

Special Session of the 22nd Synod of the Diocese of Sydney for the Purpose of Filling the Vacancy in the See of Sydney

Election of Archbishop Mowll

Presidential Address

Delivered by Bishop S J Kirkby, BA, Bishop, Administrator of the Diocese of Sydney, on Tuesday 4 April 1933.

Brethren of the Clergy and Laity –

We are met together under circumstances of solemnity and gravity: solemnity, because the shadow of the great loss of our late Archbishop is still upon us, and gravity because the choosing of a rightful successor is the responsibility that falls to us today.

Ungracious and wrong would it be if in this Synodal address no tribute were paid to the life and work of our late leader and friend. For twenty-three years he exercised the office of Chief Pastor in our midst and wielded an influence that touched not our own selves only but the whole Church in Australia. On review of that long period of service we can see how singularly difficult and stressful were those years. Perhaps the Church in Australia in the whole of her previous history since 1788 had not to face such crises as confronted our Archbishop whilst he was with us.

As has been pointed out to me, within three years or so of his coming to us, the world was plunged into the ghastly and long drawn-out agony of the Great War. No man holding high office (it matters not what he be), could pass through that experience without dreadful strain upon nerve and mind and upon faith in human nature and the sanctities of life. More especially would this be with a Christian leader standing faithfully to expound and to live out the great certitude for which the Church stands that God is a God of Love. Yet without adulation we can say that Archbishop Wright gave us wise leadership and sane counsel throughout all those “cloudy and dark days.” It has been reverently said that “Jesus Christ was the only Gentleman Who, came out of the War with His reputation unsmirched.” I dare to add that there were some others who at least tried humbly to follow in His train.

Then, with the conclusion of the War, when we fondly imagined that all our difficulties were over, the Church was confronted with another crisis in the reaction that followed: *the breakdown of pre-war standards of life and conduct.*

Those early standards were by no means perfect, but they did embody certain proved decencies, decencies which sprang from the Faith, which had been nourished by the Church, and in which much of the best life of our race had been grounded.

And when the Christian Church and her leaders had braced themselves up to meet this alarming situation, and when the times demanded highest efficiency in personal and spiritual onset against the forces of evil, then came the great economic depression, depleting as it did inevitably, much of the resources on which we must naturally rest, and causing men and women everywhere again to wonder whether God was a God of Love.

Covering those crises was the period of our Archbishop's service in the diocese, and perhaps those of us who have served in Christian witness for a similar period can understand in part what it must have meant to him to keep a brave heart and a calm mind, and to give Christian guidance to his fellow workers.

These virtues then we have in mind today and for them all we praise our God and offer the tribute of an affectionate memory and respectful esteem. As we do so we know that linked with us is the fellowship of the whole Christian Church, and not the least, that of a vast body of citizens of Sydney whose touching remarkable tribute on the day of the funeral will be an enduring memory to all who beheld it. At this point I should like to add the testimony received from His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury only this morning. In a letter he says, “Like all who knew him I had the greatest esteem and respect for him, for his quiet steadfastness of service, his deep piety, his judgment, and the dignity with which he fulfilled the duties of his high office. He will be greatly missed in Australia. I only hope that a successor worthy of him will be appointed.”

Presidential Address – 4 April 1933 (Special Session of the 22nd Synod)

So we bless God's Holy Name for His servant, John Charles Wright, departed this life in His faith and fear. As well also does the Synod tender its sympathy in the consolation of our God to Mrs Wright and her family. Theirs is a sorrow deeper than ours; yet with them we remember that our Father "is not a God of the dead but of the living, for all live unto Him," and with them we can say -

"Thy word is true, Thy will is just;
To Thee we leave our dead in trust;
And bless Thee for the love which gave
Thy Son to fill a human grave,
That none might fear that world to see,
Where all are living unto Thee."

God buries His workmen, but carries on His work. Thus we must address ourselves to our task. I have called you in accordance with directions imposed upon me by the Ordinance of an earlier session of Synod, briefly called the "Archbishop of Sydney Appointment Ordinance 1931." This important piece of legislation was closely scrutinised at the time of its enactment, and has been before us for 18 months, and I am safe in assuming, has been the object of much study during the past few weeks. Its contents should be generally known. Some two or three references I claim to make.

Our immediate business today is to receive nominations of duly qualified persons "for the office of Archbishop of the See of Sydney." The directions of the Ordinance are clear as to the procedure to be followed. With the complete list of nominations properly made before me I shall ask that someone move the adjournment of Synod until tomorrow. With the passing of that motion it is possible for members of Synod to hold a Conference, when they may feel inclined to discuss in informal and quite unofficial manner the question that is before them. There is something to recommend this course, and it looks as if the Ordinance has been actually framed to permit of this being done. I suggest that such conference should be confined to Synod members, and should be held in private.

The second comment I offer is that discussion of the candidates will be permitted when the Select List of candidates is being drawn up. I am directed by the Ordinance to put from the chair the question: "Shall (AB) be placed upon the Select List?" It will be appropriate then for the mover and seconder, at least, of any nominee to rise and speak in advocacy of the candidates they favour. Personally, I feel that no one will desire long speeches on that occasion.

Then, in the voting on the Final List, or, to put it otherwise, in the voting that determines the actual choice of an Archbishop, multifold voting is permitted; that is to say, if a Synodman has voted for Candidate X he is not precluded thereby from voting for Y or Z if he so wishes. I think that the Synod is quite clear in mind on this important matter. Further comment is not necessary.

And now what manner of man as Archbishop do we need? To such a question I hesitate to address myself. I am confident that Synod will keep the larger issues of the question in mind. This Diocese of ours is of outstanding importance and dignity; its history, its size in respect of Church population, its faithful clergy working to a high standard of efficiency, its achievements, its sound traditions expressive of a true and sturdy Anglicanism, establish the claim that has been made. It is the premier diocese of the Commonwealth of Australia. But if because of this our feelings swell out with pride, may God save us! Rather should the knowledge of our place and prestige burden us with a sense of the gravity of the situation that is now before us. We have to determine who the new Archbishop will be according to the ideals that we entertain as to what manner of man he should be.

We have not been left without guidance in this matter. The Press has gallantly and freely and gratuitously offered many suggestions about qualifications. I humbly set before you other suggestions. Needless to add, they are not my own, nor perhaps, is the catalogue exhaustive. I do not think that they have the imprimatur of the Press, but I believe that they carry the imprimatur of the Holy Spirit. I find them in an old letter -

"A Bishop must be blameless as God's steward, not self-willed, not soon angry, no brawler, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but given to hospitality, a lover of good, sober-minded, just, holy, temperate, holding to the faithful word which is according to the teaching, that he may be able to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convince the gainsayers." (Titus 1.)

Old-fashioned they may be dubbed, but their implications are far-reaching. Much more could and should be added; nevertheless if we begin on that basis we shall not be far wrong in our ultimate choice. Our task is to find an able and wise and godly chief pastor, "a man who has understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do."

Presidential Address – 4 April 1933 (Special Session of the 22nd Synod)

May we in this Synod be kept in the spirit of prayer, with the peace of God guarding our thoughts and our speech and the love of Christ binding us together. Our quest is for the man of God's choice. By His Holy Spirit we shall find him.

The Right Rev Sydney James Kirkby
Administrator of the Diocese of Sydney

4 April 1933