

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters there has often been occasion to summarise plans proposed at, for example, annual vestry meetings. Almost invariably I have chosen to move on to the practical matters. But there is a danger of historical myopia in such writing. A little reflection soon shows that it is important to emphasise that in almost every case successive incumbents (perhaps more recently than in the more distant past) have spoken about such great and abiding themes of the Christian life and fellowship as the ongoing necessity for prayer, to be pleading to God for strength to carry out the core activities of the parish. Another has always been the commitment to Scripture-based preaching, and its concomitant, the individual study and commitment to the Bible as guide to doctrine and life ('that we might in such wise read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou has given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ' as Thomas Cranmer put it all those years ago in the Book of Common Prayer). A third repetitive theme has been the call to a godly and loving fellowship ('love one another as I have loved you. By this all men will know that you are my disciples.').¹ These great themes occur so often in the reports and special addresses of successive rectors that they are easily taken for granted, but they have remained the fundamental building blocks in the life of this congregation from beginning to the present. They are what have given life and purpose to the congregation and they must never be discounted.

What was preached from the pulpit?

So then, let us take a moment to review what was preached from the pulpit at Trinity through its history. There were the collected sermons Charles Howard preached at Boroughbridge that are so intensely evangelical in character and content, and there was his very plain declaration to his congregation in Adelaide that he preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Of Farrell there is little that survives: his brief occasional sermon at St Paul's Port Adelaide suggests a similar but cautious and far from eloquent evangelical core. Richardson Reid remains a closed book: his training was not extensive, but he never sought to move his parish in the direction of the newly fashionable Anglo-Catholic teaching or style. Indeed, the parish chose a known and active Evangelical from Melbourne to succeed him. Webb's credentials were confirmed in his unrelenting commitment to evangelism and to the promotion of the Evangelical cause during his long tenure at Trinity. His work in establishing CMS South Australia was his great contribution. Of Fulford and Dillon we have just a few oral memories: Fulford eager for revival, Dillon eager that people

turned to Christ before it was too late and the Lord came in judgement upon the earth. Graham Delbridge brought his 1940s training at Moore College under T.C. Hammond to bear along with an attractive personal style: men and women were converted to Christ in numbers under his guidance and the church rapidly expanded its membership.

Shilton from Melbourne continued that endeavour. There are many sermons of his in print or on tape that might be interrogated. They were often long, highly structured and sometimes longer on application than exposition. Like most parish clergy Shilton never claimed to be an original scholar, but he worked hard at linking Christianity to the society around him, both in his sermons and his newspaper articles. From the time of Paul Barnett, who was and remains a New Testament scholar of international standing, the Bible has been brought even closer to the centre of what was preached from the pulpit. The church lectionary was abandoned in favour of annual syllabuses of preaching based on blocks of Scripture: Old Testament, Gospels, the letters of Paul (much studied by Barnett). As we saw, Piper brought these expository sermons to a high point of clarity and impact, especially when he abandoned his reliance on notes. Occasionally there would be issues-based sets of sermons, or perhaps those based on major doctrinal themes. Of course the congregation loyally endured the tyro endeavours of junior staff, but these sermons for the most part fitted readily within the well-established patterns the rectors laid down. Even Paul Harrington took time to get into his stride: his emphasis on the opportunity of entering into a rich and permanent relationship with God through Christ at first overwhelmed him: one early sermon used the word ‘relationship’ more than thirty times in the space of his allotted twenty-five or so minutes!

But the tradition has remained essentially unbroken from the commencement of the life of the congregation. The Bible dominates the pulpit, while reason and the tradition of the church, those other great standbys of Anglican theology and preaching, have been thoroughly subordinated. The preaching at Trinity is therefore quite different from what is now to be heard in a number other Anglican pulpits around the nation where that respectful dominance of Bible is not maintained. That is why so many new members of the congregation at Trinity say that they have become members because of the strong emphasis on the Bible from the pulpit. And the message remains the same: salvation leading to a new relationship with God is on offer through the work of Christ crucified and risen.

All this links closely with the key characteristics of the Evangelical which David Bebbington enunciated in his classic book, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* and which I outlined in the Introduction: this is, quite self-consciously and publicly, a crucicentric, biblical, conversionist and activist congregation. It began as one and it has never deviated from those commitments. If ever this study has established anything it has been the way in which the parish of Holy Trinity can be described, emphatically and by reiterated public statement, as an exemplary evangelical fellowship.

When we move from those great themes to matters of more practical and day-to-day significance, we must carry them always with us as defining and shaping characteristics of the congregation, whatever its current format has been at the varying stages of its history.

