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AUSTRALIA DAY 1979

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"THE CHRSTIAN FAITH"

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This is the Australia Day weekend. Sydney is a very different place to what it was when Captain Phillip stepped ashore for the first time in Sydney Cove in January, 1788. We can easily picture the scene because there is so much of the Australian coastline still remaining as it was in Phillip's day.

As we look back through the years and trace the development of our country and city there is a great deal to give thanks for. Firstly, and fundamentally, because of the peace which we enjoy, and the freedom from hostile forces fighting over our countryside. There are not many parts of the world which have enjoyed this blessing as fully as Australia. We have become so accustomed to freedom from invasion that we are growing careless, and oblivious to where our safety lies. Some of our leaders have been very free in their language. It takes years to build up friendship but it only takes moments to destroy it. We all know this from private life; the same is true in our public life, and national friendships. In the past we have depended upon our blood relationship with Great Britain for our security and freedom from invasion. In the last few years we have been secure in the friendship of the United States. Not so firm a friendship, of course, as a blood relationship, but a very genuine friendship and a most desirable one now that Great Britain is no longer in a position to provide protection.

America has the same cultural background as Australia and its foundation was due to the firm conviction of Christians who migrated to that country in order to exercise freely their Christian faith - a somewhat different beginning from Australia's! I believe it is to this Puritan foundation of America that many of that country's virtues are to be traced. There is no doubt that since the last war America has been generous in her support of underdeveloped nations, and in her resistance to military aggression as she saw it. That is why political denigration of America is to be deplored. It shows no consciousness of the debt we owe

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America, not least our protection in the last war.

This weekend six years ago saw the signing of the cease fire in Vietnam. The President of the United States declared it a peace of honour and we were thankful that the shooting stopped. Shooting is an unsatisfactory way of settling national quarrels but up till the present it has proved the only way on many occasions. For example, there was no other way of stopping Hitler from his on-going subjugation of neighbouring countries of Czechoslovakia and Poland. The world is much better off as a result of the sweeping out of existence of the Nazi regime. It would be better off, too, if we could sweep out of existence Communist regimes. The best indication of what communism is, is the Berlin Wall. That is the plain sign that the communist world is a prison. None of the free countries are prisons, their citizens can come and go - they don't go because they feel no oppression. The Berlin Wall is a clear indication that communism is an oppression which men and women would flee from if they were allowed to. America endeavoured to contain that oppression from sweeping over Indo-China; it stood more or less alone in this costly endeavour. It was not surprising that the American people have felt the time had come to bring their efforts to an end. The President described the cease fire agreement as a peace with honour. Honour tells us nothing in itself. The question that we need to ask ourselves is 'was it peace with justice?' because if it was with justice it will be with honour. If it was not, it cannot be. Justice is the basis of all our relationships with our neighbours - the doing what is right by them, the being fair to them, the giving to them what is their due.

As we look back on the history of Sydney from its first foundations I think we ought to thank God for growth in the Christian character of our community. This may seem difficult to believe in view of our present situation but an acquaintance with the life of early Sydney through its literature shows that God's Spirit working through His servants down the years has brought about a growth in ~~moral standards~~ and Christian

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conduct in our community. As we thank God for this we ought to be thankful for His servants who laboured in this city in the past, men like Richard Johnson, the first Chaplain, and Samuel Marsden and William Cowper, other early Chaplains who devoted their lives to working in this community, as missionaries as it were. There have been since those times a succession of godly ministers who regarded the working in the service of the gospel in Sydney as their life's calling and also there has been a succession of godly lay people. God does reward the faithfulness of His children, and as we have entered into the labours of other men and women, so we ourselves should labour in prayer and Christian living and testimony as we have opportunity. For our labour will not be in vain in the Lord, it will make its contribution to the welfare and moral prosperity of our country. For all this is the real blessing of a happy community living at peace with itself and this is the fruit of the Christian gospel. The prophet Samuel told his countrymen he would be sinning against God if he failed to pray for his fellow citizens. I wonder how regularly you pray for your country and for its leaders. The scriptures commend us to pray for those in responsible positions in government. For example, do you pray regularly for Mr. Fraser and for Mr. Wran, and for members of their cabinets? By prayer and Christian living and Christian witness let us make our contribution to the community which God in His providence has placed us.

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