

RESENSIES/REVIEWS

Trouble in the Colonies

Review of

D.W.A. BAKER, *PREACHER, POLITICIAN, PATRIOT:
A LIFE OF JOHN DUNMORE LANG*

Melbourne University Press 1998; ISBN 0 522 84822 2.

Some people write biographies of great men they admire for their particular virtues or achievements. Mr. Don Baker has a refreshing approach. He wrote a biography on the life of John Dunmore Lang not because he liked him, but because he did not. The preface introduces the reader to the kind of person he is: "A man to whom truth and falsehood come alike as he can best adapt them to his unmanly purposes." The author uses this quote from one of Lang's opponents at the time to characterise the subject of his biography.

Preacher, Politician and Patriot is a shortened version of the original biography *Days of Wrath*, published by the Melbourne University Press in 1985. At that time Mr. Baker was still reading history at the Australian National University.

Politically correct?

The author shows a keen interest in the Aborigines of Australia not only in this book, but also in *The civilised surveyor: Thomas Mitchell and the Australian Aborigines* (Melbourne, 1997). The epilogue of *Preacher, Politician and Patriot* reveals a similar link. For this purpose it even extends the Lang-biography to the description of the son of his sister's offspring, and a subsequent marriage of a far cousin to a lady from the Ngalia tribe ninety years after Dunmore's death, followed by the birth of three children of mixed descent, in particular. This leads to the concluding words:

So after six generations the blood of the Scottish settlers from Largs has been mingled with that of the original dwellers of Australia. John Dunmore Lang had deeply deplored the terrible wrongs done by his compatriots to the Aboriginal people of Australia; we may well imagine how he would have rejoiced at the birth of Kado, Talbot and Zaba.

This book makes for some interesting reading. In the preface Mr. Baker fulfils the role of prosecutor in the case against John Dunmore Lang, whose body and character are presented to us as dead and assassinated, respectively. In the epilogue the author and subject of the biography supposedly unite on the Aboriginal issue. They both deplore the terrible wrongs perpetrated against other people, making this a rather shaky basis for friendship. It leaves us with the following summary of Mr. Baker's assessment: Dunmore Lang was falsehood incarnate, but a visionary in his being kind to the Aborigines.

Do the contents warrant such a literary climax? Apart from the epilogue, the Aborigines are introduced to the reader at only four places. Two references are less relevant. One place refers to the need for protection against them (p. 85). On page 19 we meet Tommy who has pleaded not guilty on a murder charge, but he probably was guilty. The author describes the events as "the death of a sinner" (p. 21). The controversy surrounding this case does not consider any racial issue, but the uninvited administration of baptism by a Roman Catholic priest. According to the Rev. J.D. Lang, the Aborigine man could not possibly understand the rite or have met the requirements of faith at the time. For this reason Lang and most Presbyterians objected to this.

Lang's views on the Aborigines are described only in a small section of the book. (This may be due to the condensed version, cf. Bridges, *Presbyterian Leaders in 19th Century Australia*, Melbourne 1993, p.19.) In the nineteenth century (leading up to Darwin's evolution theory) it was fashionable among settlers to think about Aborigines as "animals like monkeys" (p. 44). However, Lang respected the Aborigines as human and appreciated some of their intellectual and cultural abilities. He resented the ruthless murder of Aborigines by both convicts and free settlers. "All the waters of New Holland", he said, "would be insufficient to wash away the stain of blood from the hands of some gentlemen of good repute." (p. 44) In 1838 when many were horrified at the execution of seven whites who had killed twenty-eight Aborigines, Lang wondered whether God was not punishing the colony by means of a drought because of its dealings with the blacks (p. 62).

Lang opposed the idea of civilising the Aborigines in order to prepare them to accept Christianity. His evangelical views on this topic led him to believe that the Gospel should be brought to the Aborigines in their culture. Christianity would inevitably bring civilisation, but nineteenth century Western culture would not necessarily bring Christianity or improvement. For this reason he advocated that missionaries assimilate with Aborigines, win their trust and proclaim the Gospel (p. 45).

Presbyterian preacher

In 1865, Lang's synod of New South Wales was one of the four groups of Presbyterians meeting in New South Wales. The meeting was characterised by Gospel preaching and missionary work, and was flexible in its adherence to traditional Presbyterian forms (p. 184). Baptist, Lutheran and Congregationalist served as Presbyterian ministers and before union the church did not have an official relationship with any mother denomination in Scotland. In some respects Lang's synod appears to resemble some aspects of the modern Australian Presbyterian evangelicalism.

