

'Bumper Harvest: Can we have More? Factors leading to Revival in Australia and their Lessons for Mission in Rural Australia today' by Rev Stuart Piggins

'The rural church, a place of feeling not just a place of function. Understand this and the key to effective ministry may be at hand.'
The Rev Clive Cook, Baptist Pastor

Introduction

The mission of BCA is to serve remote and rural people through the Anglican Church. These people include the families of farmers and pastoral workers, miners, rural townspeople, and indigenous Australians. The contention of this address is that revival is God's greatest instrument for energising his people to deal with their deepest needs, both personal and communal. Most fundamentally that need is spiritual hunger, but in those areas served by the BCA, spiritual hunger expresses itself in terms of marginalisation, alienation, loneliness, degradation, economic insecurity, and community conflict. The long drought of the 1980s and the rural recession of the 1990s has sent rural Australia into further decline, exacerbating the anxieties of all who depend on the land for their livelihood. Can religious revival revive the bush? Unlike America and Wales, Australia does not have a reputation as a land of revival, and indeed it has never been swept by a great awakening. But local revivals, especially in small rural communities have been surprisingly frequent, and the fires of revival have sometimes raged quite fiercely. We will look at some of them in this address and explore the implications of them for the possible future strategy of the BCA. As a foundation for this exploration, let me begin with a definition of revival.

Definition

Revival is a sovereign work of God the heavenly Father, manifesting his glory on the earth. It consists of a powerful intensification by Jesus of the Holy Spirit's normal activity of testifying to the Saviour, accentuating the doctrines of grace, and convicting, converting, regenerating, and sanctifying large numbers of people at the same time. It is therefore a community experience. It is occasionally preceded by an expectation that God is about to do something exceptional; it is usually preceded by an extraordinary unity and prayerfulness among Christians; and it is always accompanied by the revitalisation of the Church, the conversion of large numbers of unbelievers, and the reduction of sinful practices in the community.

To unpack that definition is to lay a foundation for a strategy for the revival of the Church.

1. Revival is a community experience

Notice that the definition insists in both paragraphs that the community dimension of revival is critical: no wider community impact, no revival. One of the major points I want to emphasise in this address is that revival is not for the Church only, but is for the transformation of the community in which the Church is located. This fact alone should make the minister in country areas of small population have a big vision for the impact of the gospel on that population. Churches can have a much greater impact in small rural communities than in larger urban environments. Peter Kaldor writes: 'Churches can have a more pivotal role in the lives of smaller rural communities than they can in larger regional centres or cities. Clergy can have greater influence there than their city counterparts have.' Since revivals are largely community experiences, the larger the impact of a church on a community, the more likely it is to enjoy a revival. Compared to urban churches, rural churches are disadvantaged in all manner of ways, but their great advantage is that they can be instrumental in spiritual movements which transform their entire local community.

1.1 Balranald, 1974-9

Consider, for example, a movement of the Spirit of God which took place in the small rural township of Balranald in the Diocese of Riverina. The priest-in-charge of St Barnabas' Anglican Church from 1974 to 1979 was Gary Priest. I heard a report that in those years he baptised more than half the total population of the town and immediate district. So I thought I'd check it out to see if these things were so. It is an amazing story. Gary, born in 1941, was converted at St James' King Street, where he had a deep experience of God's Spirit at communion, calling him at first to Christ and then to the priesthood. He offered to serve in the Diocese of Armidale, but was turned down by Bishop Moyes because he could not read. An elderly woman living in Cremorne, Sydney, somehow spotted this unusual young man, and arranged with the Bishop of the Riverina for him to be trained at St John's, Morpeth, at her expense, for Riverina. When he arrived in Balranald only four people went regularly to church and the annual income was only \$600. For about a year things stayed like that, until a woman was converted and added to the Church with her two sons. Another woman took a dislike to her; people took sides and there was major discord in the congregation. Gary pleaded with his congregation to work out their differences, but they would not. Then tragically the newly converted woman was killed in a road accident. She had stopped to help a stranded motorist and was herself hit by a truck.

