

1971 was also a year of conferences. Within the Anglican church I had been chairing a small committee which for two years was working towards a major Anglican Congress to be held in September. The inspiration for this conference came from the Reverend George Pearson, a former CMS missionary from Tanzania. He felt that the evangelical wing of the church in Australia needed to follow the example of the English movement known as the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion (EFAC), with their 1967 Keele, UK conference. This large gathering had succeeded in bringing evangelicals, clergy and lay people, closely together and establishing them with a new profile in the British church. It had proved of immense and lasting significance marking a renewed surge of biblical churchmanship in the Church of England.

It was George Pearson's vision that something similar should take place in Australia. He virtually had me installed as Chairman, somewhat against my will at first and we gathered a small committee. Before long we were all enthused with the potential, although it took a great deal of persuasion on our part to engender a similar spirit within the wider constituency of the church. Nevertheless eventually excellent plans took shape and in the September vacation of 1971 the first National Evangelical Anglican Congress (NEAC) was held at Monash University near Melbourne, attended by over six hundred delegates drawn from all states. The chief speaker was the Reverend Michael Green from Oxford, supported by many other able men and women in an excellent program. Leadership of the congress was shared between Bishop Clive Kerle of Sydney and myself, demonstrating a nice balance between Melbourne and Sydney and clerical and lay members. Clive and I were old friends and the arrangement worked well.

The congress proved to be a memorable occasion and a milestone in the life of the Australian Anglican church. As I move about Australia it is quite usual to meet clergy who refer to it as a special happening in their experience. I believe it was at this gathering that the question of the ordination of women in the Anglican church was first seriously publicly debated in Australia. We also heard an address from a female Aboriginal

writer, on issues of injustice affecting the lives of her people, which was not common at the time. Social concern in general gained a high profile. Michael Green in his studies from Acts was superb and appealed greatly to the younger clergy. We enjoyed having him with us at home for a couple of days – a lively character! Much was owed to George Pearson for his strategic thinking. His enthusiasm was unabated and he began almost immediately talking about the need for a further congress in another ten years time. This did in fact take place in 1981 also at Monash. One of the many benefits stemming from the Congress was that we now had a formally constituted committee of the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion functioning in Australia, albeit in modest fashion.

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1981

Unplanned Retirement

Just prior to our move from Rosanna to Mt Eliza Ada and I had both attended the second NEAC where some 600 delegates from all over Australia gathered for six days. Once again I had been chairman of the planning committee for this major event, perhaps because I was chairman of EFAC which was the body responsible for it. It was a demanding task and I worked closely with the Vice-Chairman, Bishop John Reid of Sydney, and a number of other splendid men and women on the planning group. The Reverend George Pearson was the one whose vision and enthusiasm had inspired the first congress and he was again a tower of strength. Profiting from our experience of the first congress, the program was far-reaching, arranged under four main headings. These were:

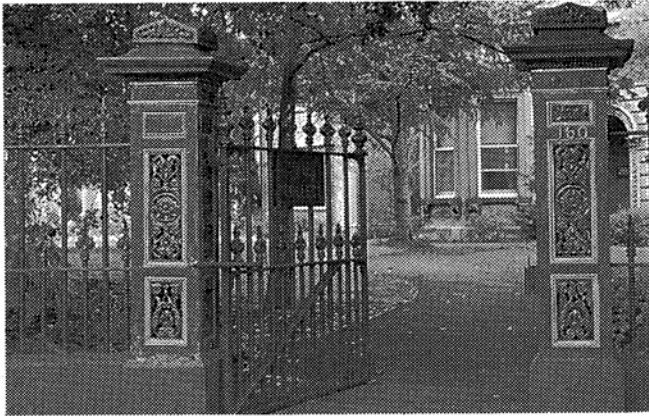
- The Gospel and the Kingdom.
- Life and Ministry of the Congregation.
- Christ and the Spirit.
- Marriage and Family in God's Purposes.

