

**LATIMER FELLOWSHIP**  
**Presidential Address, 2002**

***"Scratching Where It Itches –  
Issues Facing the Anglican Church in NZ Today"***

Interesting parallels can be drawn between the unsettled state of England in the mid-nineteenth century, at the time when many of our forebears were considering leaving Albion's shores to migrate to this part of the world, and the upheavals we face today, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the territories founded by those hopeful forefathers.

Two hymns written during the period when the New Zealand Company settlements were being planned became very popular in Anglican worship. Each captures something of the spirit of those time among serious church members in Britain - a mood of uncertainty, confusion, sense of loss, and longing for God to intervene. John Henry Newman, product of a staunchly evangelical Anglican home and upbringing, but soon to defect to Roman Catholicism<sup>1</sup>, wrote one of these hymns. It began with the words:

*Lead kindly light, amid the encircling gloom, lead thou me on.*

His impression of both the world and the Church of England of that day he described as an 'encircling gloom'. About the same time Henry Francis Lyte, another disillusioned Anglican incumbent, was writing another hymn that included these well-known phrases:

*Abide with me, fast falls the eventide:  
the darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide: ...  
change and decay, in all around I see:  
O thou who changest not, abide with me.*

Though known as 'an evening hymn', Lyte did not primarily intend it as such. Rather it was meant to be a commentary on the social and religious conditions of that time, and an expression of the unease many church people were experiencing, together with their search for greater certainty. There was a widespread sense of a Church that was wallowing in a sea of change - without momentum, rudderless and unanchored. A Church that urgently needed to recover its identity and re-vitalize its mission.

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Beginning in 1833, the most significant response to this feeling of loss of direction was the issue of a series of *Tracts for the Times*. Out of the current of that initial stirring of the waters emerged the Oxford Movement. Both Newman and Lyte were key figures in this response. The Tracts sought to re-establish the independence and dignity of the Church against the perceived inroads of an interfering State. The Oxford Movement at first attempted no more than to return the Church to purer and more primitive roots of worship<sup>2</sup>, but it soon developed a momentum of its own that redirected its energies towards encouraging advanced ritualism and catholic theology.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile many of the Anglican successors of the eighteenth century evangelical revival were slack in reading accurately the troubles of the times, and in responding

to them in a manner that would command the respect of the wider Church. When the later excesses of the Oxford Movement were issuing in litigation in English courts, many leading evangelical Anglicans were expending their energy on excursions into novel forms of experiential religion or in earnest debates about the end times.<sup>4</sup>

### **Church and Society in New Zealand Today**

The parallels with the age we live in are striking. Both society in general and the Church in particular are undergoing rapid and radical (sometimes even ill-considered) change. For some this is an exhilarating adventure; for others it is a nightmare. Whether today we would choose to describe it as an *'encircling gloom'*, or simply as *'change and decay in all around I see'*, we find ourselves in a different world, inexorably fashioning a different Church. Again today there are those who long for a return to the certainties of yesteryear, there are those looking for more solidity and content in worship, there are those yearning for a greater place and prestige for the Church over against the State, and there are also those distracted by peripheral theological debates or diverted into preoccupation with eccentric spiritual phenomena – such as the pursuit of bizarre spiritual gifts, invoking the Toronto blessing, or dabbling in esoteric spiritualities.<sup>5</sup>

What are the principle issues that face the Anglican Church in New Zealand today and frustrate its effectiveness in ministry and mission? How are we to respond to them? In what ways can the Latimer Fellowship give a lead in 'scratching where it itches'?

### **Issues Before Us in NZ Today**

I want to suggest six key issues that need to be identified, thought through, and then addressed from a biblical base. Each of these I will set out as a pair of conflicting factors confronting us in the climate of Church and society today.

