

Lucas: An Evangelical History Review

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William James Lawton, ,

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The Winter of Our Days: The Anglican Diocese of Sydney, 1950-1960.

by Revd Dr Bill Lawton

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Prologue

THIS STUDY IS PART of a more extensive examination of the way eschatology — the doctrine of the last things — has impacted on the shape of Sydney evangelical Anglicanism. In the mid years of the 1950s, eschatology and, in particular, aspects of apocalypticism, which flourished among evangelicals at the end of the nineteenth century, revived as a major concern. It heightened contrasts with the secular world, encouraging evangelicals to focus attention on teaching about the church or Christian fellowship. The re-emergence of that doctrine into prominence during the fifties and beyond has shaped the structures and theology of contemporary Sydney Anglicanism.

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Throughout Christian history, apocalypticism has been associated with belief in the church as a gathered community separate from the world. Sometimes it has offered bizarre predictions of universal calamity; at other times it has encouraged believers to long for the end or 'eschaton': in either case, it has underscored the other-worldliness of the Christian community. This has been particularly true of that version of apocalypticism known as premillennialism - the belief that Christ will return to earth to judge all creation and to reign over his chosen people for a thousand years. While many evangelicals would reject the definitions and much of the exotic terminology associated with this view their theology remains firmly futurist. It

Billy Graham's America, numerous calculations predict,

is in this latter sense that contemporary Sydney evangelical Anglicanism needs to be understood: futurism haunts its theology.

By isolating biblical texts that describe the church as an eschatological community already gathered before God, these evangelicals affirm that each congregation is a microcosm of a heavenly reality. This preoccupation with the community of faith has resulted in a concentration on preaching as a precise semantic exegesis of the text of the Bible and on attempts to shape parish structures to conform to models detected in primitive Christianity. Emphasis on church as *the gathered community* has underscored the independence of each local congregation and so has minimised diocesan involvement; emphasis on its *gathering before God* has minimised social action.

This concern sharpened during the 1950s as anxiety increased in church and community over the possibility of war and communist

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aggression. The advance of communism and nationalism in the Asia-Pacific regions forced the community to look nervously inwards. Evangelical Christians translated their fears into a preoccupation with eschatology and the heavenly church.

While, in the fifties, this theology could be contained because of enthusiasm for evangelism in Australia and in the Asia-Pacific region, in subsequent decades there has been a lessening of Christian influence in both contexts. Secularism at home and nationalism abroad have questioned the right of traditional churches to impose their ideologies. Sydney evangelical Anglicanism, committed for more than a hundred years to the belief that revival was 'just around the corner', through the sixties and seventies struggled to survive. It became a 'resistance' church, withstanding the pressures of society and unwilling to negotiate with secularism.¹ As a result, a sect mentality has come to dominate the denomination as has been reflected in recent debates about ecumenism, the place of biblical authority and the ordination of women.

The Power and The Glory

THE 1950S BEGAN WITH high hopes for Anglican revival. At the beginning of a decade of vigorous activity, with new initiatives in evangelism and social welfare, the Archbishop of Sydney, the Most Reverend H W K Mowll, addressed the Synod representatives of his diocese: Australia has reached a critical time in her history. The soul of her people is in deadly peril. Materialism is evidenced on all sides ... The spiritual and moral issues confronting us to-day, not only in Australia, but in the countries to the north, where such great changes are taking place, demand courage, self-sacrifice and vision from all who call themselves Christians.²

It was a call to arms in the face of impending catastrophe. His subsequent addresses, predicted a death struggle between Christian and anti-Christian forces in Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

This was a moment of destiny. 'The total collapse of our civilisation seems within the realm of possibility', he told the Christmas audiences of 1951.³ Crises in Europe and the Middle East intensified the cry of alarm:

We must recognise that the world may suddenly be plunged into a third War, more devastating than former Wars, and we, as Christians, should seek to understand the signs of the times - and

[13] *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review*, no. 9, Mar-April 1990. work earnestly to seize every opportunity for 'preparing the Way of the Lord'. The day may be fast approaching when our eyes shall behold Him and a new chapter will be opening in the history of the world, when He himself will come in glory and reign in power, and every knee will bow before Him. We are living

and experiments confirm, that erotic achievable in reasonable timeline. Two Worlds, One War: An Examination of the Islamic East and Christian West Prior to the First Crusade, privacy is an extremely integrated mechanism of power.

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An ungodly war. The sack of Constantinople and the Fourth Crusade, auto-training annihilates the soil. An ungodly war. The sack of Constantinople and the Fourth Crusade. By W. B. Bartlett. Pp. xviii+229+13 plates. Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000. £20. 0 7509 2378 4, the magnet is uneven. Prostitution, race and politics: policing venereal disease in the

in momentous days.⁴

This is more than rhetoric. It reflects the passion for evangelism that dominated Mowll's leadership into the early years of the fifties and stimulated a new era in denominational expansion and missionary enthusiasm. There was an urgency born of the conviction that *the time of the end* was at hand. Despite the graphic apocalyptic language used, Mowll's sentiments were not premillennial.