Coping with change

There is little doubt from this narrative that the Trinity congregation has endured good times and bad, times when ebullience ruled and a new roof could be installed or a vast auditorium planned, or times when the church was offered for sale to the government or the Roman Catholic bishop, when the parish funds survived on the generosity of the father-in-law of the rector, or when the archbishop fulminated furiously against the parish. In all of these situations, the incumbent and the parish have sought to rely on those central truths of Christian teaching just examined. That has been their rock of solidity. So they have coped with change with some success, as the contemporary structure of the Trinity network suggests. That balance between long-term certainties and the ever-present difficulties of parish life has marked the story from beginning to end.

The trust deed and the trustees

Central to the character of Holy Trinity Adelaide, from the moment of its establishment and to its ongoing survival and growth ever since, has been the trust deed executed first in London in 1836 and renewed, confirmed, refreshed and built on over subsequent decades. It began as a well-understood legal necessity to manage property and funds in a society where trusts were widely used and well understood: marriage jointures, inheritances, widow's portions and much besides were handled by such arrangements. The references to the doctrines of the Church of England in it were likewise normal and without controversial intent.

At the core of their duties was the protection of the parish's property, real and other. But the first trustees failed in their duty as bankruptcy ravaged the colony. The crushing load was borne solely by the incumbent, to the point where, unavailingly, he offered the church building for sale. The offers failed just because of the trust: alone he could not offer clear title. The crisis passed, new trustees were appointed and matters returned to a more even keel. At the other end of this tale, the trustees have borne in mind the protection of the property first set aside for Trinity to be held in the trust while also developing and extending the legal structure through the establishment first of Trinity Church Trust Incorporated and latterly, of Holy Trinity Ltd. More proactive than some of their original forbears, they are actively fulfilling the spirit and intent of those who established the original trust deed.

The operation and survival of the trust has also had the effect of setting this parish somewhat apart from others in the diocese established more directly under the control of the bishop. The trustees at Trinity have always seen their role as to support the parish in the ways laid out in the deed and centrally to maintain the tradition of the church which was established by the first incumbent, Charles Howard. With greater or lesser degrees of conviction over the history of the parish, they have held doggedly to those roles, and in so doing have provided a degree of stability and continuity which has helped mightily to maintain the character and strength of the parish. Of course, the clear-headed dedication of successive individual trustees has contributed greatly to this outcome: for example Samuel Tomkinson in the nineteenth century, and Skip Tonkin and Peter Smith in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Another important role which the trustees have carried out, though not in every case, has been to mentor and encourage the rector, to offer wisdom and suggestions, to pray with and encourage him. All the recent incumbents have spoken feelingly of this personal support they have received. The parish has benefited enormously from this largely unseen contribution to its life.

The rector and the parish

Naturally enough, an effective parish is one in which incumbent and congregation are at one, where trust and love are mutual, and where the resultant confidence flows in effective parish life and ministry. Broadly this has been true of Trinity throughout its history. Death and departure have broken the bonds before their time on occasion, but for the most part it has been a series of rich relationships, and those who decided otherwise moved elsewhere. Significant evidence of this relationship can be found in the steadily, even dramatically growing size of the annual budget as members have expressed their confidence in their leaders in the most obvious way available to them as they accepted and owned the goals being laid out before them.

More than that, each could mentor and influence the other. Reg Piper made the point to me in an interview:

[Bishop] Ken Short [of Sydney] used to quote Cranfield's 'great preachers make great congregations and great congregations make great preachers'. I think you can substitute ministers for preachers and the saying holds true in effect even if the ministers aren't great they certainly benefit from 'great trinity' and this in turn has had very good effect on the national church.²

The obvious example was Piper himself, whose preaching improved so dramatically at Trinity after Skip Tonkin challenged him to dispense with notes. The willingness of the trustees to encourage their rectors to take substantial and creative study leave has paid off wonderfully many times.

The changing contribution of women

One aspect of this bond between rector and parish has been the ongoing contribution of women to the development of the parish. While at first they were 'God's willing workers', they could be found in increasing numbers in the Sunday school or behind the tea urns at parish fund-raisers. By the end of the nineteenth century they were attending vestry meetings in their own right. Not least among them were the rectors' wives. Perhaps we might pass on from the sad story of the Farrells and the family support Mary Reid brought to her husband Richardson to notice the serene strength of Emma Webb, the eager personal work and mentoring of Iris Fulford and Doris Dillon, and the energetic contribution in the rectory offered by Joan Shilton. The contributions of later rectors' wives have also been emphasised in the chapters above. Eventually it was recognised that they could not carry the burden alone. Nor did the rising numbers of competent and educated women of the later twentieth century expect them to any longer: many others took up tasks not only in the Sunday school but on the parish council, as wardens, as members of pastoral and leadership

committees and as leaders of women's groups. To them were added female staff members who could carry out pastoral and organisational work, and not only among women. But balancing these contributions was ongoing conviction of Trinity's leaders that women must not exercise a presiding or public teaching role to mixed groups: only men may exercise pastoral leadership and preach. While this policy might have limited some options or dissuaded some from joining, the parish has not suffered. Some for whom it was an essential element in their membership found other congregations with whom to worship.

