

Special Session of the 31st Synod of the Diocese of Sydney for the Purpose of Filling the Vacancy in the See of Sydney

Election of Archbishop Gough

Presidential Address

Delivered by the Rt Rev W G Hillard, Administrator of the Diocese, on Monday 24 November 1958.

Brethren of, the Clergy, Brethren of the Laity,

Too soon we rise; the symbols disappear;
The feast, though not the love, is pass'd and gone,
The bread and wine remove, but Thou art here -
Nearer than ever - still my shield and sun."

Here in this Service the perfectly courteous Host and gracious Lord waits to meet us in the feast that He has bidden us keep in remembrance of Him; and when we go into the Synod Hall to commune and reason together, He Himself will draw near and go with us to aid us in our task if we but try to be conscious of His presence and seek His guidance. Someone has called the Service of Holy Communion "The Lord's own trystingplace". I am not suggesting that His presence is localised in the consecrated bread and wine, but I do profoundly believe that He is here in the Service, not as the victim on the altar, but as the host at the feast, and I believe that, of normal experiences, this is the divinely appointed means whereby I am best enabled to realise His presence. I have always seen an interesting significance in the experience of the two men walking to Emmaus on the afternoon of the first Easter Day. Did not their hearts burn within them while He talked with them by the way, and while He opened to them the Scriptures? But it was in the breaking of bread at the end of the journey that their eyes were opened and they knew Him. He is present here this afternoon; may He, give us grace to realise His presence, and having found it here, take with us into our deliberations a lingering sense of His fellowship.

As we realise this fellowship, let us remember all that He has done for us, all that He is doing for us, all that He is to us, our Redeemer and our Lord; and let us never forget throughout our Session, and beyond it, our responsibility to Him. "Take, eat," said He at the institution of the sacrament, "this is my Body which is given for you, do this in remembrance of me . . . drink ye all of this, for this is my Blood of the New Testament which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins; do this as oft as ye shall drink it in remembrance of me."

Let us never forget either what we owe to Him or the account we must render Him at the last day, and in that spirit let us go to our task.

The Holy Communion is not only a meeting with the Lord and a happy, challenging feast of remembrance; it is also a meal for strength. It is a means whereby we appropriate to ourselves the blessings of His death and the strength and vigour of His risen life. Here at this time, if we seek earnestly and with a single mind, we shall find the wisdom and the judgment and all the other qualities that we need to arrive at the decision He would have us make.

Let us remember also that the Holy Communion is a bond of fellowship. How carefully the Church impresses this upon us in the Catechism, Exhortations and Invitation! We are reminded, as we come, of the communion of saints and of our individual responsibility to enrich and preserve it. We are indebted to the past; we have a duty to the present and the future. Let us not fail to discharge it as we ought.

I give you welcome - and specially those of you who are with us for the first time - to this special Session of the Thirty-First Synod of our Diocese. We meet under the shadow of a very heavy loss for, while with grateful hearts we contemplate the life abundant and the joy inexpressible to which our beloved Archbishop has been called, we cannot but be deeply sensible of the gap that his passing has left in our personal and Diocesan life. I have already paid tribute to his life and work in the sermon preached at the Funeral Service, and this will be published in a special memorial issue of the Diocesan Magazine, but I should like to say a little here, if only for purposes of record.

During the last quarter-of-a-century he brought a magnificent contribution to the welfare of our community, and he was an outstanding figure among us. Coming to Australia in 1934, with an enviable record of Missionary service in China, of scholastic work in Canada, and having served as a Chaplain with the British Army in the first World War, he quickly made a strong and favourable impression, which was deepened and enriched as the succeeding years went by. His strong and simple faith, his friendliness and kindness, and his manifest desire to serve at once, won golden opinions far and wide, and the general appreciation and regard grew with the years. His charm of personality, and his many admirable qualities of character, as well as his broad vision and wide sympathies, allied to his considerable gifts of heart and mind, increasingly inspired the confidence of others.

He filled with distinction various positions of leadership. Within his own Church he did a remarkable work; during his 25 years as Archbishop of Sydney; the Diocese made considerable progress, and in 1947 he was elected Primate of the Church of England in Australia. In this position he still further strengthened the hold he had upon the admiration and regard of the people of his community. His frequent visits to distant parts of our great Island Continent, to cheer the members of the widely scattered flock of the Anglican Communion, were very greatly appreciated, and people felt that the Primate was something more than a name, and his Office was something more than a mere term of organisation - he was known to them and appreciated and loved.

Outside the circle of the Anglican Church he was also very highly regarded: he was the first President of the Australian Council for the World Council of Churches in Australia, and he held that office from 1946 to 1951; later, he returned to the office from 1954 to 1955, and again in 1957-58, and I know how very highly he was regarded in that wonderful, ecumenical organisation. It appealed naturally to his broad vision and to his natural friendliness, to his keen zeal for united action on the part of all the constituent members of the wide Christian Church. And his zeal, his capacity, and his spirit naturally inspired the confidence of those who worked with him, and caused him to be elected to this position of wider leadership. A very prominent member of the Council, who had been associated with him in that work for a very long period, remarked to me that his loss was incalculable to the ecumenical movement. He had a great missionary zeal and was regarded far and wide as a missionary statesman. He had a prodigious capacity for work; his industry was wonderful. Everybody who knew him paid tribute to his astonishing gift for personal kindness, which endeared him to a veritable multitude. He was not only greatly admired, but very greatly loved.