Definitions are important, for evangelicals still polarise around competing eschatologies. Premillennialism focussed on the church's heavenly destiny and tended to be revivalist. Mowll, on the other hand, appears to have been postmillennial - believing that until Christ's return should bring the world order to an end, the church must fulfill its destiny through evangelism. Christians would 'extend' the kingdom of God by changing society through love and righteousness', with respect for 'the infinite value of human personality' and with 'brotherly co-operation for the common good'.⁵ Mowll encouraged a relationship with the trade union movement, set up chaplaincies in hospitals, university and new housing districts and involved the church in a variety of social services.⁶

Before the End the Gospel Must be Proclaimed

EVANGELISM WAS THE KEY to progress, with the under-25s as the main target group. A mission by youth to youth, organised for 1951, aimed at contacting all those confirmed in the diocese in the previous ten years.⁷ This focus on youth was to produce the enormous young peoples' fellowships that filled churches in the fifties. The Youth Department maintained its aggressive outreach among diocesan young people through houseparties, rallies, and fellowship groups. It was part of a total program that began with plans for the diocese-wide Youth Mission of 1951 and concluded with the Billy Graham Crusade of 1959.

The Youth Department became one of the most significant organisations in the diocese. It conducted leadership training courses of from eighteen weeks to two years duration and provided a varied range of parish resources. The department aimed at training and appointing a youth worker for every parish with a view to contacting and evangelising every

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young person in suburban Sydney.⁸ Following the model of the North American Supervised Holiday Camps, the Youth Department established Camp Howard on the shores of Port Hacking and a Ski Club in the Snowy Mountains. These properties have attracted thousands of school-aged children to participate in the Department's recreational and evangelistic programs.⁹

A youth rally held in the Sydney Town Hall on 19 June 1957 was packed to capacity as representatives from diocese and community celebrated the theme 'Complete in Christ'. The Archbishop's address indicates the breadth of his concern for a Christian Australia: As members of a world-wide Church we should be in close fellowship with other national Churches to strengthen their faith and to share our privileges with them. As members of our Commonwealth-wide Anglican Church we also have special responsibilities for helping New Australians, and for those who are living without adequate Ministry by the Church in the New Housing Areas or in the loneliness of the Outback.¹⁰

Mowll emphasised his commitment to missionary expansion and the role of Sydney evangelical Anglicanism in achieving this. His concern for Anglican unity contrasts with the more restrictive theological and social convictions that were already emerging elsewhere in the diocese.

Youth ministry was the stimulus for diocesan evangelism. Young peoples' rallies were conducted in the new housing areas of Balgowlah, Punchbowl,

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Herne Bay and Padstow. As a direct result, throughout the developing areas of Sydney, new properties were purchased and others consolidated; a 'Mobile Church' met the temporary needs of worshippers till a building could be provided. Synod reports detail the huge expansion in building and church attendance that now took place.

Enthusiasm extended into almost every area of diocesan life. The Anglican Building Crusade (launched by Mowl in 1940), the Youth Department, the Home Mission Society and Moore Theological College all expanded. Every issue of the *Diocesan Magazine* detailed the growth of these organisations reflecting that the archbishop's strategy of evangelism lay primarily with youth and with close contact between church and community. The Archbishop advised the 1951 Synod that this was the church's major task.¹¹

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Mowl believed that if the evangelising of the world was to be done effectively, student involvement was essential. He began by establishing a hostel at Drummoyne known as 'The International Friendship Centre' (or 'Wingham'). 'Wingham' was central to Mowl's strategy of evangelising Pacific and Southeast Asian countries through converted nationals brought to Australia under the Colombo Plan. The Hostel features constantly in Mowl's letters to the diocese and in his overseas addresses indicating how important it was to his evangelistic program.

Mowl's longstanding concern for the evangelising of China, where he had been bishop for eleven years, almost certainly prompted his founding of 'Wingham'. The need was heightened by communist advance through the Asian mainland and Southeast Asia. Even before the funds for 'Wingham' had been manipulated from other sources, Mowl pleaded with the diocese to make the evangelising of these regions its major preoccupation. His Synod charge for 1950 pressed on the conscience of Sydney Anglicans the need to evangelise countries to Australia's north while there was 'still time'. A unique opportunity has been given to us, as representatives of the British way of life and of the Christian faith, to influence 1,160 million of the world's population living in close proximity to our shores ... I could wish that all our usual Church problems could be relegated to a subordinate place and that we might arouse ourselves and, through us, the members of the Church, to the challenge of these days for our witness and service to the world around us.¹²

This British, Christian way was symbolised for Mowl in the conquest of Everest by 'members of a British expedition' and by the coronation of Queen Elizabeth, that 'wholly remarkable sacrament'. These were 'signs of the time', symbols of a Christian belief that endured in British traditions, indicators that God would still use his people, and the church of his people, for the evangelising of the world. We see a New Day dawning. Many are looking for the right path to follow ... 'The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, for He must reign for ever and ever'. Can we not see the preparations for His coming - His Coronation?¹³

The day of Christ's return is near when this world will be Christ's world. In vivid, unmistakable splendour, his Kingdom will then be set up on earth. Evangelism means the conversion of the individual and the redemption of society. Now is the time of Anglican destiny.