Women's ministry, notably the call for women's ordination as equal partners with male clergy, never became an issue upon which the Trinity congregation divided in difficult public controversy, as well it might have. Plainly many calculated that the leadership had made up their collective mind and that it was not for turning: attempts to change it would be more costly than it was worth. Then there was the widely held view that debating the place and role of women was a secondary issue about which the Bible had only limited guidance, and that therefore it should not be allowed to distract the congregation from much more important matters. Again, ministry by and among women was going on, and new and appropriate methods were being deployed. If it was effective, why compromise it by asking for even more. There has been a maturity of judgement among Trinity people about the issue of women's ministry which has kept it within a manageable perspective. Perhaps too the community at large has matured into a more generous and accepting view of different perspectives on this subject.

Relations with the diocese

Whatever the parish, there will be differences of opinion with the diocese, in matters great and small. In that way, Trinity has been no different. Points of difference as well as moments of cooperation have been mentioned throughout this book, beginning with the time Charles Howard spent with Bishop William Broughton in London before they both departed for Australia. Defining the character of the relationship between Trinity and the diocese of Adelaide have been the two constitutive documents: for the parish its 1836 trust deed, for the diocese, the consensual compact of 1856 and the constitution which grew out of it. Trinity's trustees have always protected their role in the appointment of the incumbent through their control over the temporal resources, the 'living'. While not alone among the parishes of the diocese of Adelaide in possessing such authority, it has been exercised at Trinity with a clear sense of independence from the bishop, who has had to accept the decision of the parish with such grace as he can muster.

Trinity began with an evangelical set of convictions, and as well, a low church style. Fairly soon that style became notably divergent from what was fashionable in most other parishes of the diocese. Especially under Bishop Kennion and his successors, Adelaide largely became a high church diocese in style and conviction. Many outside Trinity looked askance at what they regarded as old-fashioned or worse about its worship and teaching. Characteristic them and us tensions developed from time to time, sometimes based on little more than ignorance or prejudice on

either side. More recently, the diocese has become more diverse in its theology and styles of worship. A notable development was the appointment by Archbishop Driver of Dr Tim Harris, a former rector of St Matthew's, Kensington, and a known evangelical, as assistant bishop with responsibility for mission and evangelism. Driver deliberately intended this appointment to signal the significant role evangelicals could play in the diocese. This has blunted some of the low level disdain, though the effects of what might possibly be called envy at Trinity's apparent financial prosperity and suspicion at its growth continue to fuel those tensions. For the most part people ignore such matters and get on with the job, cooperating where they can.

The emergence of 'HTA Hills' and the subsequent churches in the Trinity network have been more than the story of successful church planting, however satisfying that is to the Trinity congregation. The process has also been about the larger issues of church polity and the exercise of authority within the confines of the Anglican Church of Australia. Paul Harrington pressed the advantages the trust deed gave him when negotiating the grey areas in the power relationship between his parish and the diocese of Adelaide. On the other hand, in his expectation that Holy Trinity would comply with his directions, Archbishop George adopted a traditional, even autocratic, view of his office and its powers. The exchange was more than just a generational conflict. Older ideas of habitual obedience and coherence within the Anglican Church of Australia were visibly fragmenting, here as elsewhere.³ The story revealed a great deal of disillusionment at received assumptions about power relationships within the Anglican Church. Although Archbishop George subsequently left office, the tensions between Holy Trinity and the diocese of Adelaide have yet to be resolved. The authority of the contemporary Anglican diocesan bishop in a church that increasingly reflects the pluralism and democratic expectations of the surrounding culture therefore remains an important issue. Mutual trust and the appropriate exercise of power, or more realistically, influence, within diocesan structures are major challenges for the Anglican Church of Australia as its members grapple with their future in the twenty-first century.