#### **1. Culture and gospel**

The issue here is this: To what extent do we embrace 'culture' as a given, as an unalterable way a people live, that the gospel inevitably must adjust itself to? Or to what extent is the gospel of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord a counter-cultural message that we will not trade off, however distasteful it is to the mood of the times or the disposition of a congregation?

To put it another way, is it the task of the Church in its gospel mission to conform as closely as possible to the culture of the people it meets, or to confront that culture with the challenge Jesus Christ presents? Can the gospel indeed be received as 'good news' if it is encountered as something alien and disturbing and out of 'sync.' with the established life-styles and values of the people who hear it? May too bald a presentation of it in fact be viewed as 'bad news' – and thus needlessly rejected? Is our calling as Christians to so fully incarnate the gospel in the soil of our own times and land that it becomes indistinguishable from the culture or cultures of this place?

Or is our vocation to enter into cultures with the intention of redeeming them and changing them until they accord with the kingdom of God?<sup>6</sup>

For Anglicans in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2002 this issue comes to the surface in ways such as these, among others:

Within Tikanga Pakeha, is our prime concern to exalt Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, however unpalatable this may be to the mores and market forces of the day? Or should we be prepared to so minimize the person and work of Christ that we can accommodate any and every variety of current spirituality, and affirm these as equally valid ways of experiencing God? To put it bluntly, is our theology at all times to remain strongly Christo-centric, or is it increasingly to become spirituality-driven?

In Tikanga Maori, what is to be our attitude to *atuatanga*, to the homage paid to ancient gods of this land, and the acknowledgement of their continuing influence over our everyday lives today? How does this sit alongside Christian belief?

## **2. Revelation and naturalism**

Related to this is a second issue we may not be facing up to boldly or critically enough. What shapes our theology? That is to say, how do we come to know God and understand the nature of God? Is faith an insight that is primarily made known to us by an initiative of God, in other words, through special revelation? Like the revelation provided in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus, and through the insights given by God to the prophets and apostles of old and preserved for us in the Bible.

Or is our knowledge of God something which we form from our own personal insights, and from our observation of the world and how people live in it, reflections that have their root in human experience or endeavour rather than in any special revelation?

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The answer to these questions will affect a wide range of our life and activities as a Church. Our liturgy will reflect this. Does the content of our prayers and eucharistic Great Thanksgivings owe more to God as discovered in nature, or to God as revealed in Christ? Will some find that blessing fallen leaves at an Autumn Festival means more to them than giving thanks for the mellow gold of God's grace that comes to us in Christ?<sup>7</sup>

Evangelicals may feel they are not as guilty of this kind of aberration as some others. But there is another aspect of 'naturalism' to which evangelicals may be even more susceptible. That is, whenever an impression is conveyed that God is the divine experienced within the faithful believer at moments of high awareness as they pray and worship. Such an experience of God focuses on the feelings of the worshipper and in the process forfeits a sense of the ineffable, of the God who is always beyond the atmosphere that worship has created. A God within more than a God without. Immanence over transcendence.

## **3. Unity and diversity**

A further issue is how, as a Church in a rapidly changing environment, we integrate the often conflicting ideals of unity and diversity, order and freedom. At the moment our Church seems to be over-zealous in pushing out the boundaries of diversity in the areas of worship, ordination practice, church membership and personal lifestyles.

In my address last year I mentioned the ill-considered move General Synod had taken in authorising for regular Sunday use the utterly flexible eucharistic worship provided in the New Zealand Prayer Book under the title, *A Form for Ordering the Eucharist*.<sup>8</sup> Since our last Annual Meeting, General Synod has taken this process a step further and authorised "*A Template for Anglican Worship*", to (I quote) "allow the prayer book to more adequately serve the mission of the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century". We are advised that soon to follow this will come similar templates for other frequently used services, including baptism, and also resources for an even greater range of variety that the worship leader can introduce into these services.