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Evangelism on Sydney University campus was pivotal. It allowed co-operation with other evangelical denominations and it provided opportunity for Anglican leadership. The longstanding interaction between the diocese and interdenominational groups consolidated in these years. Most notable was the involvement of Howard Guinness, the newly appointed Rector of St. Barnabas' Broadway, in the University of Sydney mission of 1951. Dudley Foord, leader of the Evangelical Union, with the same flair for organisation that has continued to characterise his ministry, bombarded the university campus with literature arranging the main mission program and a hundred and forty subsidiary meetings.¹⁴ Every day the Great Hall was filled to

capacity.

A remarkable conjunction of evangelical leadership flowed from this event, linking people like Howard Guinness, Bill Andersen of Sydney Teachers' College, Stuart Babbage, Dean of St Andrew's Cathedral and Alan Begbie of St Matthew's Manly. Evangelicals joined hands across denominational boundaries. The Anglican connection with the Intervarsity Fellowship and Scripture Union was one of the most dynamic and lasting features of that era. It identified the Anglican Church in Sydney with aggressive evangelism amongst students at both secondary and tertiary levels.

The Dean of Sydney followed up the university campaign with a mission to the city, inviting Canon Bryan Green of Birmingham to hold meetings in the Sydney Town Hall and Cathedral from 22-29 July 1951. The venues were packed each day and on the concluding Sunday, an hour before the service was to begin, a queue a mile long had formed. That night Green addressed an audience estimated at between 5,000-6,000.¹⁵

Howard Guinness recalled the excitement of that Mission: I shared the pulpit steps each evening in St Andrew's Cathedral with the Dean and a number of other people who could find nowhere else to sit. Every foot of space was occupied and those under thirty were on cushions, rugs or hassocks in the chancel.... On the concluding Saturday and Sunday the Town Hall was also crammed to suffocation and the Chapter House had to be used as well to help house the overflow. Six thousand heard the Gospel on each occasion.¹⁶

Here was evangelistic fervour, not experienced since the days of the great tent missions in the early years of the century. It was in no small measure due to the enthusiasm and imagination of Howard Mowll who had placed

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energetic men into positions of leadership. They were fired with the possibility of evangelising Australia in their generation.

A key figure in this strategy was Stuart Barton Babbage, Dean of Sydney since 1947. During the first week of July 1950, he had addressed crowds of up to 600 in Sydney University's Wallace Theatre on the theme 'The Relevance of Christianity to Modern Life'.¹⁷ He had the ability, rare among diocesan clergy, to communicate profound ideas with passion and enthusiasm. The audience was held by his powerful oratory and sharp relevant insights.

Stuart Babbage was the man of the moment. He took over the dreary, chaotic religious education classes at Fort Street Boys' High School and soon held the 1st to 5th Form boys spellbound. His impressive, dynamic personality filled the auditorium, as he wove stories of marvellous impelling power. Almost forty years later, his strong manly Christianity and his tales of contemporary encounter with Jesus Christ remain vividly in the minds of some of his former students.¹⁸

He was a man of immense interests making the cathedral a centre of cultural and civic activity. His third Annual Labor Day service in 1950 brought together a wide range of politicians and trade unionists to hear an address by Allan Walker of the Waverley Methodist Mission on church and union co-operation.¹⁹ Stuart Babbage was fired by a deep social concern. When he finally moved from the Cathedral in 1953, union representatives honoured him as a man of the people.

For that brief moment, Babbage called on Australian Christians to listen to the philosophers and martyrs of other times of crisis who were prophetic voices 'pointing us to Christ the supreme scandal'.²⁰ His cathedral Lectures on 'Great Christian Contemporaries' -- Schweitzer of Africa, Kagawa of Japan, Azariah of Dornakal, Berggrav of Norway, Barth of Switzerland, Neimoller of Germany - reflect the breadth of his reading and the depth of his conviction that encounter with the historical Christ would alone meet the needs of the generation. The theme common to his addresses is not future crisis but fortitude and commitment to this age, full of possibility for regeneration. In

such diocesan power centres as Moore College and Church House, where the theology was rooted in revivalism rather than in existentialism, Babbage struck a discordant note.

Mowll encouraged the social application of such views. Early in 1949, the Ladies' Home Mission Union funded Deaconess Best for chaplaincy ministry at Crown Street Women's Hospital, the Royal Hospital

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for Women and St Margaret's Hospital for Women. This social and pastoral ministry expanded with the appointment of the Reverend Geoff Feltham as full time chaplain to the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Gloucester House, King George V, and the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children. In other areas the local clergy handed over visiting to members of the Mothers' Union, or, as in the Rural Deaneries of North Sydney and Gordon, paid a retired clergyman to act on their behalf. A social service, funded in part by the Home Mission Society, was beginning to expand rapidly. If money were available, the possibilities for growth seemed endless.²¹

The Abomination that Desolated

THE FUNDS NEEDED FOR such projects would strain diocesan resources and pressure mounted for some concerted campaigns to increase giving. An advertisement for a 'Public Relations Officer' who would raise money 'from Church people and the general public' showed the continued dependence of the denomination on community good-will.²² By mid-decade, fund raising from community sources was an established feature of parish life. It appealed to altruism, to generosity and to the established position of the church in a Christian society.