Revival often stems from disaster, and it was so here. As a result of her death, the spirit of brokenness and repentance swept the congregation. There was a great surge in the congregation's growth, both numerically and spiritually. The following Christmas 300 came to Church. Many were baptised or had their children, whom they had hitherto left in unchurched paganism, baptised. The bishop observed that Gary seemed to be baptising the rabbits. Confirmations were huge. Providentially, a group of six Sydney evangelical Christian teachers just happened to be posted to the local schools, and they brought a freshness and a biblical rigour needed by the expanding congregation. The church

community now began to pull together as one. They looked to the mission of the Church instead of being a mission. They not only met all their own expenses, but paid for the training of another priest and gave generously to the Bishop of Carpentaria to buy a boat. Gary was given to crashing his car, so he got to know his panel beater, Roy Mann, very well. He became a Christian and is now the local priest at Balranald, and recently appeared on '60 Minutes', riding around his parish on a Harley Davidson.

What's all this got to do with BCA? Not a lot at first sight. Gary would be happier characterising himself as a Charismatic High Churchman than as an evangelical. But this is an instructive story from every point of view. It shows the value of unity in the pursuit of revival, of a positive appreciation of the strengths of the traditions of other Christians. Gary has nothing but respect for BCA and admiration for its workers with whom he has worked all over Australia. He insists that the Balranald resurgence would not have been nearly so effective without those six evangelical Christian teachers from Sydney in his congregation. He says it was so kind of a providential God to ensure that those six evangelical Bible teachers were there when the renewed congregation needed them. He recalls that subsequently at Bunbury, where he was Dean in the 1980s, he and 30 clergy from different backgrounds and traditions spent time on a retreat together. The Lord brought home to them all that they had but one mission, to preach the kingdom. With that discovery, he said, 'all the other crap fell away'. In revival all the other crap which divides Christians falls away as they focus on the one thing needful. The Balranald story also illustrates the sovereignty of God as he used the tragedy of a road death to bring brokenness to a hard and resistant people. But the chief value of the story is that it shows how in small rural communities a movement of God's Spirit can touch the whole community, bringing a sizeable proportion of the population into vital faith.

1.2 The National Church Life Survey

From the fact that revival is a community experience, it follows that any strategy for revival will have to include the careful study of the community's needs in order to understand it, to maximise connectedness, to win a hearing, and to create opportunities for ministry. The glory of the Anglican Church in Australia, a glory to which BCA has made a significant contribution, is that it is more omnipresent throughout Australia than any other denomination. Unlike Macdonald's, the Anglican Church, the more present it is everywhere, the more different it has to be. The local context requires local adaptation. Ray Hermann made a study of six coal mining towns within fifty miles of each other in central Queensland and concluded that each required a different approach because of developmental differences, different people and different company attitudes. He concluded that 'to have done the same in each place would have kept me busy, but not effective'.

The National Church Life Survey is an invaluable tool in helping the Church to be alert to the need to adapt in each locale. It not only shows how a community

study should be made, but in its latest book, soon to be published, called *Shaping a Future: Characteristics of Vital Congregations* it shows how a congregation might maximise its effectiveness in any context. It is a study of special interest to those committed to the revival of the Church, because it is concerned at its core with 'congregational vitality' measured in terms of

- the level of newcomers,
- the rate of retention of young adults,
- numerical growth,
- the sense of belonging,
- the involvement of its members in the community,
- the extent to which members share their faith and invite their friends to Church, and
- growth in personal faith.

The NCLS study will help the churches towards revival by identifying the things that matter in increasing congregational vitality:

- outward focus,
- high levels of involvement by attendees,
- a strong sense of community among attendees,
- a clear sense of direction,
- effective leadership,
- a lively faith, and
- a youthful age profile.

Just as importantly, the NCLS study liberates by showing the things that really do not matter which we sometimes get hung up on: structures, denominations, doctrinal position or churchmanship, long or short sermons, exegetically or topical preaching, the age and background of the minister, size of the congregation, size of the car park, size of the bank balance, good advertising. None of those things seem to matter much in influencing congregational vitality. It is significant that none of those things has ever been important in revival, either.

Shaping a Future is a very important resource, but it does not focus explicitly on the difference between rural and city churches. The NCLS has plenty of data on which to base such a study, and it could be done given the resources. A Baptist minister, Clive Cook, has made a study of factors affecting the growth of rural churches in Australia and has come up with the following list of indicators.

PROFILE OF AN EFFECTIVE RURAL CHURCH.

