



James Grant

KEBLE ADDRESS

1978

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AN ADDRESS

delivered on Friday 14 July 1978 by

the Rt Revd James Grant

Vicar-General, Diocese of Melbourne

to commemorate the anniversary of

JOHN KEBLE'S

Sermon at the Assizes 1833



Australian Church Union: Melbourne Branch

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THE SERMON WE COMMEMORATE TONIGHT - that preached by Mr John Keble, Fellow of Oriel College, before His Majesty's Judges of Assizes at Oxford on Sunday, 14 July 1833, in St Mary's, the University Church - is one of the most famous ever preached in the English Church. Its preacher was 'the true and primary author' of the Oxford Movement and officially - that is to say in the opinion of its leaders - its preaching marked the beginning of the Oxford Movement. John Henry Newman wrote in 1864, 'I have ever considered and kept the day as the start of the religious Movement of 1833'.

It was published under the title of *National Apostasy* and was occasioned by the Whig Government's suppression of ten Irish Bishopsrics with scant reference to the Church. Few today would contend for the pre-1833 establishment in Ireland. But Keble believed that behind the clamour for Church reform lay the decay of faith and that the tendency to abandon religious for secular principles of policy, the disregard of the obligation of solemn oaths, and the disrespect to the Bishops were signs that the nation was in danger of repudiating its duty to God. The duty of faithful churchmen lay in intercession for the guidance of the State as the minister of God, and in remonstrance against the intrusion of the State into the spiritual province of the Church, especially if that Church were kept strong and true by attention to its own spiritual discipline.

The sermon made no vast stir at the time. Canon Ollard in his *Short History of the Oxford Movement* writes:

One of the two judges before whom it was preached is said to have remarked that 'it was an appropriate discourse'. 'Some barristers on the Tory side thought it too strong, especially as one of the judges, Gurney, either was or had been a Dissenter.' Dr Pusey was said to consider 'some passages rather too pointed'. But an observer of rare powers marked it with wonderful acuteness. 'I cannot help thinking it,' wrote J.B. Mozley, 'a kind of exordium of a great revolution - shall I call it? - coming on, whether rapidly or slowly we cannot tell, but at any rate most surely.'

And so it proved. Behind the opposition to and fear of recent political events there lay a new vision of the Church of England. For Keble was asserting that the Church was not merely a department of the State but the Body of Christ, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic, the custodian and dispenser of the faith and grace once delivered to the saints, the pillar and ground of truth.

For some this newly-realised Catholicism of the Church of England issued in romantic excesses and self indulgence, but for far more it found its expression in renewed holiness of life, in new penitence and self dedication, in renewed study of the Scriptures, the Fathers, and theology, and renewed zeal for evangelism and for ministering to the spiritual and bodily needs of the nation. Let me quote to you an account of some of the first fruits of that renewal movement. I quote from Archdeacon Stranks' life of W.F. Hook, the great nineteenth century Vicar of Leeds:

'We lived together to save money, so that we could have more to spend on the poor. We rose at six, and within a few minutes were assembled for a short service wherein we blessed God for our preservation through the night, and dedicated ourselves afresh to His service throughout the day. At half-past seven two of us were at church, beginning the early morning service, which was regularly attended by a number of earnest souls, both young and old, rich and poor, some of whom came from a considerable distance. Before breakfast we had our own family worship. At nine the day schools had to be opened with prayer, and afterwards religious instruction given to the older scholars. From school the transition was naturally to the districts, where the anxiously expected visits were made until half-past ten, at which hour those of us who had not already been to Morning Prayer had to hasten to church to take the ordinary forenoon service, preceded by marriages and followed by baptisms and churchings, while the others continued to visit in their districts. In the afternoon, at three, came baptisms again, with churchings, and burials, and a full choral service; the latter to be repeated at half-past seven, but now only read for the

convenience of working people, and others, who could not attend earlier. At the last service in church only one curate was usually present, the rest being otherwise fully occupied, some with classes of candidates for Confirmation, or of communicants, others at evening schools, but all in one way or another. It was usually ten o'clock before we had wearily reached home, to eat our simple supper, have our night's devotion, and go gladly to rest. Sunday, however sacred, was no Sabbath, being the day least of all the seven a day of rest.' It was no mere turn of the tide, but work and prayer like that, which brought Victorian England back to religion.