Over thirty speakers dealt with different aspects of these themes plus a most impressive array of workshop leaders. John Stott, John Gladwin, Colin Buchanan and Vinay Samuel were distinguished guest speakers from overseas. As in 1971 the major messages were published in a 220 page volume entitled *Agenda for a Biblical Church*.

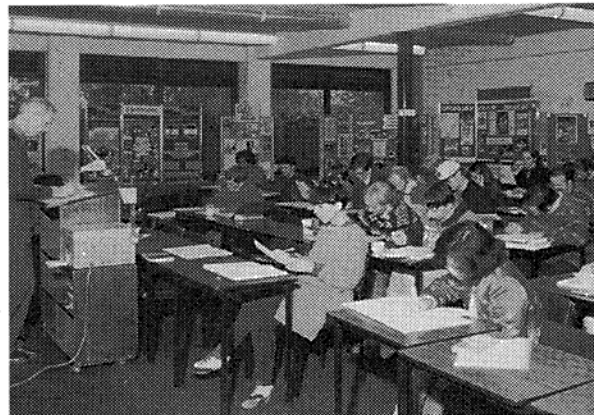
These two large gatherings, ten years apart, did a great deal to bring evangelical lay people and clergy together, and also greatly helped relationships between those of Sydney and Melbourne and the smaller dioceses. This unity was to be fiercely tested a few years later in the debate over the ordination of women to the priesthood. The Congress program was widely praised and appreciated, but EFAC decided later that due to escalating costs of travel and accommodation it was better in future to maintain a program of smaller conferences for about 120 – 150 people on specific topics each second year, and this is the pattern which has prevailed since 1981.

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In October we hosted a large function at home organised by the Ladies Committee of Ridley College with a view to promoting greater interest in the work of the College. Jean Penman



Two views of Ridley College. Above, the main entrance gate, and at right a lecture in progress.



spoke and encouraged those present to reach out to new immigrants, especially Muslims, amongst whom she and her husband had worked for so long.

Once again we headed for Brisbane by car, this time with the objective of me catching a plane for Port Moresby and then on return collecting our English visitors, Ruth and Derek Warren and driving them down the coast to Sydney. Our overnight stops were Coffs Harbour and Forster and our friends enjoyed the trip greatly. Ada and I then departed, leaving the Warrens to enjoy Sydney for another week and journey down to our home later. Derek and Ruth then had twelve relaxing days with us. We made numerous excursions together but regretfully were unable to satisfy their keen desire to see kangaroos in the 'wild', where we had expected them to be. It was beautiful weather and the last four days of October were all over 30 degrees, enabling them to swim at the beach each day. We are sure that thereafter they retained a very favourable view of Melbourne's spring weather.

At the end of November Geoff and Anne Kells entertained the Bookhouse board members at a dinner party in their home at which I was thanked for my service as chairman over some twenty years. Back in Melbourne we enjoyed all the usual Christmas activities with the final day of the year bringing a rather special event when the whole fleet of tall ships sailed into Port Phillip bay as part of the festivities associated with Australia's bicentenary. The main celebrations were to take place in Sydney on January 26th, being the actual anniversary date, but this was a foretaste and one which Melburnians relished. We entertained a large party of friends on the cliff top from early morning and enjoyed the sight of these graceful ships making their way up the bay.

This was a nice prelude to a truly memorable week in Sydney marking the bicentenary of our nation. Tuesday, January 26th 1988 will live long in our memories, particularly the sight of hundreds of yachts and boats of all sizes attending the handsome sailing ships as they made their way up the harbour. The weather was perfect and from early morn till late at night the day was marked by a unique sense of euphoria which was shared by the hundreds of thousands who gathered in Sydney and in other cities and towns throughout the land. It was a day of shared good will, remarkably free from serious crime or accident.

