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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

A STORM CENTRE.

BY THE REV. F. BATE, D.D.

OF the younger Churches in the Dominions Overseas the most unhappy in its history and in its present position is the Church in South Africa. Dr. Lowther Clarke, at one time Archbishop of Melbourne, in relating the history of the Church in South Africa, wrote :

“South Africa soon became the storm centre of Church life abroad because the rights of the Church were there so persistently and uncompromisingly asserted against the claims of the Crown to rule in Church doctrine and to regulate public worship. In other countries the self-government of the Church proceeded unceasingly, but with greater deference to English demands.” The late Archbishop of Sydney in his address to the Provincial Synod in 1912 stated that “the Church of the Province of South Africa is the only body which has adopted a different policy (to the Churches in Australia and New Zealand) which by a momentous proviso separated themselves from the Church of England. We speak with all respect of a Church which has a perfect right to settle its own affairs, but as most of us look at it, from the outside, the Church of South Africa then took a hasty step which has limited its comprehensiveness and its usefulness to the whole community.”

The Church of England held its first service in South Africa in 1749. In the early days a congregation, having no building of its own, was granted by the Church Council of the Dutch Reformed Principal Church the use of their own building, which it continued to occupy until 1834.

For more than forty years following the second British occupation, in 1806, the Church of England congregations were dependent for episcopal ministrations upon casual visits of bishops on their way to or from overseas dioceses. Bishop James of Calcutta, Bishop Turner, Bishop Daniel Wilson, and Bishop Corrie of Madras, were among those who confirmed and ordained during that period.

In the year 1841 the Archbishop of Canterbury summoned a meeting which resulted in the formation of the Colonial Bishops Fund. It is clear that one of the chief considerations which led to the establishment of the fund was the need to provide episcopal ministrations in the Cape. Among the most generous donors was Lady Burdett-Coutts who gave, among other gifts, £20,000 towards the endowment of the bishopric of Cape Town. It is worth while, at this point, to recall that Baroness Burdett-Coutts in her will expressly declared that “such endowments and gifts were made not to any community as a spiritual body or as an independent voluntary association, but to the Protestant Church of England as now by law established under the supremacy of the Crown being Protestant.”

It is hardly too much to say that the whole future history of

the Church in South Africa was determined by the appointment of the first Bishop. Choice fell upon Robert Gray, a son of the Tractarian movement, a man of great qualities but with unbending determination. His most loyal biographer would not find it possible to deny that he was headstrong, impatient of all opposition, and willing to risk the disapproval of his most valued advisers provided that he could obtain his will. The new Bishop, after consecration by the Archbishop of Canterbury, reached the Cape in 1848. Trouble soon began to brew. The division of the diocese, the appointment of Colenso to Natal, his subsequent excommunication by Bishop Gray on the charge of heresy, and Colenso's successful appeal to the Privy Council were all stages leading to a decision which has resulted in trouble without measure and which, as Archbishop Wright suggested, has limited the comprehensiveness and usefulness of the Church in South Africa. In 1870 Bishop Gray carried through his plans for an independent Church, a Church of the Province of South Africa, independent of Canterbury, with its own constitution.

Leading authorities in the Church at home, almost with one voice, warned him of the consequences. The Archbishop of Canterbury protested: "I for my part cannot separate the Church from the laity belonging to it and I should be sorry to see any Synod erected with governing power composed of the ministers of the Church alone. Of the danger of such a system we have sufficient evidence in the Church of Rome." The Bishop of London wrote to Bishop Gray in 1868: "You should surely allow that you ought not to proceed to a step which must be fraught with gravest consequences for the Church both at home and in the colonies and for which there is no precedent since the days of the 'Non-Jurors.'" Archbishop Tait suggested in Convocation that if Bishop Gray's power were equal to his will he would drive from his province all those who were Evangelical.

Gray got his way. The independent Church was established. In its constitution was a proviso (the third) rejecting the authority and judgments of the Privy Council in matters of Church doctrine and discipline. It was round this particular proviso that so much future history was to be written and so many battles fought.

The third proviso is still part of the constitution of the Church of the Province, but supporters of that Church have argued that the effect of the third proviso in severing the Church of the Province from the Church of England has been nullified by a new canon which provides for a final appeal in matters of faith and doctrine to a consultative body of which the Archbishop of Canterbury is president, constituted by the Lambeth Conference of 1897 as a final Court of Appeal for the whole of the Anglican Communion. In a judgment recently given in the Courts of South Africa, it was definitely stated that "this consultative body is not the Privy Council and there has been no legislation in England so far as I am aware, substituting this consultative body for the Privy Council as the final Court of Appeal according to the laws governing the Church of England. We are

bound to hold that the Church of the Province of South Africa is a different religious association from the Church of England."

