

AUSTRALIA DAY 1973

By D.B. Knox

The Protestant Faith

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 of where our safety lies. Some of our leaders are 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 the present spate of political denigration of America by some of our Australian spokesmen is to be deplored. It shows no consciousness of the debt we owe America, not least our protection in the last war. It is also quite undeserved and some of the statements are gratuitously libellous which makes them all the more unchristian; and as I have been saying these verbal attacks on America are also nationally dangerous as it is so easy to destroy friendship and friendly attitudes, by immoderate and undeserved calumny.

Australia Day is a day to remind us to look to our position nationally. We will reap what we sow, and if we continue to sow ungrateful attacks on those who deserve our thanks, we can expect to reap the fruit of our behaviour by being isolated and then, of course, over-run. It would be worth a letter to the Prime Minister from each of you to ask him to use his influence to moderate these uncalled for and unchristian verbal attacks on America.

This weekend also sees the signing of the cease fire in Vietnam. The President of the United States has declared it is a peace of honour and we can be thankful that the shooting has 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 the 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 has been endeavouring to contain that oppression from sweeping over Indo-China; it has stood more or less alone in this costly endeavour. It is not surprising that the American people have felt the time has come to bring their efforts to an end. Mr. Nixon has 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 'is it peace with justice?' because if it is with justice it will be with honour. If it is 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. Only time can tell whether this is peace with justice to the citizens of Indo China.

We Christians are naturally interested in the welfare and future of our fellow Christians in South Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and the other countries of that area. We know that there is no future for Christians in communist dominated countries.

The church has been eliminated, for example, in North Korea and in China, as far as information is able to be obtained. God has not promised his servants freedom from persecution. Indeed Jesus that if people persecuted Him then they would also persecute His followers. And on another occasion He said that it was certain that offences could take place, but He warned us not to contribute to these by our own actions, but said "Woe to that man by whom the offence comes". We have the obligation to do all that is in our power to establish justice and restrain offences. Peace follows justice. There is no peace in the absence of justice, unless you call the quietness of prison peace.

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 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. Whitlam and for Sir Robert Askin, and for members of the ir 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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