An effective rural church will exhibit a majority of, but not necessarily all of, the following characteristics.

- Positive spirituality.
- Belief in the authority of Scripture.

- Modern worship which is positive and enthusiastic.
- Warm open and welcoming of non-members,
- No present major conflicts.
- Strong leadership by long term pastors who have a vision and a plan for the future of the ministry.
- Strong lay participation in all aspects of leadership.
- Commitment to personal growth through small group ministry.
- Commitment to some form of servant ministry to the community .
- A willingness to engage in evangelism.
- Good administration.

Cook observes: 'These features it must be recognised are not particularly rural. They are the features of any effective church as identified by the church growth movement. The evidence suggests that rural churches which seek to manifest these characteristics in their life and ministry will be more effective even in declining socio/economic circumstances'.

On the issue of clerical leadership, Clive Cook helps us to see that it may be that the sort of leadership required in rural churches may be different from that of city churches. Cook cites Carl Dudley, *Making the Small Church Effective* , who believes that to be effective in a rural community, a minister needs to be a lover, rather than a highly organised administrator, planner and man of action. Cook also cites Anthony Pappas in *Money Motivation and Mission in the Small Church* who contends that the effective clergy person in a rural area needs to express the nurturing qualities: to be a patient, feeling, connective, inclusive, shepherd who seeks out and nurtures the flock.

1.3 Broken Hill, 1982 to date

It appears that effective church leaders are those who have an instinctive feel for the needs of the community in which they work and an indomitable conviction that those needs can be met by the gospel expressed in the loving, practical concern of God's people. A stunning example of the impact of the gospel on a country town is found in my book *Evangelical Christianity in Australia: Spirit, Word and World*:

John Curtis, a full-time lay minister in the Churches of Christ, . . . dreamed of taking Broken Hill for Christ, which in view of its history as a tough mining town with proud Union traditions was an ambitious dream. In 1982 he and his wife Judy sold their home and with another family bought the St Joseph's Sisters of Mercy Convent. There they housed three families, a theological college which was a branch of 'Cornerstone' . . . , a youth refuge, a family crisis centre, and a retreat centre for out-of-town Christian workers. To reach the rising tide of unemployed youth he purchased a double decker bus and used it as a mobile drop-in centre. When the novelty of this had worn off, Woolworths donated their Broken Hill store to the Barrier Youth Association of which John Curtis was secretary, and it was converted to a massive games parlour. To provide money

for the theological students to help pay their fees, he opened a pizza home delivery business, and soon had the whole town converted to pizza consumption. To reach people in times of need, he bought the local funeral business. To reach people at all times of the day and night, he bought the only commercial radio station in town, which alarmed the locals until they found that he did not intend to thrust religion down their throats. He had a more subtle approach. He decided that nothing would be broadcast which was incompatible with the Christian faith. So, for example, in a town, notorious for sexism, he would refuse to make any derogatory remarks, even in jest, about his wife. Only positive things would ever be said about the institution of holy matrimony. The radio station was also used to train Christian radio announcers so that they could go and do likewise. To give a job to an unemployed, bereaved man who was in danger of losing the fight with alcohol, he bought a tourist mine and put the man in as manager. His determination to meet people at their point of need from a heart full of love was wildly infectious and brought great hope to a community which felt sadly neglected by governments and industries.

1.4 The Aboriginal Revival, 1979 to date

The best Australian example of the community impact of revival is the Aboriginal revival which began on Galiwinku (Elcho Island) on 28 March 1979. It must be seen as a spiritual solution to a desperate cultural and social crisis in Aboriginal communities. It is one of the very few solutions which the Aboriginal people have experienced since the coming of whites. They have been suffering from what the anthropologists call 'demoralisation': a disintegrating culture, accompanied by alcohol abuse, petrol sniffing, suicide, and violence. They have had to initiate and sustain the battle for land rights against a largely unsympathetic white population. And they have been confronted with the necessity of synthesising traditional and Christian beliefs.

Accompanying the revival have been amazing phenomena in copious quantities. John Blacket reports miracles, sightings of angels, numerous visions of fire coming down from heaven igniting spot fires all over the continent, of a great river flowing from Elcho Island to towns in southern WA, of signs in the sky telling the aboriginal evangelists and their teams where to go next, many dreams in fulfilment of the prophet Joel who prophesied that sons and daughters would prophesy, old men would dream dreams and young men would see visions, deliverances, even a resurrection or two!