Such accounts could be multiplied and if 1933 found the Church of England at home and abroad renewed and transformed, this reflected the praying, the thinking, and the serving of priests and laity who had encountered Christ and become possessed by his Spirit, within the fellowship of his Church.

There has just been published a new biography of the first Bishop of Australia, William Grant Broughton, a study of whose life makes abundantly clear how much he welcomed the Church's recovery of its catholicity. Faced as he was with uncooperative Governors, pestiferous Presbyterians, and rebellious Roman Catholics, Broughton was sustained by the prayers, the counsel, and the money of such men as Joshua Watson, Edward Hawkins of S.P.G., Edward Coleridge, and W.E. Gladstone, and with the help of a new breed of clergy he was able to erect the household of Faith we have inherited.

In this Diocese, for a generation the men of Oxford made little inroads on the preserves of the men of Cambridge and of Dublin, so carefully shepherded by Charles Perry. Only Handfield at St Peter's and Gregory at All Saints' St Kilda gave promise of things to come. But with the coming of James Moorhouse fresh winds began to blow. From his new Theological School at Trinity College came a remarkable group of men - J.F. Stretch, A.V. Green, T.H. Armstrong, Reginald Stephen, E.S. Hughes, William Hancock. They were ably supported by such as William Chalmers, Robert Potter, and J.S. Hart. Great alike in prayer and study, they convinced

the gainsayers and proclaimed their truth. In the same years the foundation of the Mission to Streets and Lanes, the Community of the Holy Name, the Holy Redeemer Mission, Fitzroy, and the early support for the New Guinea Mission proved that Faith and works grew together.

I would direct your attention also to those great teachers and pastors, Ernest Hughes and Walter Green - what a joy for a parish priest to have in his parish one who was taught the Faith by such giants. And to Farnham Maynard - great in worship, great in study - think of him editing the *Australian Church Quarterly* for twenty-five years - great in his concern for social justice.

And finally, let us direct our attention to ourselves, the heirs of the men of 1833. How do we measure up? Are we still foremost in prayer and discipline, in study and reflection, and in caring and serving? Do we value a bishop for the height of his mitre, a priest for the depth of his lace, or a server by his capacity for vino? Or for their following of Christ? Are we content to take our theology from brightly-coloured paperbacks, and do we look for the Word of God only in a denim cover? Are we more intent on sheltering in a stifling ecclesiastical hothouse than in facing the bracing winds of our increasingly vital and pluralistic Melbourne community?

One of the great privileges a bishop enjoys is to see and know his diocese or region for what it is; in all its strength and in its weakness. Twenty years ago, when I was ordained, the centres of life, of outreach, and of vigorous thought in this Diocese were, generally speaking, the Catholic parishes. Today this is no longer the case. Today the initiative rests very largely with the new-style evangelicals and with the charismatics. I thank God for our evangelical brethren: I admire their discipline, their knowledge, and their commitment. I thank God for our charismatic brethren: I thank God for their freedom, their faith, their warmth. But I long for these fruits of today's renewal to be found more generally among the inheritors of the Oxford renewal.

Some years ago that man of prayer, that profound theologian, that great-hearted pastor, Michael Ramsey, after

meeting some flower-carrying Christians, was asked his view of them. To which he replied, 'I admire their devotion to our Lord and to each other but unless they can add to these discipline, study, and outreach and come to appreciate the fruit of twenty centuries of the Spirit at work, I do not think their witness for Christ will be effective or lasting'.

The Church is always in danger; from within more often than from without. As we thankfully recall the response of our fathers in the Faith to the challenge of their age, let us with no less confidence commit ourselves to that renewal of ourselves, our Church, and our world for which the Holy Spirit has equipped us and which he calls us to undertake in faith, in hope, and in love.