

The Story of C.E.S.A.

The Church of England in South Africa



Bishop Robert Gray



Bishop Colenso

In South Africa we have the unusual - but by no means unique - situation of two separate Churches coming from the same roots but in fact today being very different in their character and emphasis, namely the Church of England in South Africa and the Church of the Province of South Africa. This article is aimed at very briefly tracing these differences from the Church of England in South Africa (C.E.S.A.) point of view, which will involve stating the position of this Church.

(Copies of this booklet are available in booklet form upon request. stjames@iafrica.com)

The Church of England is the oldest of the English speaking Churches in South Africa. The first service on record was held at Cape Town on 20 April 1794. Regular services commenced in 1806 in Cape Town after the British occupation of this Colony.

For 27 years these continued in the Grootte Kerk, an early example of practical co-operation and basic doctrinal agreement between the Dutch Reformed Church (Protestant, Reformed and Presbyterian) and the Church of England (Protestant, Reformed and Episcopal).

After the arrival of the 1820 Settlers and subsequent immigration from England, the Church of England work expanded considerably and visiting Bishops held services on a number of occasions. In 1847 Robert Gray was appointed by the Crown in England as the first Bishop of Cape Town. Shortly thereafter, in 1853 Bishops Colenso and Armstrong were appointed to Natal and Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape, respectively.

The Early History

In 1833 in England a new movement had started within the Church of England in England. Known variously as the Tractarian or Oxford or Anglo-Catholic movement it was an attempt to instill new spiritual life into the ailing Church of England. Both in doctrine and worship the Tractarians rejected the teachings of the Reformers and leaned instead heavily towards the Roman Catholic Church. They believed that their pre-Reformation doctrinal beliefs and practices could be reconciled with the unequivocal Reformed and Protestant doctrines which were entrenched in the 39 Articles of Religion, formulated in the 16th Century, and also the order of worship of the Book of Common Prayer of 1662. All clergymen ordained into the Church of England ministry were and still are required to sign full acceptance of both these documents.

The incongruity of this position finally led a number of Tractarians to leave the Church of England and join the Church of Rome. The most famous such person was the Rev. J.H. Newman who had written Tract 90 which attempted to interpret the 39 Articles in a manner agreeable to Anglo-Catholic beliefs, a process only possible by taking the words in a sense contrary to their plain meaning. John Newman was later made a Cardinal of the Roman Church, which shows where his true beliefs lay.

The defection of Tractarian clergy to the Roman Catholic Church did not prevent the growth and increasing influence of the movement within the Church of England. As late as 1877 the then Archbishop of Canterbury described the movement as a conspiracy against the Church. Nevertheless it became in the 20th Century, the dominant party within the Church.

Bishop Gray, who was a very gifted and energetic person, was single minded in his determination to force the Church of England in South Africa into the Tractarian mould. He wanted to free it from the "bonds and fetters of the Reformation", as he put it. He wanted to be free and yet still "in communion" with the Church of England in England. He therefore rejected the jurisdiction of the tribunals of the Church in England, namely the Courts of the Realm, referring to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council - the highest judicial body in England - as "that masterpiece of Satan for the overthrow of the faith". Thus he clearly demonstrated his churchmanship.

It was therefore unavoidable that there should be conflict between Bp. Gray and those who held the teachings of the Reformation and the Church of England dear. After numerous battles and decisions of the Privy Council Bp. Gray in 1870 established the Church of the Province of South Africa, (C.P.S.A.) taking as another title "The Church of England as known in these parts". Not all the existing congregations joined this new denomination and so arose an anomaly which still persists today, namely two Churches from the same roots but going in different theological directions.

During the years following there were a number of court cases between the two Churches, the most notable of which was the Privy Council ruling in 1882 that there was not "identity in standard of faith and doctrine" and that the divergence between the two churches was not merely potential but "present and actual" (For a detailed history of the legal battles please refer to "A Candle Burns in Africa" by A.G. Ive.)

The Struggle for Survival

The remaining congregations of the Church of England in South Africa were scattered and battled to survive on their own. The sole survivor of those days was Holy Trinity Church, Cape Town. Members of that Church went out and formed new congregations in Johannesburg and Pretoria. In Natal, Bp. Colenso had stood outside the new C.P.S.A. but his successors in office soon joined the larger body. While the large Zulu speaking mission work remained faithful to the Church of England the bulk of their assets was acquired by the C.P.S.A. as a result of the promulgation of an extraordinary Bill enacted in Natal in 1910 known as the "Church Properties Act".

Two important Court actions were heard at Cape Town in 1932 and 1936. In the former, the Archbishop of Cape Town (C.P.S.A.) failed in a claim to be a trustee of Holy Trinity Church.

In the latter the Church of England claimed ownership of the valuable Bishopscourt property which had been bequeathed to "The Protestant Church of England as now by law established." This action did not succeed but the Court held itself free to make a further order should the Church of England in South Africa obtain its own Bishop.

Over the years contact has been had with the Church of the Province of South Africa, both on a local level and also at official level. The main purpose of these meetings, as far as C.E.S.A. has been concerned, has been to seek ways and means of existing together, without compromising the independence of the denominations. These contacts have also served as a useful means of handling conflict situations which have arisen from time to time.