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Where now is the 'common prayer' that once bound us together as a denomination? Where are the safeguards against clerical eccentricities that laity once could rely upon? Where is the assurance that whatever prayer is used and theology expressed in Anglican services has first passed the scrutiny and now possesses the authority of General Synod? We have sold our birth right for a mess of pottage. Diversity has triumphed over unity, freedom over order. The gates are now open for that very clerical control of the content of worship that the Reformation and Elizabethan Settlement had preserved us from. The laity again become passive bystanders, potentially mute accomplices of the latest whim of a worship leader. Who can now be sure as to the content of next Sunday's liturgy? And there are no grounds for redress if theology drifts off course.

#### **4. Personal and communal identity**

Mercifully the Anglican Church in this land has so far been preserved from the excesses of debate and division over issues of human sexuality, and how these impinge on questions of ordination, marriage blessings, and licensing of clergy. But in some other parts of the Anglican Communion (and even other denominations in this country) this is an issue that has racked the Church.

No doubt at some point it will also become an issue here for us. But however much some Western theologians may put their own spin on the debate, Lambeth has been very clear in its statements on human sexuality, affirming in its 1998 resolutions.

faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman,  
abstinence for those not called to marriage,  
acceptance with caring sensitivity of those with a same-sex orientation as equally loved by God and members of the Church,  
rejection of all mindless fear of people with a different sexual orientation, and  
opposition to the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of those in such relationships.

But behind this issue lies a more fundamental one. This is highlighted by the way the bishops voted at Lambeth in 1998. The greatest proportion of those seeking a more liberal attitude to the incorporation of same-sex relationships into the life of the Church were bishops from the Western world. The overwhelming proportion of those opposing such an acceptance were bishops from 'the South' (Africa, South America, Asia etc.).

What does this tell us? That two different Christian world-views are involved. In one, the Western world, the emphasis is on the individual and his or her uniqueness, their

freedom to be themselves, and their right to the protection and even promotion of that individuality at the expense, if necessary, of the good of the wider community. (As an expression of Western values, we see this echoed in New Zealand today, for example, in the extremes we go to in order to protect the rights of privacy accorded to individuals.)

Contrast with that the more tribal and communal outlook of non-Western peoples, where the good of the community is considered to be of greater importance than the eccentric preferences of individuals. Each person thus finds their personal identity in the well-being of the community as a whole, rather than in untrammelled self-expression.

The challenge to us is this: Have we allowed the liberal emphasis on personal liberty and freedom of the individual, so deeply embedded and taken for granted in our Western societies, and so readily embraced by Protestant theology, to replace the communal emphasis of the Scriptures, still found in most non-Western societies? And how does this shift of emphasis affect the way we in the West look at moral and ethical issues, such as those of human sexuality?

### **5. Law and grace**

Another issue to be faced is that of boundaries to behaviour. The Anglican Church seems to have joined in the Gadarene rush to distance itself from any suggestion that there may be God-given borders to responsible human conduct, borders that may be expressed in laws or marked out with 'no-go' fence posts. So we have removed the Ten Commandments from the Liturgy, avoided labeling anything other than social shortcomings by the Government of the day or actions of certain multi-nationals as sin, and assumed an attitude of tolerance towards whatever bizarre activities or relationships individual citizens engage in. And when nothing any longer is considered 'wrong', there is little point to emphasizing the role of confession or absolution in our public worship.

At a time when crimes of violence, child abuse, murder and mayhem by minors, and corporate fraud is at an all-time high, should not the Church be saying clearly that there are moral and ethical boundaries to be taught and observed and enforced in a healthy society? And, as a Church, reinforcing this with clear teaching and application in our own internal discipline?

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Grace must abound. Always there will be sensitivity and compassion in the way the Church addresses moral issues of the day. But of recent decades it seems that the Church has cowered before the spectre of being criticized as 'pharisaical' or 'puritanical' or prudish. And too often we have said nothing. Grace has abounded – but at the expense of dispensing with law. Yet either one without the other spells disaster. Jesus said to the Pharisees: "This you should have done, without neglecting the other."