We awoke early that morning to the sound of hundreds of family groups walking down Macquarie Street to the harbour and we later joined some of them in the Botanic Gardens. After lunch we were able to view the whole extensive panorama from the roof of the Club building. Late afternoon saw us on the harbour in a ferry and for quite some time we were unable to proceed, because of the crowded conditions on the water. This gave us an unrivalled view of the ships and the harbour in carnival mood. At dinner in the Club we met some friends and went with them to the gardens to watch the extended fireworks display, rounding off a notable day. In one sense ours is still a young country and as a people we lack the strong feeling of history enjoyed by citizens of the 'Old world' At this point in time I had lived for a third of the life of Australia as a nation, a concept which comes as a surprise to my friends on the other side of the world. I believe that these celebrations did a lot to strengthen our feeling of nationhood.

Returning home from that exciting week in Sydney we continued the 200th Anniversary theme by attending a special cricket match between England and Australia at the MCG with English-born Stephen and Rosemary Bird as our guests. Another major bicentenary event took place on May 9th when Her Majesty the Queen opened the new Federal Parliament House at Canberra, a notable building erected at a cost in excess of \$1 billion.

During this time we had the great pleasure of the company of our friend from SU in Peru, Paul Clarke. He spoke to a large gathering in our home on the Saturday evening and preached at the morning service in church next day. Both of these addresses lived long in the memory of many who heard them. Paul, and his wife Marty, stand very high on the list of remarkable Christian people we have been privileged to know through the Scripture Union. One week later another group of friends were invited to join in celebrating my 70th birthday. It was a warm and friendly occasion which the guest of honour greatly enjoyed. On the following Wednesday we had a total of fifteen present at the Bible study, the highest number to date. The next weekend was the parish house party at Kallista when thirty-five parishioners enjoyed a splendid time of fellowship despite cold and wet weather. These gatherings have continued through the years and have done much to draw people into a closer fellowship with the Lord and with each other.

The second half of the bicentennial year also provided us with an array of interests. We flew to London via Hong Kong and made our way to the University of Kent at Canterbury where we joined with six hundred delegates to a conference conducted by the Anglican Renewal Fellowship. Dr Terry Fulham of New York delivered a masterly series of Bible studies and Graham Kendrick, the hymn writer, led the worship sessions, amongst numerous other features, altogether a fine gathering. From there we moved to Oak Hill Theological College, north of London, where the English EFAC movement had arranged a one week pre-Lambeth programme for bishops from around the world. We had kindly been invited to join with them as I was Australian chairman and a member of the international executive of EFAC, and we especially enjoyed meeting a number of the African bishops. Some of them were to play a major



EFAC, International Executive 1988.

Back row, from left: Bishop David Evans, Bishop Gideon Olajide, Alan Kerr, Jill Dann, Bishop Michael Nazir Ali, John Rodgers, Ruth Etchells.

Front row: Dr John Stott, Bishop Donald Cameron, Dr Vinay Samuel.

role in the Lambeth conference a few days later and, I gathered, in the initiative for the 'Decade of Evangelism'.

Later that month we had a very satisfying executive meeting of the EFAC international body, enjoyable too, as we were guests of a family which generously made its centuries-old home 'Highmoor Hall' available for such meetings. We met in a specially built conference room, ate in the panelled dining room with members of the family, slept in the huge bedrooms and strolled and chatted in the spacious grounds and gardens. It was as well that we made the most of these luxurious surroundings as the following year we held our meeting at Oxford and were accommodated in a small and rather cheerless college. A good opportunity to put Paul's well known advice into practice.

That 1989 meeting marked the retirement of Dr John Stott, on the grounds of age, from the executive of a movement which he had so carefully guided over the years. For the same reason it

was also my final meeting, having exceeded the set retirement age by one year. I was succeeded as Australian chairman by Bishop Peter Chiswell, and Canon David Claydon became the international delegate. It is encouraging to see EFAC playing an increasingly influential role within the Anglican church worldwide.