The Organisation of C.E.S.A.

In 1938, with help and advice from the Very Rev. H.C. Moule, Archbishop of Sydney, the Church of England in South Africa adopted a federal Constitution. In practice the Church is organised as one Diocese with a Bishop and Area or Assistant Bishops. To avoid confusion with the C.P.S.A. the title Presiding Bishop was used for the senior Bishop. Doctrinally the C.E.S.A. has not deviated from its Protestant, Reformed and Evangelical position.

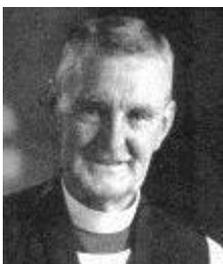
The various congregations that formed the federation - known as Constituent Churches - are independent of each other, yet bound together by a common love for the Word of God and submission to the Constitution, a document which enshrines the Book of Common Prayer of 1662 and the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion as the formularies of the Church.

So the contractual relationship in any congregation is between the minister and the local Church Council, subject to the approval of the Presiding Bishop.

In the early years, with the political situation in South Africa as it was, the Black Churches were run on the basis of Mission Churches and were financed almost entirely from gifts from the White Churches. This has now changed and any suggestion of discrimination on the basis of race or colour has been removed from the Constitution.

The growth in the Church over the years has necessitated the appointment of a full time General Secretary who handles the administration of the denomination.

Bishops



Bishop Fred Morris

In 1943, Bishop Fred Morris was consecrated as Bishop of North Africa in St Paul's Cathedral, London by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple. In 1955, having retired from that position, he was elected as Bishop of C.E.S.A. and also took up the position of Rector of Christ Church, Hillbrow. He was sharply criticised for accepting election by, amongs others, the Archbishop of Cantebury. However, since his election the C.E.S.A. has significantly consolidated and expanded its work.



Peter Chamane

One of the most important tasks which Bishop Morris performed was the consecration of Bishops Stephen Bradley and Peter Chamane. Stephen Bradley was an Australian who came to South Africa in the early 1930's to assist the Church whilst Peter Chamane was a Zulu who had grown up in the Church.

In the years that followed Bishops Desmond Douglas, Joe Bell, Jeremiah Ngubane, Frank Retief, Martin Morrison, *Warrick Cole-Edwards*, *Edwin Ngubane*, *Raj Moodley* and *Desmond Inglesby* (Italics added to update original document) have been consecrated to meet the needs of the ever expanding Church.

Expansion

In the early 1960's there were only a few scattered white congregations in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Pinetown, together with a larger number of black congregations in Natal and in some of the Transvaal townships. (It needs to be noted that segregation along racial lines was never a policy of the Church but was the practice as a result of language, cultural and geographic differences.) However, since then the Church has expanded considerably and there are congregations in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng and KwaZulu Natal. There has been a great deal of emphasis on outreach over the years and this has borne fruit with congregations being established amongst all the different population groups in the country.

The largest congregation is St. James Church in Kenilworth, Cape Town. This Church gained international attention when, in 1993 a group of armed men attacked the Church during a Sunday night service, killing eleven men and women and seriously injuring many more. Even this terrible event though has been used of God to reach out to many people across the country and indeed the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. St. James has been instrumental, over the years of establishing, either directly or indirectly some 22 other congregations.

But the horizons have gone further as well. Sister Churches have been established in Zimbabwe and Namibia. More recently a group in Malawi have asked to come under the auspices of C.E.S.A. Indeed, God has been very good. There are more than a hundred licensed clergy in the country with others serving on the mission field overseas.

One of the major limitations to expansion has been the financial situation in the country during the years of isolation and sanctions and this has had its consequences for the Church, which does not have large central funds from which to draw.

A very exciting development has been the establishment of George Whitefield College, a theological training facility in Cape Town. It follows the model of Moore Theological College in Sydney Australia and has been accredited with the University of Potchefstroom. The founding

Principal of George Whitefield College was the late Dr. Broughton Knox who had been the Principal of Moore College for over twenty five years. This cemented the links between the two colleges. His successor, Dr. David Seccombe, is also a graduate of Moore College. The faculty now consists of a Principal and three full time lecturers, as well as a number of part time lecturers. Men and women are trained, not only for the ministry of C.E.S.A. but also for missionary and other Christian service. After humble beginnings the College has recently moved to premises in Muizenberg near Cape Town which are able to accommodate 100 students. An interesting phenomenon has been the increasing number of students who have come from other countries in Africa.

Holy Trinity Church in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu Natal have also established a training college, Trinity Academy, where people can be trained in Bible knowledge and doctrine.

Recognition

A question that is frequently asked is whether C.E.S.A. is recognised by the Anglican Communion. Without going into a detailed discussion of this question, the simple answer is no.

However warm relations continue to be maintained with the Diocese of Sydney and also with numerous like minded individuals within the Church of England in England. It is hoped that these can be developed in the future.

Reference: A Candle Burns in Africa - A.G. Ive

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