During 1954, the Wells Organisation, a fund raising company active in the United States and Canada, conducted its first campaign in the parish of Brighton in Victoria. Money given or pledged over a three year period amounted to \$43,000 and, despite high costs, promised the parish freedom from financial anxiety and the possibility for expansion. Archbishop Mowll noted the success of the program and urged the adoption of Wells' techniques into the diocese. 'We need a campaign for teaching the stewardship of money, if spiritual power is to be released', he wrote to the Sydney parishes.²³

The Home Mission Society, reflecting its prominence in diocesan strategy, took up the challenge and created a Department of Promotion which would conduct an annual 'Every Member Canvass' simultaneously throughout the diocese. Leading American fund raisers were invited to help in the initial planning. From the outset, the Director emphasised that the campaigns should concentrate on 'the need of the giver to give — not on the needs of the Church'.²⁴

The Archbishop hoped that the increase of funds would reflect the congregations' commitment to personal holiness and to evangelism. He designated 21 October 1956 as 'Stewardship Sunday' to be an occasion for

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'the deepening of Christian fellowship in the parishes and the full committal of each member of the Church to Jesus Christ and His Kingdom'.²⁵ He saw the program as increasing the evangelistic and social output of the Diocese of Sydney. The response was beyond his imagining as 127 parishes conducted simultaneous campaigns, many of them reporting offertory increases of 500 percent and substantial rises in congregational attendance. The number of adult confirmations rose dramatically during 1956 and 1957.

The promised revival was a delusion. Giving increased for three years, then fell dramatically. Parishes that had incurred huge debts in the building of halls and churches to accommodate new converts, plateaued out during the late fifties then went into steady decline through the sixties. The literature of

the Department of Promotion shows that the emphasis on 'giving till it hurts' and 'what the Church can do for you' failed to convince prospective members of the worthwhileness of a long-term commitment to parish activities. Kenneth Dempsey observed in his book *Conflict and Decline* that 'every-member fund-raising canvasses do not lead to long-term revival and certainly not revitalisation of the "spiritual side of church life"'.²⁶

Opposition to the canvasses grew amongst conservative evangelicals who charged that the principle of giving urged by the Department of Promotion was based on wrong premisses. The biblical injunction, 'nothing from the Gentiles', increasingly characterised evangelical response to community involvement in church affairs. The canvass was a symbol of worldliness and unworthy of a Christian congregation of the end times.²⁷

Days that Bring Distress Such as Never Has Been

THESE RESPONSES HIGHLIGHT a growing sense of anxiety. There was a precarious balance between inherited belief in a Christian society and the feeling of alienation. The unease expressed was more than clerical posturing. It was bound in to an expectation of impending catastrophe. The focus of preaching began to shift from the unconverted to the church member who needs 'reviving'. There was uncertainty about how Christian the Australian community was.

Expectation of revival was always 'in the air'. Reports of large Christmas attendances at St Andrew's Cathedral and elsewhere in the diocese led to the conclusion that there were 'good grounds for hope and prayer that a revival of true religion may be on the wav'.²⁸ as the decade

[20] *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review*, no. 9, Mar-April 1990.

proceeded these were expressed against a background of gloomy predictions of moral and social collapse.

Some of the apocalyptic imagery current in the 1950s will be familiar, but much of it will be strange and alien even to contemporary Christians. In thirty years religious jargon has changed, but, interestingly, the theology of the church which derived from this period has remained constant. Those years, from the mid fifties, were full of new exciting theological ideas, with twists and eccentricities that have continued to shape church life in the 1980s.

From that volatile period, the doctrine of the church emerged as the most significant contribution to the present generation. It set the scene for contemporary concerns about fellowship' as a necessary feature of congregational life; it underscores the current hostility to episcopal authority and centralism. The theology of the church was forged out of the anxieties of the fifties yet it has survived because it questioned the biblical foundations of the denomination. In this sense, its emergence in mid-decade marked the end of older evangelical concerns about churchmanship and sectarian rivalry. It was the focus of new interests in 'biblical theology' and led inevitably to changed pastoral and preaching attitudes in the diocese.

In 1950, Sydney evangelical Anglicanism, though shaped by the holiness and revivalist movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was largely pragmatic. Evangelicals were buoyed up by reports of conversion experiences and by the personal dynamism of the leadership. As the decade proceeded, the threat of universal catastrophe and the impact of secularism produced a loss of nerve. The death of Howard Mowl in 1958 came at a critical time in the life of the diocese. The theological and structural changes of the sixties found evangelicals largely unprepared.