Djiniyini Gondarra, their leading theologian and minister of the Elcho Islanders when the revival began, had a remarkable vision of crows and flying foxes (which are totems of himself and his wife) and of a beautiful girl wearing lots of bangles, namely Queen Jezebel. Gondarra called out to his wife, 'Go to Jerusalem, get the blood and wash the cross'. She did so and, when she washed the cross with the blood, it turned into a flaming two-edged sword, and she thrust it through Jezebel who turned back into a flying fox and exploded. Then God said to Gondarra:

You lay down every totem and ceremony. In each of them there is good and bad. All of them must come under my Lordship, be washed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and then you will see a new Aboriginal culture. I don't want to destroy and leave you empty. I will restore and renew what is good.'

It would be totally inadequate to view this experience as just another bout of Pentecostal delirium. Djiniyini's vision gave him the clear cultural message that Christianity comes not to destroy but to fulfil the aspirations of traditional aboriginal law. The revival is thus a dramatic step by the Aboriginal people towards self-identity. Once — during the two centuries of subjugation — they were no people; now they are a people, God's people. Revivals are often associated with the political empowerment of a social group, leading to economic progress and cultural integration. Revival is the power sufficient for the indigenisation of Christianity in minority cultures leading to the empowerment of adherents of those cultures who had hitherto been demoralised unto death. Revival is for the salvation, social as well as spiritual, of communities.

2. Revival is a sovereign work of God the heavenly Father, manifesting his glory on the earth.

Revival is 'a visitation from on high' (Isaiah 32.15; Luke 1.78); a time of refreshing from the Lord (Acts 3.19); it is a heavenly light; a divine fire; a river of water from God's sanctuary; a dayspring from on high. Genuine Revival cannot be worked up from below. It must come down from above. The authentic prayer for revival is 'Come down, Lord. Come down from where your glory fills the heavens and let your glory fill the earth.'

In 1874 God's glory descended on the scattered rural villages of central Northern Tasmania, and the whole landscape seemed luminous with the glory of the Lord. The awed population gave over thirty Bible place names to the region of blessing, including Paradise, Beulah, Garden of Eden, and the Promised Land.

In August 1969 a mission entitled 'Free Indeed' was held at Wudinna, a little town in South Australia. The mission was held in the Methodist church, but people converged on Wudinna from as far away as Ceduna and Cummins, both of which, like Wudinna itself, were areas where the BCA had been at work over many decades. Indeed it was just in the year before the mission that BCA had handed over its Flying Medical Service which it had operated for thirty years to the Royal Flying Doctor Service. The mission was accompanied by genuine revival where the glory of the Lord was perceived to descend to the earth, in this case very literally. There was a sense of the presence of God brooding over the whole geographical area. A farmer who had not been going to the meetings, although his wife was, was out on his tractor ploughing, when great conviction came upon him and he got down in the dust and gave his life to the Lord.

One of those transformed in the revival among Aboriginal people also testifies to God's descent to be with his people on earth:

. . . the glory of the Lord was so low — it really came and lived with people, spoke with people. When I say low — the glory of the Lord covered the whole area — it came right down to earth. Kids can tell you they received the touch. Old ladies can tell you [about] that first touch. People are saying today, Why can't we go back . . . to that first step — that time of glory. The Lord Jesus had magnified Himself through common people — would you like to call us third world people. It wasn't somebody that told them to be like that, but God chose these people for His own glory . . .

A revival is really a theophany, an appearance of the glory of God. It is a sovereign work of God coming down to touch the hearts of the poorest and the humblest, and spreading his glory in the dust. There is a lot of dust in Australia, so the Lord has a lot of scope. Because revival is a sovereign work of God, we may be confident that it will come, and we must pray. Revivals are not human emotions worked up from below; they are God's glory prayed down from above. And they often come in times of worship, for in worship we just occasionally taste the aspect of God which he himself most values, namely his glory. It follows that whatever else BCA is engaged in, it must be committed to the service of giving people opportunities for worship which satisfies the heart. On reading Leon Morris's account of his time with BCA, I was struck with his observation that the people to whom he ministered seemed to value Church services and times of worship, and were especially given to harvest festivals where they had the opportunity to say 'thank you' to God for his kind provision for them.