The Rev. John Dunmore Lang appeared evangelical-minded in his moral crusades against immorality in both the Church and society. In doing so he was a very practical and sensible man: If the government were to establish a colony with inequity between the sexes; it would attempt to correct the issue by importing single women of unimpeachable character who "turned out to be dissolute and licentious on their arrival in Sydney" (p. 47). Likewise in later years, he would object to the immigration of Chinese to Queensland, for cultural reasons, but in particular to importing these men without allowing them to bring their wives.

In 1835 he visited Tasmania to consecrate the St. Andrew's Church (now Scott's Uniting Church) in Hobart. Lang opened the church, but more or less preached the charge as well. On his arrival he learned that the Rev. Archibald Macarthur had the habit of what the reverent clergyman claimed to be "holy kissing" the sisters of the Hobart congregation against their wishes. During an interview for confirmation he also showed such an intimate physical interest that a poor girl jumped at his attempts and ran for it. Lang called on

Macarthur who, overwhelmed by sorrow and remorse, resigned the charge and returned to England six months later. This was especially painful as Macarthur had welcomed Lang as minister in Australasia in 1823 (p. 10).

These troubles seemed to point to the state of the Presbyterian Church in the Colonies at the time. In New South Wales these were instrumental in the establishment of Lang's Synod of New South Wales, as opposed to the Presbytery of NSW in the late thirties. On his return from Van Diemen's Land, the Rev. J. Lang was confronted by the testimony of a housemaid, who begged her father to bring her back to Sydney to escape the drunken and riotous behaviour of the perhaps not so reverend John Hill Garven. This clergyman became quarrelsome and attempted to shoot a convict male servant twice, but misfired. In short: enough material for immediate deposition and a jail sentence. But he called the maid a liar and tried to secure the servant's silence by returning him to the government for feigning sickness. Lang obtained his testimony but the Presbytery was ruled by drinking buddies who effectively blocked the charge by technically restricting the witnesses in April 1836. After Lang left for England and Ireland to recruit better men for the ministry in New Holland, the presbytery covered up the case, disproving the charge and stating that far from being drunk and attempting manslaughter Garven had only been exercising a "becoming" firmness towards his servants (pp. 48-63).

One wonders whether the Antichrist was in Rome or in the Presbytery of New South Wales. As moderator of the General Assembly in October 1872 Lang seemed to firmly favour the first position, perhaps with greater ease now that the Presbyterian issue in NSW had greatly improved, despite Free Church conspiracies of a different nature (pp. 195, 96). Lang declared that the latter days were at hand because the one thousand two hundred and sixty years of papal apostasy had ended with the abolition of temporal power of the Holy See by king Victor Emmanuel in 1870. Even as a politician he stated that Rome drove a larger proportion of her motley adherents to the jails and gallows than did any other form of Christianity (p. 132). Needless to say, Lang made enemies and would even make his personal contribution to the jails.

Jailbird patriot

On 30 July 1850 Lang took a seat in the Legislative Council, after overwhelming support in a public show of hands but, strangely, he only obtained 51 percent support in the ensuing polls. He started a new weekly newspaper, the *Press* to further his political cause. Unfortunately, he also defamed a political opponent, for which he eventually served a jail sentence of a few months, or rather a reasonably comfortable apartment in the jail governor's house. As a good Scotsman, Presbyterian and moderator of the Church, he even obtained a resolution of the Synod which "sympathised with the affliction that had befallen him in his labours for the public good".

His long career in politics lasted after his leaving Parliament in 1869, and he continued to exercise influence through his writings. Like Abraham Kuyper in the Netherlands, the working class to a large extent support him, accounting for some of his popularity. In politics he fought for a European Republic and even published "Freedom and Independence for the Seven United Provinces of Australia" in 1870 (p. 199). This echoes the seven united Protestant provinces of the Netherlands that liberated themselves from Roman Spain. But Lang fought a lost cause on this particular issue, whilst enjoying large support otherwise and great improvement in both the Church and society until his death in August 1878.

Conclusion

John Dunmore Lang had an interesting life. Perhaps one should agree with Barry Bridges (*Presbyterian Leaders in 19th Century Australia*, Melbourne 1993, p. 34) "that he would have achieved a great deal more, but for the flaws in his character." However, his incorrigible wilfulness and relentless pursuit of top positions may have helped him to persevere where other men would have failed. Whether Christian ministry should be empowered by such traits is an entirely different matter.