Revival burst on Sydney during the fifties and stimulated interest in 'the old time religion' of the Graham Crusade at the end of the decade. Christians took this mission to heart as part of the older evangelicalism that had for so long sustained them. Graham touched the fears of the generation declaring that the end of the age was near. But there was a theological shift. Graham preached premillennial judgement when 'man will live for a thousand years,

death will be eliminated ... the Utopia that people have dreamed of is going to come true ... It's going to be a marvellous world, ruled by one man, Jesus Christ. And the people will live for a thousand years.'²⁹ An evangelical newspaper described the Sydney Crusade as 'one of the last calls that God will make on this generation'.³⁰ The wars and rumours of war were signs of the coming again of Christ. Anxieties

[21] *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review*, no. 9, Mar-April 1990.

mounted as events in Southeast Asia began to affect Australian domestic and foreign policy.

Nation will Rise against Nation

AT 4 A.M. ON SUNDAY, 25 June 1950 the Communist North Korean Army battled across the poorly defended 38th parallel. By the evening of the 26th, its troops were just outside the South Korean capital, Seoul. The following day, without opposition, the forces spearheaded an attack into the city. Armageddon was upon it

Thousands with hand carts and few possessions streamed out of Seoul hoping for the protection of the countryside. Their world was at an end. Three years later between four and five million civilians would have died in a stalemated war. With them would lie Australian, American and other United Nations' troops. We had been propelled into this war out of fear of communism's spread through Southeast Asia to our own doorstep, though for some evangelical Anglicans it became a war touched with the spirit of the Crusades.³¹

Australian newspapers that Saturday evening had already settled on the headlines for the next day. A cyclone had devastated northern New South Wales, leaving thousands homeless. The damages bill ran into millions. Sydney's gas supply had been dislocated and rationing was likely. Melbourne, too, had its troubles with a football punch-up. In the months before, the papers had scarcely prepared the Australian public for a new Asian war. We basked in America's protection. Korea did not rate a mention.

Monday's headlines screamed the possibility of World War III. What would Russia do? What would America do? Was this part of an international communist conspiracy? What role would Australia play? Our two great fears were in the open -- Asians and communism.

When war came, and America wanted allies, Australia's involvement as inevitable. Ever since the Second World War we had been drawn increasingly into America's orbit. Though we supported Britain in Malaysia during the later emergency, we were, in reality, protecting American strategic interests in Southeast Asia. Our involvement in Vietnam, in the 1960s, was just one more instance of our commitment to American foreign policy. All this brought with it American hysteria and anxiety about communist infiltration into the free world.

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Brother will Betray Brother

WE FELT THE BEGINNINGS of this during 1949 and 1950. These were years when communist conspiracy seemed pervasive. In March 1949, Lawrence Sharkey, chairman of the Australian Communist Party, had been prosecuted under the Crimes Act for sedition. The three year sentence aroused bitter controversy about communism's intention to overthrow the parliamentary system.

Fear of socialism increased with Labor's proposals to nationalise banks and medicine. A long series of communist-inspired strikes only confirmed the popular belief that Labor had been undermined by communist ideals. The intention to nationalise banks, though declared unconstitutional by both High Court and Privy Council, drew together the fears of all sections of the

Australian community that savings accounts and the whole private enterprise system were under threat. In the election at the end of 1949, Labor was swept out of office.

Robert Menzies, the new Liberal Prime Minister, played on Australians' anxiety about communist control of industry. During April 1950, he introduced legislation into Parliament to ban the Communist Party. He described its supporters as 'a traitorous minority' set to destroy us. Menzies spelled out the potential of communism to undermine national security in time of war.

Hearts Failing for Fear

THE ANZUS TREATY, a defence pact between Australia, New Zealand and the United States, ratified our dependence on a foreign power to aid us in case of aggression. We were nervously looking over our shoulders at changes in political alignments throughout Southeast Asia and the effects these might have for the defence of Northern Australia. Belief in America as Australia's powerful protector, was never more abjectly expressed than in Harold Holt's submission in the mid sixties to the U.S. President, Lyndon Baines Johnson. He promised that we would go 'all the way with LBJ'. His supporters made clear that American foreign policy would be faithfully reproduced in Australia.

There was almost perpetual anxiety that war might break out at any time. We exaggerated our paranoid fear of Asia. When this combined with the belief that communism was a threat to international peace, China became a new source of national hysteria. It had all the potential for another Japanese invasion, and drew us the more tightly into the bosom of Uncle Sam.