3. Revival is a firestorm of the Lord Jesus Christ, who baptises with the Spirit, who in turn exalts Christ and the doctrines of grace.

Jesus is the hero and focus of attention of every authentic revival, not the Holy Spirit. Revivals are outpourings of the Spirit, but the Spirit is poured out by Jesus (Acts 2.33) . Jesus is the one who kindles fire on the earth (Luke 12.49) and who baptises with the Holy Spirit (John 1.33) . The Holy Spirit, poured out in revival blessing, testifies to Jesus and exalts Jesus and the doctrines of his saving grace.

In the Aboriginal revival, visions of Jesus were the most reported of all the visions in a revival characterised by a score of visions. In 1983 a small Aboriginal boy in kindergarten at Yarrabah, south of Cairns in Queensland, did a butterfly painting, putting paint on a piece of paper and folding it in half. When he opened it he gazed on a remarkable likeness of Christ with crown of thorns. Revival came to Yarrabah immediately. When they experienced the phenomenon which has been labelled 'slaying in the Spirit', the Aboriginal evangelists did not like the term, preferring to describe it as 'resting in Jesus'. The leaders had not witnessed anything like these revival experiences before, and white missionaries did not

seem to be able to give any help, and therefore Aboriginal pastors became extraordinarily dependent on stories of Jesus in the Bible to guide them to know what to do next. They read what Jesus did in the gospels and they believed that Jesus was doing it all over again in Australia. They interpreted the bible literally and pictorially and they expected to witness miracles and to see visions as Jesus walked with them on Australian soil. Aboriginal Christians thus affirm that it is Christ himself, rather than a phenomenon called revival, who is helping them to transform a world which had been death to them into a life-giving synthesis of old culture and new challenges.

One Solomon Islander who experienced revival in the endemic revival in the Solomon Islands, which began in 1970, said 'Revival is Jesus': it is what 'goes on in the soul when Jesus comes into right focus'. More precisely, revival is what goes on in the soul when the cross of Christ comes into right focus. A revival is a manifestation in this world of a divine victory in the supernatural world. A revival is an outbreak in the present world of the great victory over Satanic and demonic forces which took place in the past on the Cross and which will receive its most visible and permanent manifestation when Christ returns again to bring in a new heaven and a new earth. Revivals, then, are re-enactments, not of Calvary, but of the victory won at Calvary. Therefore revivals are always associated with the preaching of the Gospel which is the message of the Cross.

It follows that the ministers whom we appoint, if they are to serve as agents of revival, must understand that message of gospel grace and preach it. The 1969 Wudinna mission took as its theme FREE INDEED, based on John 8.36, 'If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed', while the addresses which Geoff Bingham gave were Bible messages on the bondage of man to sin and Satan and the powers of darkness and of flesh and the world, and the true freedom which Christ gives from such powers. The responsibility of all preachers of the Gospel is to make hearts combustible and therefore ready for the divine fire through such preaching.

4. Revival is an intensification of the normal work of the Spirit, convicting, converting, and sanctifying.

It must, of course, be acknowledged that anointed preaching which promotes revival will not only result from getting the doctrines of grace straight in our heads. It also results from keeping the heart open to the Spirit. This is evident in the testimony of two Australian bishops who have not been raised in evangelical traditions, but who have been identified with the Charismatic movement, namely Hamish Jamieson and Ralph Wicks.

Bishop Jamieson testifies that in his Diocese of Bunbury, as a result of the movement of the Spirit, people have become more sharply focussed on Jesus as Lord, rather than on the Church. In traditionally High Church dioceses that is a very significant development. Bishop Jamieson believes that country towns are

far more conservative than city churches and therefore more resistant to innovations, including spiritual ones. But he has witnessed significant blessing in the town of Manjimup, population about 5,000, which held the first ARMA conferences in Australia and has sent five men into the ordained ministry since 1983.