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Signs of the times

A review of

MARK HUTCHINSON, *IRON IN OUR BLOOD, A HISTORY OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN NSW, 1788-2001*

Ferguson Publications and the Centre for the Study of Australian
Christianity, Sydney 2001.

The highest praise that can possibly be bestowed upon the author and his book is that the story is so well and accurately told that it need never be written again.

This was the judgement of a different age and earlier generation of Presbyterians on the first major publication on the history of the Presbyterian Church in New South Wales (C.A. White, *The challenge of the years*, Agnus and Robertson, Sydney/London 1951, p. ix). Only fifty years later the statement would rank high in the category of famous last words. Added history since 1950 and other questions of a different culture called for more than what the new generation simply called a “compilation of parish histories and biographies” (Iron, xii).

Dr. Mark Hutchinson wrote this book as the Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity was commissioned by the PC in NSW. The title *Iron in our Blood* is derived from a moderatorial address to the General Assembly of Australia — quoted in *Australian Presbyterian Life*, August 1977, p. 6:

The Presbyterian Church is pronouncedly and pre-eminently a doctrinal church. It is these doctrines that have put iron in our blood. It is these doctrines for which we contend now.

As a “fiddler on the roof” with some theological tunes of his own (that do not necessarily disagree with a moderate evangelicalism of some sort, e.g. p. 249), Hutchinson observes the changing times of Presbyterian “Annatevka” in New South Wales.

The main differences between these two books would appear to be that the first one concentrates on facts about and for the church, whereas the second one interprets and explains, not necessarily theologically or ecclesiastically. Mr. White used thirteen periods with approximately five categories to describe developments between 1788

and 1950, whereas Dr. Hutchinson uses nine, with five different ones for the twentieth century.

Where the earlier history left one wondering how an exemplary and godly Scot such as Thomas Muir could end up in Australia as a convict (*The challenge of the years*, p. 1), it is refreshing to have some answers to the questions in more detail than was permitted by the conventions and understatements, if not nationalism, of an earlier generation (*Iron in our Blood*, p.4).

Summary

Hutchinson describes the first period (1788-1820, pp. 1-20) as the time when Scottish freemen and convicts adhered to their convictions in days of Anglo-Saxon domination. The second period, for a reason perhaps only known to the author, does not start with the arrival of the first minister and sacraments of the church with the Rev. John Dunmore Lang in 1823. Hutchinson prefers the following year for his new period, thus leaving a gap of four years (1824-1836, pp. 21-48). His main theme of Presbyterian endeavours to establish their right of State support perhaps justifies this strange move in the eyes of some. Others might fail to see the logic, especially if they are theologians. The natural obstinacy ascribed to the Scots is the theme of the next phase, and the Free Church struggles emerge (1837-1850, pp. 49-80).

The fourth period (1850-1880, pp. 81-140) covers the expansion of the church. It was the age of great institution building (p. 81) but also of the gradual disappearance of traditional prerequisites of traditional Presbyterian worship (p. 123). Events are evaluated sociologically rather than theologically, and this is especially obvious in this chapter. On the other hand, perhaps the church had become so much of an institution that it did no longer theologically evaluate itself in the light of Scripture and tradition. The next period (1880-1914, pp. 141-218) describes Presbyterians as “principled pragmatists” (p. 207), resulting in a firm place in colonial society and education. The sixth period deals with the shocks of the Great War and Depression, respectively (1914-1938, pp. 219-264). The “agreed ideology of the Church” as Hutchinson describes it, fractured and met the crisis of modernism.

Period seven deals with World War II and its aftermath (1939-1960, pp. 265-322). Reaching our times “the significance of the period 1960-90 can hardly be overestimated” (p. 324). Hutchinson calls this the period of the disappearing church (pp. 323-396). The crisis of identity and irrelevance to a secular world emerges, church and Sunday school attendance drop dramatically. While others overcame small numbers by uniting, the Presbyterian Church in New South Wales was continued and largely taken over by evangelical Presbyterians. The last period (1990s, pp. 397-420) are discussed in the light of the PCA’s rejection of Dr. Peter Scott Cameron, champion for women’s ordination and Bible criticism, who misread the signs of the times in Presbyterian Australia.