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Christians, like the rest of the community, were unsure of themselves. Evangelicals searched for certainties in a crumbling world. The *Australian Church Record*, an independent evangelical Anglican newspaper circulating in the diocese, had gloomy expectations for the 1950s and its introspection contrasts with the optimistic programs of Archbishop Mowl. Its pages were full of apocalyptic crisis: 'All over the world humanity seems helplessly to be stumbling onwards into a third, and perhaps final catastrophe ... Evangelical Christians [must] be less concerned with the world, and ... begin more realistically to pursue their "high calling" in Christ.'³² As everything collapsed, they would set their eyes on heaven. Society trembled before the potential of atomic warfare to destroy humanity, but 'the Christian has no grounds for pessimism. Are we not bidden "when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh"?'³³

The editor quoted extensively from Old and New Testament prophecy as foretelling the collapse of the present age. He reflected sadly on Britain's demise. He noted the long years of British appeasement of German territorial aims in Europe, and with it the slow attrition of British power. The reader was meant to make the connections between God's provenance for Israel and the Empire on which the sun might just be setting. While she was powerful, Britain was a symbol of order and Christian nationhood; now in decline, she sank before the forces of chaos and secularism. The Australian readership was not meant to miss the paper's innuendoes that these were the face of communism.

Learning from the Fig Tree

THE OLD VIEW of a Christian Australia died hard. There was a naive confidence that the British character of Australians would somehow win through. Truly we here in Australia have a goodly heritage which is a constant challenge to do our part in keeping the Empire true to this great ideal and vocation.³⁴

The use of words like 'goodly', 'heritage', 'challenge', 'Empire', 'ideal',

Vocation' were the sort of generalisations that linked the comment to the rhetoric of the nineteenth century. These evangelical Anglicans were fixated with past glory, so immobilised were they by the present. Churchmen vaguely hoped that well attended Anzac Day services reflected

[24] *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review*, no. 9, Mar-April 1990.

that 'there is deep down in the hearts of our people a sense of God which will respond on urgent occasion'.³⁵

Moral decline in the nation seemed to say otherwise. Even in its most prosperous years, said the *Record*, British civilization had the mark of the apocalyptic beast stamped on it. Acceptance of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, with its concern for evolution and material progress, began Britain's downward slide into obscurity. The end of the First World War showed its dreadful consequences as Europe was enveloped 'in a tidal wave of sensuousness'. The great bulwark and bastion of freedom had fallen before the Beast from the Pit. In the presence of such evil and moral collapse, Christians had only one message for the nation: 'Repent ... Return'.³⁶

Howard Guinness expounded the same prophetic imagery. He told the gathering for the 66th Anniversary of the Methodist Central Mission that nuclear warfare was the fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy about the end of the age. The signs of that end were upon them as they witnessed the return of the Jews to Palestine, the growth of the missionary movement, and anxiety and world calamity 'in which the forces of nature would become out of control'.³⁷

His reference to Jewish nationalism binds him into a long tradition of evangelical eschatology. Many Protestant Christians believed that a return of the Jews to Palestine would herald the second coming of Jesus. It is interesting that preachers kept reviving and exaggerating this view at times of national crisis. They applied the vivid, end of the world imagery associated with Jewish expectations, to international events. Sometimes it was France, sometimes Germany, sometimes Russia. Always it was the anti-Christ ready to consume the world that bore his mark.

This interpretation was part of the evangelical stock in trade. Through the latter part of the nineteenth century and right down into the 1950s, one could hear sermons on the signs of the coming thousand year, or millennial, reign of Christ. It is the response of people who treat the Bible as a book of unfulfilled prophecy. They search its pages for references to current world events. Interest in the subject has revived in the 1980s. Coming at a similar time of international uncertainty, it reflects Christian anxiety about the moral directions of secular society.

The Elect, Whom He Chose.

THE FIFTIES' PREOCCUPATION with revival prepared the way for this theological development One of the most active holiness preachers

[25] *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review*, no. 9, Mar-April 1990.

time was Geoffrey Bingham. He urged his hearers 'to cease striving, to rest in Christ, to know the peace of that selfish life erased'.³⁸ He had a remarkable ability to draw huge crowds, packing the thousand and more seats for a week night meeting at St. Stephen's, Newtown. Every Sunday evening Holy Trinity Millers Point was filled to capacity. He preached energetically and passionately about the power of the Holy Spirit to transform Christian lives. He warned theological students who attended the Moore College Convention of 1954 against 'pitching their tents' too close to Sodom; the intrusion of the world would contaminate Christian witness.³⁹

Enthusiasm for holiness or sanctification among young Christians was a feature of the fifties. Andrew Murray, Ruth Paxson and Norman Grubb were the devotional support of that generation. The books have a recurring theme: The normal daily experience of the believer walking with Jesus ... is the

abiding presence of Jesus in the heart. His peace, joy and presence fills us to overflowing, with no shadow between.⁴⁰

Many times a day, and over the smallest things, we shall have to avail ourselves of the cleansing blood of Jesus, and we shall find ourselves walking the way of brokenness as never before. But Jesus will be manifested in all his loveliness and grace in that brokenness.⁴¹

This emphasis on placing everything 'under the blood', on being completely yielded to the Holy Spirit, on constant 'brokenness' led inevitably to perfectionism. In Moore College and in the Sydney University Evangelical Union, some students would not go to bed until they had spoken about Christ to one other person. One student put tracts in his pyjamas' pocket in case he should get up in the night and meet a stranger in the College singles quarters. His midnight evangelistic encounter with a drunken university student from the college next door was hailed as an example of Christian obedience. Small groups of believers began to study John's First Epistle. There, they read: If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth us from all sin.⁴²

The simple commentary by Roy Hession drew out the verse's special implication for those who had yielded to the Spirit.⁴³

[26] *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review*, no. 9, Mar-April 1990.