This issue for us, then, is how we can hold law and grace together in a way that provides gospel light to take us through the strains of living in a Western society today.

## **6. Ministry and priesthood**

Over the past 160 years there has been a sea-shift in Anglican understanding of ordination. The Reformation had made the minister primarily a teacher. His main function was that of preaching and reading the Prayer Book service to the people. But, under the influence of the Oxford Movement, and as a consequence of the liturgical developments it promoted so successfully through the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ministers of the Word were turned again into sacramental priests, mediators between God and man.<sup>9</sup> The primacy of preaching the Word was replaced by the primacy of presiding at the Eucharist.

Today 'priestly formation', in terms of preparation for ordination, at times looks like induction into a role that would have been barely recognised at the time of the Reformation. Gone is the priority placed on preaching and teaching skills. (*Remember the like of Canon Orange, Roger Thompson, Bill Bretton, and their ilk, in whom that Reformation ideal still lingered, four hundred years later? Where are their heirs today?*) In its place the emphasis is now on the 'sacredness' of the priestly calling, as something quite distinct from the vocation of the laity, and under no circumstances to be confused with it. The dangers associated with 'crossing boundaries' are spelled out. A mystique has been created around ordination that is frankly novel, owing more to medieval theology and nineteenth century sacramentalism than to the teaching of Scripture and the heritage of the Reformation.

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To be fair, by the end of the eighteenth century some correction of the swing of the liturgical pendulum had become long overdue. The Reformation had enshrined in the Book of Common Prayer an understanding of the priest as a minister of word and sacrament, but over the next two centuries the sacramental factor within this parity had been allowed to shrink. In fact it was the evangelical wing of the Church that first began to redress the balance, late in the eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Weekly Holy Communion services were initiated by several evangelical parishes in the Church of England well before the first of the Tracts was published or the Oxford Movement came to light. But whereas the failing at that time lay in only occasionally tacking a shortened Communion on to a full-blown service of Morning Prayer (with the Litany), the failing today is regularly slipping a shortened homily (often of Readers' Digest proportions) into a full-blown Eucharist.

This transformation into a sacramentally-centred priesthood was well suited to the era of Christendom, to a society where faith was publicly acknowledged. The Church's vocation was simple: to provide ministry with a strong pastoral emphasis to a settled population, built around a parish church, assuming infant baptism as a norm, in a male-dominated hierarchical society. But today, a secular environment, where few children are baptized or taught the Christian faith, populations are mobile, social distinctions are broken down, and God is kept at a distance in the public arena, requires a different kind of ministry.

And here is where the sacramental model of priestly ministry, applied to a changing Church in such a changed society, throws up new problems. For example ...

1. Latterly, Ordination has come to tower over Baptism in terms of its ornate ceremony, public profile, preparation required, robes worn, certificate issued, and church hierarchy involved.<sup>11</sup> But which of these is the Gospel sacrament, 'given

by Christ to the Church', and which is no more than a sacramental action, provided by the Church for the good ordering of its life?<sup>12</sup> What theology produces this?

2. How does the doctrine of the 'indelibility of orders' square with the limitations in exercise of ministry that often accompany ordination for self-supporting or local shared ministry? And how does it stack up with the widespread assumption that ordained ministry may now be considered as no more than a limited-term option, open sooner or later to some further career turn?<sup>13</sup> 'Indelible'? Incredible!
3. If some are ordained as local priests in order to regularise celebrations of communion where a diocesan priest is not available, without regard for the competence of those same priests to be proficient ministers of the Word as well as of the Sacraments, is not this a latter-day reversion to a form of mass priests?

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Such, then, are some of the issues now facing the Anglican Church in New Zealand at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The question is this: How will future generations look back on this time? Will they ask why there were not more Anglicans at this time with better insight who could have read the church scene more accurately, and addressed issues such as these with greater vigour and courage?