Many of us will also remember the inspiring leadership, the work and influence of his distinguished predecessor, John Charles Wright, and we shall be profoundly conscious of the responsibility that rests upon us as we seek to find a successor to these two eminent Christian leaders, who, between them, presided over the life and work and witness of our Diocese during almost half a century. We meet at a time of critical importance, not only to Australia but in the history of mankind, when the challenge of the Church's message and the witness of its life are of paramount importance for the general welfare and the destiny of the race. Our scientific knowledge and our technical skill have brought us possibilities of good or ill that stagger the imagination. They could be like the rod of Moses and help us to climb to the sunlit plateau of real progress, lasting happiness and abundant satisfaction. On the other hand, they could become the wriggling serpent, waiting to sting us to death. Which of these two is to be the fate of mankind? If we listen for the voice of God and follow His commands, we shall be able to stretch forth our hands to take the serpent by the tail, and it shall become the supporting rod with which we may ascend to the glorious heights of achievement and satisfaction. We have acquired a great deal of knowledge and developed amazing skill, but we have not learned to devote them to beneficent purposes. I often think that our generation, with its machine civilisation, driven by its great technical skill, is very much like a driver seated at the wheel of a powerful car but lacking a proper sense of direction and, as a result, the car is in imminent danger of hurtling over the precipice to tragic destruction below. Surely it must be obvious to all who reflect that in such circumstances the Church has both a gleaming opportunity and a dreadful responsibility because it has been entrusted with the task of proclaiming to mankind by word and example the way of salvation, corporate as well as individual. This reflection must add to our deep sense of duty as we set about electing our human leader in this place. May he help us by the grace of God to deliver our message with arresting power to a community threatened by subtle influences which lead men to a disregard of the central place that belongs to God in all our thinking and acting, and of His claim upon our life and our devotion. We cannot but view with grave anxiety the widespread drift away from the recognition of the sanctity of the Lord's Day and the alarming spread of the moral and social disease of gambling, as well as the menace of intemperance. This spirit of selfishness that finds such frequent expression in and around us, the setting up of material values by so many as the supreme objects of desire, and the general tendency to live as though our sojourn on earth were the only life - all these and other similar considerations challenge us with a sense of the dreadful urgency of the mission of the Church, and claim from us all the utter dedication of our lives to the building of the kingdom of God. May our new leader be enabled to inspire us, and may we be ready to follow earnestly his lead.

Perhaps, for the purpose of clarifying the Ordinance under which we conduct the business of our Session, I should remind you of the procedure which is there laid down for our direction. It seems to me to have been carefully and admirably designed for our assistance in arriving at a careful and unhurried conclusion. It provides for a progressive narrowing of the area of choice till we come to a final concentration on the few who in the light of the preceding elections seem most likely to receive the suffrages of such a substantial proportion of the total membership of the Synod as to support the belief that after further prayerful consideration, they might win the preference of the Synod as a whole. This afternoon we shall have handed in written nominations, and a list of the names thus submitted will be read out to the Synod, which will then adjourn until tomorrow. This interval provides an opportunity for a careful and prayerful individual survey of the names that are to be considered. The list will represent the aggregate of the suggestions made by all of the members of the Synod who desire to bring a name before their fellows. The names will be arranged in alphabetical order and placed separately before the members on a resolution in the form, "Shall A.B. be placed on the Select List?" If that question in any particular case shall be carried by a majority of either order of the members of the Synod then present, the name of that person shall be placed upon the Select List. The voting in this case is by show of hands and any member of Synod may vote for any number of the names thus submitted. When every name on the list has been dealt with in this way, those who have been placed upon the Select List are put to the Synod again in the same way, the resolution this time being, "Shall A.B. be placed on the Final List?" Such names as receive the votes of a majority of each order then present and voting shall be placed upon the Final List. This vote, if 30 members of the Synod desire it, shall be taken by Secret Ballot. In this case, as in the former, members may vote for as many names as they desire. The names on the Final List, on which there must be at least three names, are then placed in order before the members and such of them as receive a majority of the votes of each order are then considered, and the one who receives both these majorities and the highest aggregate majority of the votes of all the members present and voting, shall be declared by the President to be elected. This vote also may be by Secret Ballot if 30 members of the Synod express a desire for it.

And now, in conclusion, just a word or two on the spirit in which we should go to our task.

I am sure you must all have been impressed in reading the Acts of the Apostles by the diligence with which the members of the primitive Church sought the guidance and the power of the Holy Spirit in all their undertakings, including their conferences. Thus we read of the first election, the choice of one to take the place of Judas in the body of the Apostles, and we are told of how they prayed concerning the two men who seemed to them to have relevant qualifications: "And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, 'Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two Thou hast chosen.'" (Acts 1:23-24). In the 2nd chapter we read of the circumstances in which that early Christian society received the power and enlightenment of the Holy Ghost: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2:1-4) . There was among them an earnestness of purpose, a spirit of unity, and a submission to the Will of God, with a strong faith that believed in the fulfilment of their Master's promise and a love for Him that transcended and absorbed all other feelings and desires. Well could such a body say after a subsequent conference, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us." May we so thoroughly submit ourselves to His guidance and direction that at the end of this momentous Session we, too, may be able to say with all reverence and in very truth, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us, that this man whom we have elected should be chosen to be our Archbishop." May God help us to arrive at this happy conclusion!

The Rt Rev W G Hillard
Administrator of the Diocese

24 November 1958