With the hindsight of theological reflection, it is easy to see the qualifications and to argue that this is only the devotional face of Protestant orthodoxy. The shift, however, is subtle; the classic doctrine of justification by faith had been supplanted by the experience of sanctification. When an identical debate polarised evangelicalism in the nineteenth century, the new Brethren movement which argued the issue so strongly, summarised the point of contrast: Any Christian ... was as completely sanctified in God's view the moment he became linked to Christ by faith, as he will be when he comes to bask in the sunshine of the Divine Presence! All was settled the moment he believed in the only begotten Son of God, as settled as ever it will be, because as settled as God can make it⁴⁴

Revivalism emphasises sanctification and yielding to the Spirit at the expense of the doctrine of justification. It trades off the objectivity of Christ's atonement for personal experience.

When justification has been dethroned as the central doctrine of Christianity and has been replaced by revival experience, then it becomes possible to speak about perfection now, in an instant. Revivalism fuelled the possibilities of discovering total sanctification and of spreading that belief through groups of Bible believing Christians: As others are broken at the Cross they will be added to your fellowship, as God leads. Get together from time to time for fellowship and share your spiritual experience with real openness ... As one billiard ball will move another billiard ball, so one group will set off another group, until the whole land is covered with New Life from the risen Lord Jesus.⁴⁵

The hope for revival was infectious. Individuals were urged back to Calvary so that they might reckon, and reckon again, that they were dead to sin. The trouble for so many Christians was that, though they constantly reckoned themselves dead, their desires and prejudices kept reviving. Dead men it seemed didn't lie down. So they wrestled with the seventh chapter of the New Testament letter of Paul to the church at Rome:

I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me ... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it

[27] *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review*, no. 9, Mar-April 1990.

Is it the 'I' that needs to be crucified or is it sin that dwells in me?

There was a beautiful simplicity about some of the pietism of the mid fifties but, on balance, it offered little to sustain people anxious about the threat of renewed war and atomic holocaust. The holiness movement was essentially neurotic - well meaning, but emotionally damaging. It deflected people from rational evaluation of political movements and human behaviour and turned their attention inwards. When we recall the massive changes, then beginning in Australian society, it was a flight from reality.

The language of the holiness movement was rooted in the past experiences of evangelicalism and expectations about Christ's return. It was given new vigour by a current revival that had broken out in the African continent and was introduced to Western churches by returning missionaries. The doctrines of sin and sanctification dominated evangelical preaching. To use the jargon of the time, the emphasis became increasingly 'Christ in you' rather than 'Christ for you'.

The movement was a powerful staging post in the evolution of Sydney Anglican evangelicalism. It drew attention to the search for personal holiness. A Christian was marked out from 'the world' — called, elect, chosen, sanctified ~ having here no abiding city but seeking that which is to come. Revivalism promised a triumphant march through suffering and 'tribulation' all the way to the heavenly Zion. The 'wars and rumours of wars' were crises which would purify the church of all corruption and 'present it spotless' at the climactic Day of Judgement This movement of the fifties is a bridge to our own generation and it has affected the way our theology of the church has taken shape.

Like A Man on a Journey -- The Search for New Directions

BOOK REVIEWS THROUGH the fifties suggested a new world of theological discovery, but the introspective mood was too great to allow its impact to be felt. Parish bookstalls were cluttered with the accumulated piety of African revivalism. There were new devotional heights to conquer and old churchmanship scores to settle.

Some parts of Sydney Anglicanism still fumed and fretted over the debate of 1949 that had condemned the wearing of eucharistic vestments. When Father Hope, Rector of Christ Church Sydney prayed Sunday by Sunday for the persecuted Catholics of Birmingham, the innuendoes of hostility towards the local hierarchy were not lost on his congregation. He

[28] *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review*, no. 9, Mar-April 1990.

grudgingly paid off a parish mortgage to the diocese, funding as a result evangelical projects such as 'Wingham'.

The old churchmanship debates were fought as bitterly as ever they had been in the nineteenth century, but their fury was short-lived. By the end of the decade, they had declined in importance. Judged by a longer perspective, the fifties were not remarkable for churchmanship squabbles but for the implications of a renewed interest in 'biblical theology' and its outworking — the church as the 'gathered community'.

This changed emphasis was nowhere more obvious than in the Moore College lecture series that Broughton Knox began in 1956 on the doctrine of justification by faith.⁴⁶ He focussed away from introspection to Christ's role as sacrifice, redeemer and mediator. It was a deliberate bias towards objectivity. Under his influence, by the end of the decade, systematic theology came to dominate the College curriculum. The effect was to draw all theological ideas under the single theme of Christology. Broughton's friend, T H L Parker, had unpackaged these ideas in his review columns in the *Record* during 1950.