Bishop Wicks' testimony is similar. I remember one evangelical Anglican from Brisbane telling me of the change brought to the Cathedral ministry in Brisbane because of Bishop Wicks' experience of the Spirit of God. In his autobiography, the Bishop writes after his experience of renewal: 'Some clergy regarded me as a "weirdo" but one thing they could not deny: The proclamation of Jesus and God's gift of salvation by grace through faith became key features of my preaching. I was reminded by Scripture that the work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Jesus.' He took many missions. He particularly remembers one at Stratford, a small town between Sale and Bairnsdale in the Gippsland, which was a total flop on the first night, but by the fourth night scores of people who had never heard of the Charismatic movement were 'hungry for the Spirit, begging for the anointing'. So strong has been the testimony of Bishop Wicks to the Lordship of Christ that he has been a blessing to many evangelicals who have come to realise that they have been more in love with the Bible than with Jesus. He reports that he was invited to address a conference of evangelicals in Melbourne, but they were no doubt nervous of this weirdo Charismatic, so they limited him to six minutes. Bishop Wicks wrote:

The then Archbishop of Melbourne, Bob Dann, kept reminding me about the 'six minutes'. I put away my prepared text and simply shared with the conference what spiritual renewal meant to me: how my ministry was enriched, how I came to understand and love Jesus more. The response of the delegates was very moving to me. They rose in acclamation. I went backstage and wept. God had done something beautiful.

God had indeed done something beautiful. He had brought those evangelicals close to one who was on fire, and, in his grace, He had made their hearts combustible. They had made the priceless discovery that it was not gospel preaching that is required, but anointed Gospel preaching.

But if evangelicals are often in need of revival, so too are Charismatics themselves. Revival is not the same as the Charismatic movement. Revivals are not primarily about the special or extraordinary gifts of the Spirit. These may or may not be evident in revivals. Revivals are primarily about the fruit of the Spirit. It follows, I think, that we must not only seek BCA staff who are open to the Spirit and who do not quench the Spirit. We need those who will also be eager to manifest the fruit of the Spirit, not so much in the spectacular and the sensational, but in the practical glory of self-denying service. This has been one of the remarkable aspects of BCA which must not be lost no matter what new strategies it might adopt. Many of its staff have been very mature spiritually, with

what it takes to give long years of service in apparently the most inhospitable parts of Australia. The stickability of BCA workers is the more remarkable when compared with the typical length of service in many outback parishes. In the diocese of Perth, in the nineteenth century the average incumbency was six to eight months in the largest parishes. Herberton in North Queensland had 13 incumbents in 14 months about 1902. The failure of the clergy in such an environment was as notorious as it was understandable. At the 1889 Anglican Church congress in Sydney, a delegate commented that bush work always isolates a clergyman so that he too readily falls in love and 'otherwise makes a fool of himself once a year' until he so 'visibly deteriorates' that he has to be moved on.

One would not want to idealise BCA staff. It has frequently been difficult to get city evangelicals to go to the bush let alone be happy there. As long ago as 1925 Bishop Long of Bathurst capitalised on bush resentment of the city by contrasting 'the play boys of the beaches and the work boys of the bush'. The first person I asked about outback ministry in preparation for this talk, and who works for a mining company, told me that the clergyman who married him has since divorced and the clergyman who baptised his children has since suicided. I asked him how he explained such things, and he replied, 'Their's is a very difficult job and they are often isolated between the men on the one hand and the company on the other. They did not receive enough support.'

Nevertheless, continuity of service has been one of the great contributions to the outback of some BCA workers, who have been characterised by determination and faithfulness. Furthermore, a number of BCA's organising missionaries or federal secretaries over the years have been remarkable for their sanctified pragmatism, starting with its founder whose name we honour in this lecture, Sydney James Kirkby. This explains one of the key missiological factors in the success of BCA: the pragmatism has enabled its staff to know what to do to meet genuine community needs in the areas of pastoral care, health, education, hospitality, and communications and transport; their determination and faithfulness empowered them to be there when they were needed, to do the things they were equipped to do, and to keep doing them. BCA quickly acquired a reputation as a 'useful' society, 'doing good'. In her doctoral study of rural Anglicanism, Ruth Frappell compares the BCA with the Bush Brotherhoods. Ruth is not an evangelical, and it is therefore significant that the BCA comes out of her study far better than the Bush Brotherhoods precisely because it was so much better run, with wise policies, pragmatic leadership, sustained ministries, and faithful workers. She also notes BCA's extensive, unabashed employment of women, some of whom gave decades of service, such as Florence Dowling who supervised the hospitals on the Eyre Peninsular in the decades leading up to the Wudinna revival. One would love to know what contribution the faithful years of ploughing made to the spiritual harvest. No doubt they contributed to the combustibility of many hearts. The success of BCA, Frappell concluded, owed less to its evangelical emphases and more to its practical service and to the work

of its female missionaries. Even Kirkby, a redoubtable evangelical, justified the BCA in terms of its achievements, not its churchmanship.

