that if there was any church of

the social establishment then they were it, and the problem was their self understanding did not match that position. On the other hand Anglicans had imbibed the bifurcated field of knowledge and the consequential diminished identity for themselves in fundamental theological terms. As a consequence they do not have the critical theological and intellectual tools to enable them to develop a critical relationship to the host society and its culture, nor to have a constructive conversation with each other on this subject, or indeed many others.

The deficiencies of self understanding and of a critical interpretation of the social and cultural environment arise in large measure because of a long standing failure to critique the assumptions inculcated by social institutions in the realm of education. That leaves Anglicans in serious trouble in terms of self understanding and role, and that serious trouble arises because of fundamental theological weaknesses.

Clearly it is not the case that the education arrangements are the only factor in shaping Anglican sensibilities or understandings. That is not my claim here. My claim here is that this particular area illustrates how the theoretically contingent environment in which Anglicans have lived has had a profound affect of Anglican thinking and it seems to me that we have not enterprised the theological issues with enough energy, commitment or knowledge of our own tradition.

Many years ago Robert Banks resigned his orders as an Anglican priest. At the time I tried to persuade him that the institution was not so important that one should resign from it. Looking back I see that I was a child of exactly the problems which this paper has tried to address. It has been good over the years, therefore, to have had Amos near at hand to keep the question there and to warn against the perils of an unexamined life.