At the same time, Donald Robinson, later to become Archbishop of Sydney, introduced other new courses on 'biblical theology'. There were some tensions with the systematic theology program. Biblical studies searched for

the meanings within individual passages. They lacked the philosophical coherence of systematic theology and offered a smorgasbord of ideas. Biblical themes stood in awkward conjunction with each other, loosely linked under the broad umbrella of 'kingdom of God'. Evangelicals increasingly described themselves as a-millennial - a theology that sat loose to the imagery of apocalypticism whilst retaining its futurism. The 'Battle of Armageddon', so central to millennialist interpretation, and reflecting a cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil at the end of the age, now focussed on the death of Christ. That event became the herald of the eschaton, the foretaste of the end of the times. By this explanation, the eschatology of the revivalist movement was adapted to the new theological education, but shorn of its exaggerated millennialism and its pietistic introspection.

'Biblical theology' asserted that Jesus is the cosmic Lord. His death, the focal point of the inbreaking of God's kingdom, marks the end of the age. In that one event, past and future meet. The theological text books of the fifties grappled with the tensions inherent in this theology. Jesus was not just a man of history; he was more than the Lord of the human heart; he was the 'eschaton', the culmination of all human desire. Biblical theology was dominated by the great climactic intervention of Jesus, the Lord and

[29] *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review*, no. 9, Mar-April 1990.

Judge, at the end of the age. As a result, Christology - the goal of systematic theology — was shaped by eschatology — the goal of biblical theology.

This has remained the touchstone of theological formation for ministry in the Diocese of Sydney. Whereas Mowll's theology — broadly and pragmatically postmillennial — had linked the kingdom of God with a renewed world order, revivalism had transferred it to a heavenly, other worldly realm. For Mowll 'kingdom of God' meant evangelism expressed through proclamation and social action, with the result that overseas mission and home mission societies were central, interactive agencies for denominational growth. Revivalism shifted the focus to a rule of Christ 'in the heart'. It remained for the new biblical theology to reshape this idea linking the experience of conversion in the present with the future hope of perfection. By this means, the old premillennialism of the nineteenth century was transformed and revived. The more exotic interpretations of biblical imagery were discarded, but the futurism remained. The result was a pre-occupation with the church as a manifestation of the kingdom of the end time.

Though social service agencies in the diocese have continued to grow they are peripheral to much of evangelical thinking. The centre of interest has shifted to the development of congregational life. This had led to tensions between denominational structures that assume central control and operate pragmatically and parochial structures that reject the principle of diocesan interference and maximise the independence of the local congregation. When this is justified by an ideology apparently grounded in the Bible, the authority base of evangelicalism, the tensions between diocese and parish move to breaking point

Current pressures to review attitudes to moral questions like AIDS, relaxed drug legislation, IVF, abortion, apartheid, support for freedom fighters, women's ordination and ecumenism are beginning to expose the poverty of a theology that finds its rationale in futurist eschatology. Sydney evangelical Anglicanism must review the implications of this doctrine, and its corollary the heavenly church, or continue to fragment into sectarianism. It may yet need to listen to a prophetic voice already heard in Sydney in 1953: The Church is her true self only when she exists for humanity ... She must take her part in the social life of the world, not lording it over men, but helping and serving them. She must tell men, whatever their calling, what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others.⁴⁷

[30] *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review*, no. 9, Mar-April 1990.

Evangelicalism must learnt to live with secularisation and technology and, above all, discover how this 'world' might be reconciled to God. He who will come again at the end of the age has already come into this world and is now

Endnotes

This paper was first delivered before a meeting of the EHAA in 1989.

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 6. President's charge to Synod 21 September 1959 *Year Book of the Diocese of Sydney* 1960, p235
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 13. Archbishop's sermon in St Paul's Cathedral London 14 June 1953 *Diocesan Magazine* vol 7 no 4, 20 August 1953, p57
 14. See H Guinness *Journey Among Students* Sydney: AIO 1978, pi49; *Diocesan Magazine* vol 5 no 4, 20 June 1959, p59; vol 5 no 5, 20 July 1951, p71; vol 7 no 7, p20 November 1953, p108; *Evangelical Action* vol 69 no 3,1 September 1955, p7
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 17. *Australian Church Record* (hereafter **ACR**) 13 July 1950, p3
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- [31] *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review*, no. 9, Mar-April 1990.
19. *ACR* 21 September 1950, p15; *Diocesan Magazine* vol 4 no 7, 20 August 1950, p!32
 20. *ACR* 15 June 1950, pp!2-13; see further 27 July 1950, pp7&14; 21 September 1950, p!0; 4 May 1950, p11; *Diocesan Magazine* vol 3 no 12, February 1950, p219
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22. ACR 12 January 1950, p9
23. Archbishop's letter *Diocesan Magazine* vol 8 no 12, 20 May 1955, p181
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47. D Bonhoeffer *Letters and Papers from Prison* London: SCN 1956, p!0

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