5. To promote circumstances propitious for revival, focus on and seek to stimulate the factors that have either always or usually preceded revival: heightened expectation, unity among Christians, and hard praying.

5.1 To raise expectation

- Remind people of the need
- Tell them what God has done — he can do it again,
- Create a vision of a community which is revived
- Imagine taking a country town for Christ - a school for Christ - a workplace for Christ.
- Read the history of revivals; read the history of Australian revivals; catch fire from them; have your desire to pray for revival excited by them. One could even do a course on revival.
- Study the theology of Revival: Read everything written by Jonathan Edwards you can lay your hands on! Among modern authors Martyn Lloyd-Jones and J.I. Packer will repay close study. J. I. Packer says that there are three things that those who long for revival should do:

- Preach and teach God's truth · Prepare Christ's way by removing obvious obstacles such as habitual sins, neglect of prayer and fellowship, worldly-mindedness, etc.
- Pray for the Spirit's outpouring

5.2 Be a force for unity

Revival, historically, has come when traditionally divided and feuding churches seek to express their essential unity in Christ. Billy Graham, just before his wonderful New York Crusade of 1957, wrote:

God cannot bless us if there are divisions, fighting and strife within the church. How many churches we hear about today that are filled with divisions, jealousy, revenge, spite, pride. How can God possibly bless a situation like that? Pastors and Christians need to repent of the sins of strife, controversy and fighting. I tell you, this is not of God.

Many people wonder why revival has not come to the evangelicals of America. This is one of the primary reasons. We have had enough name-calling and mud-slinging. Let's repent of our sins, fall on our faces before God and spend the time in prayer that we used to spend in controversy and see what happens. I guarantee that God will send a revival.

Therefore, we should seek to be a force for unity, by

- avoiding censuring other Christians
- stressing co-operation on the basic doctrines of the faith, rather than specialising on the differences

- hosing down the flash points: the male/female divide; the Charismatic/evangelical divide; the relationship of Sydney evangelicalism to the rest of the Australian Church
- helping all Australians to commit themselves to reconciliation with indigenous Australians — Mabo and Wik may be movements of the Spirit, too
- repenting of past sectarianism.

A word on the last. Sectarianism has been terrible in Australian Anglicanism and we have paid a high price for it. Australian Anglicanism, according to historian, Ruth Frappell, has been marred by a rigid diocesanism along party lines, expressive of exclusive churchmanship, resulting in immobility, illiberality, and poverty, especially in rural areas. Impoverished clergy, a lack of indigenous clergy, poor structures, little theological reflection, and ad hocery - that has been the C of E in rural Australia. We need to repent of a lot of our history and find ways of undoing it, but we evangelicals may get some sort of perverse satisfaction out of contemplating the financial misery of non-evangelical dioceses and their run-down churches. We feel like the spectator who watches a lawyer buried up to his neck in cement and says, 'what is needed here is more cement'. In all seriousness, it is a big strategic question about what to do in this situation. Do you call for more cement to finish 'em off, or do you help 'em out? If you do help them out, don't expect to be popular with all your fellow evangelicals. But that has always been BCA's policy. I think it is right. It seems more dominical somehow. I think the Lord would have pulled High Churchmen out of wet cement, even on the Sabbath. More seriously, the Lord's Spirit has been pleased to move among non-evangelicals on significant occasions in Australian history. It seems wisest to seek ways of working with them as BCA has sought to do over its eight decades.

5.3 Promote prayerfulness

- join or start a Prayer Movement for revival
- be diligent in your own prayer - people need to see a holy messenger as well as hear the message of holiness.

6. In revival, nominal pew warmers become phenomenal agents of ministry.

It is intriguing, when reading the empirical findings of the National Church Life Survey, to see how the researchers often come up with solutions which state in a new and fresh way what agents of significant Church growth in the past have also practised. The vocabulary of revival now has an old-fashioned ring to it, but the experiences and practices expressed by that vocabulary, will always be integral to bumper spiritual harvests and the congregational vitality needed to impact a community.