Paul Harrington reiterated some of this in a Pew Bulletin letter in 2011:

I know that for some 'Anglican' is not so much a theological term as a statement of a connection to an institution with a common culture. That is why here at Trinity we are firstly an evangelical church. This term was coined in the eighteenth century and refers to a movement of the gospel which rediscovered the biblical truths of justification by faith alone and the finished sacrificial work of Christ on the cross. Evangelicals proclaim the gospel and look for conversion by the power of the Spirit. Here at Trinity we are evangelical first and Anglican second. Pray for our Synod reps that they can be faithful evangelicals at the meeting next weekend.⁴

As we have seen, Harrington, like all his predecessors, was a convinced low churchman. This meant that he and his parish consistently declined to adopt the more elaborate forms of liturgy practised in many other

churches in the diocese. Nor would Trinity leaders ever go beyond the view that episcopacy was a useful form of church governance to maintain effectiveness and good order. Not everyone shares this essentially managerial view, preferring more exalted interpretations of the significance of the diocese.⁵ The views and practices adopted at Trinity had a long and distinguished pedigree rooted in the Reformation and its leaders were not about to change their minds on such core issues. Therefore, at the heart of the differences between Trinity and the diocese, at least from the perspective of Harrington and his predecessors, were not just matters of church style, but the commitment by Trinity to proclamation of the gospel of Christ.

Trinity in the wider church world

Dean Marryat in 1895 was conscious the congregation and trustees were appointing a man (Frederick Webb) of decided evangelical views from Melbourne. He protested at this importation from outside the diocese, but to no avail. Webb fulfilled the expectations of the parish powerfully. He possessed excellent links with other evangelical leaders around Australia. The creation of the CMS SA branch in 1916 and with the creation of the evangelical trust were obvious fruits. Then there were two BCA men who came after him in succession, Reg Fulford and Fred Dillon: once again the parish looked outside for renewal of its leadership and drew on friendships around Australia to supply it. With Delbridge and then Shilton, when significant growth in numbers began to occur, Trinity needed curates regularly, and sought them from Melbourne and Sydney. Shilton was a great networker and sought to see and promote the big picture: Billy Graham and Lausanne were taken up enthusiastically, while he stood apart from the diocese of Adelaide under Bishop Reed. Paul Barnett later claimed that Shilton was a great promoter of Trinity wherever he had the opportunity. It probably paid off in the inward flow of new families from interstate who joined Trinity having heard about it from friends as the evangelical centre in Adelaide: that was certainly true for me and my wife. Both Delbridge and Shilton, and then Barnett, were called back to senior posts in Sydney. In Reg Piper's time Trinity continued to call men from interstate, men who often possessed greater experience and competence than some of the curates of the 1950s and 1960s, suggesting that Trinity had developed attractions for clergy looking for experience and careers outside their home base. Then of course there was the outward flow: Barnett, Piper and eventually Forsyth and Brain were appointed bishops. In Harrington's time much the same can be seen: Harrington has often spoken at interstate conferences, and he has recruited mainly in Sydney, as well as encouraging the evangelicals within the diocese of Adelaide. From the outside looking in, there has been appreciative recognition that Trinity shares outlooks that are held dear elsewhere, notably in Sydney and some parts of Melbourne. It is likely that the Trinity church-planting endeavours are being observed closely by others, whether admiringly or not. By 2012, to be fair, Trinity was by no means the only Anglican Church around Australia with multiple worship sites and multiple congregations.⁶ However, it does have a particular vision for taking the gospel to a whole city reflected in the geographic spread of its planting activity, without the

limitations of geographic parish boundaries. It also has managed to plant a church from one of its church plants. This ‘grand-daughter’ planting probably represents a pioneering approach to church planting in Anglican churches around Australia. Taken together Trinity and these other multi-centred network churches represent a challenging and powerful new departure. How that network model works out in the life of the Anglican Church in Australia and more generally in the life of Christianity in this country will be for the next generation of church historians to investigate.

There has been an evangelical tradition at Trinity since 1836. This book has told the story of its establishment and its development, its successes and its failures. It is a tradition consciously sustained and understood. Trinity’s present members are well aware that they are ‘surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses’ and that, consequently, they must press on eagerly in the Christian faith, based on Christ and Him crucified. There is every reason that emphasis will continue into the future. The trustees and the rector, at the centre of the congregation, are too aware of the need to maintain the existing evangelical momentum, and too aware of its benefits, to allow any deliberate undermining of the evangelical heritage which has been the central theme in the history of this city church. Anglican, yes, middle class for the most part too, by no means always successful, enduring lean times as well as good. But centrally, the story has been the story of the maintenance and presentation of the evangelical Christianity which was brought to the colony in 1836.

Praise the Lord

1 John 13.34-5.

2 Reg Piper in conversation with Brian Dickey, 31 Jul 2011.

3 Explored more fully in David Hilliard, ‘The Ties That Used to Bind: a fresh look at the history of Australian Anglicanism’, *Pacifica* 11, October 1998, pp.265-80.

4 Pew Bulletin, 16 Oct 2001.

5 See for example, the views expressed by John Fleming in a review of the original edition of this book in the *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, vol. 16, 1988, pp. 183-5.

6 For example, Crossway Anglican in Sydney, and St Jude’s, Carlton in Melbourne. No doubt there are now others.