In the mid-nineteenth century, as our forebears were settling into this country, many evangelical Anglicans in England were too absorbed in peripheral theology and various pragmatic ministries to understand what was happening in society about them, and to respond accordingly. So others stepped into the breach and assumed that leadership, for both good and ill. What will the next two decades reveal in Aotearoa New Zealand?

+Brian Carrell.

October, 2002

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<sup>1</sup> Why did so many foundation evangelicals convert to Rome? The answer lay in a mix of unusual factors at that time. The times were changing rapidly as a consequence of the industrial revolution; political turmoil and international uncertainty accompanied the Napoleonic wars; state encroachments on church sovereignty caused deep concern to many; there was alarm as to where society and the future were heading; Benthamite utilitarianism was producing new social pressures; there was widespread antipathy among Christians of all ilks to the spirit of that age. (David Newsome, 1966, *The Parting of Friends – The Wilberforces and Henry Manning*, Eerdmans (1993 ed) pp 5-6.)

<sup>2</sup> "Those Tractarians who had experimented with ceremonial innovation in the 1840s had largely restricted themselves to carrying out the service of the BCP with greater frequency and with closer observation of the rubrics, or with the re-introduction of liturgical practices which had some precedent in their occasional use by Anglicans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

"After 1850 most advanced Tractarians wanted to demonstrate their Catholic outlook more aggressively. Despite their appeal to the Ornaments Rubric in the BCP, what they really wanted to do was to incorporate into Anglican services as much medieval ceremony as they considered consistent with their subscription to the Articles." (N Yates, 1991, *Buildings, Faith & Worship*, Clarendon Press, p142)

<sup>3</sup> "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. 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." (Horton Davies, 1996, *Worship and Theology in England*, Book II, Eerdmans, p. 271.)

<sup>4</sup> After about 1820 the potentially powerful evangelical party divided between those who saw the hope for the future to be grasped through adventism and spiritual manifestations (represented in the preaching and teaching of Edward Irving and Henry Drummond) and those who came to see that a return to the authority of Rome offered the only security for the times ahead. The alternatives to some like Newman, Manning and several of the second generation Wilberforces seemed to be: church order or antinomianism?

<sup>5</sup> Such as Celtic spirituality, labyrinth walking, creation spirituality, varieties of feminist spirituality etc..

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<sup>6</sup> Alister McGrath, in a recent article in the Church of England Newspaper, writes: "The gospel is indeed public truth, and it must be reconnected with the great debates within our nation. [Bishop Richard] Harries' book ['God Outside the Box'] has challenged me, as a theological college principal, to set myself a goal -- to aim to have courses in place by the end of this academic year which will enable my students at Wycliffe Hall to engage with our culture, both as a matter of apologetics (affirming the gospel as public truth) and ethics (applying the gospel as public truth)."

<sup>7</sup> Eg see the AAW 'Circle', vol. 34.3, Winter 2002, p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> Pp. 511-514.

<sup>9</sup> Yates, op. cit. pp 173-4

<sup>10</sup> "The Evangelicals can rightly be claimed as pioneers in restoring the Sacrament of Holy Communion to its central place in the Anglican cultus" (Horton Davies, op. cit., p. 223.)

<sup>11</sup> In richness of robes, variety of symbols and elaboration of ceremony, Anglican Ordination has moved a long way from its simpler roots. Up until last century, the New Testament (deacons) or Bible (priests and bishops) were the sole symbols authorised. Bishops did not wear mitres. Clergy were not 'vested' according to their order as part of Ordination. As for clerical attire, preaching scarves were more common than stoles.

<sup>12</sup> See *A New Zealand Prayer Book, A Catechism*, pp. 933-934.

<sup>13</sup> Eg., recent withdrawals from active ministry by Deans of Dunedin and Hamilton Cathedrals to pursue other career courses outside the ordained ministry.