One lesson of revival history, for example, is that whenever a congregational leader gathers a committed nucleus and develops a group discipline, he increases the opportunity for spiritual blessing. The lesson of history is that many

revivals have begun with a small group dedicated to pray for revival, first that they will desire revival, then that they will learn what the cost of revival is, and then that they will be prepared to pay the price: the home Bible study meetings of the Pietists; Wesley's Holy Club and then the Methodist class meetings; student prayer meetings before the second great awakening in America; the haystack prayer meeting before the launching of the modern missionary movement in America, and so on. It is surely significant that Jesus came to focus his ministry on the Twelve. They became the nucleus of the revival which began at Pentecost.

There is, I believe, in every local church a group of unorganised, restless Christians who do not know quite what they want and who are not aware that others feel like they do, who are just waiting to catch fire. In Matthew 12.20 we read that the Messiah would not quench the smoking flax. Jesus was concerned to set the spark of faith ablaze with the fire of revival. Once a congregational leader has caught the fire of revival himself, he has often instinctively started a smoking flax club in his local church and sought to stoke the flames. He seeks out those concerned for revival and gives them of his best in teaching, prayer and fellowship.

Since certain theological emphases are more calculated to promote revival than others, he will focus on them:

- The glory of God
- Justification by faith in the crucified redeemer
- Holiness
- Spiritual warfare
- The manifest presence of God.

And certain spiritual disciplines are well calculated to promote revival, so he will focus on them:

- Walking and talking with God.
- Entering into the presence of God
- Prevailing prayer
- Time and quietness to commune with God
- Knowing how to evangelise

And since certain priorities are more calculated to revitalise his congregation, he will major on them in his preaching:

- balanced Biblical teaching; preaching is mass counselling from the Bible
- addressing the heart as well as the head: preaching should be heart to heart
- moving from orthodoxy to vital Christianity
- focussing on the things which should be our priorities: the glory of God and the primacy of evangelism and appropriate worship.

In many rural areas, numbers gathering for worship are so few that some strategists are instinctively feeling their way to seeing that the small group itself,

as happened at Balranald in the 1970s, must be made an agent of mission rather than the mission itself. In recent months two separate strategies for the revitalisation of Australian Anglican churches have been publicised, one from an evangelical perspective, the other from a High Church perspective. In February 1997 the Victorian Executive of EFAC (Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion) advanced 'A Gospel Strategy for the Anglican Church in Victoria.' It bemoans the lack of 'a culture of passionate energy for evangelism' in the mainstream denominations and applauds 'creative attempts to reach unchurched people' found in many 'vital local churches'. It gives a detailed strategy for 'fostering healthy and effective models of local community churches'.

Brian Farran, Bishop of the Goldfields/Country Region of the Diocese of Perth presented to the National Anglican Conference in Canberra his vision of local churches as 'ministering communities'. Based on the realistic conclusion that 'the Church in rural Australia has been dysfunctional for a long time', frequently incapable of attracting or paying for stipendiary clergy, Bishop Farran argues that the Church must seek a different way of being the Church in order to attend to its 'essential missionary task'. Based on a study of Ephesians and the Book of Acts, he contends that in Baptism, Christians are gifted for ministry and that instead of being places for the private, introspective spirituality of the biblically illiterate, churches should be outwardly looking communities of ministers. When due allowance is made for differences in tradition and history, there is a convergence of opinion on what the Lord seems to be requiring us to do. He wants to revitalise our local congregations so that they will be outwardly focussed, intentional fellowships, biblically literate, spiritually alive, and with a heart for mission, both evangelistic and social service.

Conclusion

In this address an attempt has been made to draw lessons from the revival experience of Australian Christians for the revitalisation of rural congregations today. Revival is a sovereign gift of God for the benefit of the community in which the local Church is placed, and therefore we have focussed on those factors which might energise a congregation to reach out in loving service and evangelism to its community. Rural Christians, being conservative, are likely to want to cling to traditional ways of being the Church. But if they are prepared to take risks and reach out, their reward will not only be great in heaven. It will also be likely to be greater than that of their urban counterparts, as they could have the joy of witnessing their whole community transformed by the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

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