That will explain the action of certain churches in 1870 and a good deal of the trouble that has ensued. Holy Trinity, Cape Town, established 1841; St. John's, Wynberg, dating from 1832; and St. Peter's, Mowbray, declined to join the Church of the Province, preferring to remain, as they always had been, Church of England churches and congregations. (We are not, in this article, concerned with the churches outside the Cape Peninsula. Incidentally it is amazing that to-day members and former members of the Church of the Province of South Africa can speak and write of these churches as "so-called Church of England." It is perfectly clear that they always have been Church of England congregations and it would be difficult to know under what term they should style themselves if not as "Church of England.")

All manner of difficulties have ensued. There can be little doubt as to the pressure, unfair pressure, that has been brought to bear upon these clergy and congregations in an attempt to compel their absorption into the Church of the Province. In a judgment given in the Supreme Court of the Cape in 1932 the Judge declared: "In the past, frequent difficulties have arisen between this congregation and former Archbishops of Cape Town. For example, previous Archbishops have endeavoured to compel the ministers of the Church to acknowledge the canons of the Church of the Province of South Africa before granting them a licence to officiate and one of them refused to ordain candidates for the ministry unless they joined the Church of the Province of South Africa. Again the Archbishops of Cape Town have claimed the right to nominate the Incumbent of Trinity Church and this has led to differences between them and the congregation. The present Archbishop claims that right. He is the Head of the Church of the Province of South Africa which does not regard the views of this congregation with sympathy, and his appointment as a trustee can only have the effect of giving the Church of the Province of South Africa control over this congregation and effectually preventing them from making use of the Church in accordance with the views which they hold. This congregation follows the Evangelical school of thought and regards certain rites and ceremonies, countenanced and practised in the Church of the Province of South Africa, as illegal practices. It therefore regards the Church of the Province of South Africa as not only legally disconnected with the Church of England but also severed from it in matters of faith and doctrine."

Among other difficulties is that of securing confirmation for the young people connected with these three churches. The difficulty did not become acute until the election of the present Archbishop. Former Archbishops had been consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, consequently as Bishops of the Church of England, so that despite the fact that they were holding office as Archbishops of Cape Town, the Church of England Churches were able, without compromising their own position, to accept their offer to confirm.

With the election of the present Archbishop conditions were completely changed. Archbishop Phelps was consecrated in South Africa by Bishops of the Church of the Province and as a Bishop of that Church. To accept his offer to confirm would be to compromise, in the eyes of the law, the position which they hold.

With the best will in the world, in view of litigation, present or prospective, those responsible could not avail themselves of the Archbishop's services. By arrangement and with the consent of the Archbishop of Cape Town, a temporary arrangement has been effected during the past three years. Dr. Chambers, Bishop of Central Tanganyika, has each year visited the Cape and confirmed in those three churches. It is interesting to note that on his first visit, in 1931, he confirmed some 300 candidates and in one of the three churches in 1933 he confirmed at least a hundred.

The grave loss to the whole cause of the Church in South Africa through the present unhappy position is causing great heart-searching in many quarters. Attempts to effect an understanding and to bring about a concordat between the Church of England and the Church of the Province, have been frequent. The first of any note was that made by the late Canon Stuart in 1904, when in South Africa with the Mission of Help. He actually drew up plans for uniting the three churches with the Church of the Province. Though his proposals embraced guarantees calculated to secure the Evangelical character of the churches, learned Counsel advised the non-acceptance of the proposals and proclaimed the impossibility of Church of England bodies uniting with the Church of the Province of South Africa under its present constitution without sacrificing their trust rights. Within the last year, selected laymen on both sides have met together with a view to achieving what the leaders had apparently failed to effect, but nothing has come of their efforts. It is too easy to blame extremists on both sides.

Is a solution possible? One would like to pay tribute to the kindness and gentleness of the present Archbishop of Cape Town, Archbishop Phelps. There is no doubt that nothing would give him greater joy than to see this cause of offence removed. It will never be removed if the thoughts of those who lead the Church of the Province run on the lines of absorption. It is quite patent that the congregations concerned will never consent to absorption in a Church quite devoid at present of Evangelical witness and where teaching and practices are tolerated and approved which have no place in the teaching of our Prayer Book. Peace can only come if the right of the Evangelical Churches to live and to develop is conceded. They can develop only if they are given the same facility as is afforded to Evangelical Churchmen in the Homeland. In brief, peace can only come if the way is found to consecrate in England a Church of England Bishop or Bishops of Evangelical sympathy and outlook to minister to the congregations remaining outside the Church of the Province, who look and always have looked to the Church at home for sympathy, understanding and help.