Evaluation

It was in 1829, during the days of the early British settlement in New South Wales, that Thomas Carlyle wrote his famous “Signs of the Times” for the *Edinburgh Review*. (Cf. *The Collected Works of Thomas Carlyle*, Volume 3, London Chapman and Hall, 1858.) While some gloried in the progress of the age, the emerging empire and the end of the Napoleonic wars, Carlyle in gloomy Scotland, heartland of Presbyterianism, considered the signs of the times:

The truth is, men have lost their belief in the Invisible, and believe, and hope, and work only in the Visible; or, to speak it in other words: This is not a Religious age. Only the material, the immediately practical, not the divine and spiritual, is important to us. The infinite, absolute character of Virtue has passed into a finite, conditional one; it is no longer a worship of the Beautiful and Good; but a calculation of the Profitable. Worship, indeed, in any sense, is not recognised among us, or is mechanically explained into Fear of pain, or Hope of pleasure. Our true Deity is Mechanism. It has subdued external Nature for us, and we think it will do all other things (CWT, v.3, p. 111).

Carlyle also noticed the failure of his times to produce great men who stood for great ideas and convictions. The same countries and constitutions were still there, but without the heroes they used to produce and without the spiritual motives of bygone ages. Eleven years later this would ultimately lead to his lectures on heroes and hero worship. In Hutchinson’s *History of the Presbyterian Church in NSW* the careful reader will not be able to circumvent some of Car-

lyle's heritage. Both like to explain and share a longing for heroes, but there is a striking dissimilarity between Carlyle and Hutchinson. The old Scot and even Manning Clark in his way (especially in his retirement years) tried to get through to the stage of higher ideas and ultimate theological reasons of divine purpose behind a sociological surface. Hutchinson's book is about relationships between people, "warm flesh of relationship and common spirituality over the cold bones of Church law, polity, and financial structure." (p. 419)

In essence, this is a secular history about a religious people. Carlyle was still looking for men of valour to arrive on the scene, a survival of truth and authenticity in the ultimate sense, inspiring in new ways after past failures. By contrast, the author of *Iron in the Blood* appears to have given up hope that there will always be such men. His reasons are what could daringly be described as "sociological predestination". The days are simply over and we should no longer expect men such as Angus and McGowan (cf. pp. 245-51). Please note that in *Iron in the Blood* the greatness of these men is not defined by the importance of their ideas and steadfastness in pursuing them, but by their influence as leaders and popular support. This is a very different kind of heroism to that which Carlyle would recommend or aspire to. Hutchinson has become a victim of what the former would call "the mechanical age".

Iron in the blood is the history of a religious community. It is an enjoyable history; it is cleverly written and keeps track of developments; it connects with a changing world and takes theological convictions and debates into account; but it is the history of a religious community and not a Church history. The somewhat awkward element is that it was the church who explicitly commissioned him to write a social history. It would hardly be fair to blame the author for doing his job, but one should realise the implications of horizontal scientific paradigms.

The great Absentee

There is a vast difference between a social history of religion (*Iron in the Blood*) and a *historia ecclesiastica*. Although the author realises the importance of convictions, they are treated as socially distinctive features that are more or less successful when translated into numbers

and social relevance. While the author may be of the opinion that there is more to it than mere sociology, perhaps implicitly indicating this in the title of the book, this may have been an afterthought, covering the revival of doctrine in Presbyterianism in the continuing church after the union in 1977 and the importance of doctrine and preaching in Presbyterianism throughout the ages as a special social feature of this communion. This church had after all commissioned him to write the book, and the importance of traditional doctrine was an important feature of this community.

Iron in the blood is not the history of God and his relationship with his succeeding and failing people in New South Wales. It is the history of a religious community and its members' experiences in a Presbyterian background of a Scottish heritage. The Spirit, the purposes of a divine Reality with ideals for his church and working them out in NSW of all places on earth, love beyond the horizontal, are the great absentees. This is not a book on the Catholic Church on earth, attempting to glorify God and enjoying Him forever.

The author has ultimately left us with the bare bones of Ernie Vines (p. 397) without the Spirit to make them alive. Even the "spiritual" is horizontally defined (p. 419). A vague "evangelical" commitment to shared spirituality, and loving and forgiving one another as Presbyterians shall not cause these bones to rise again. Only the great Absentee in this book will be able to do that. This of course is a theological conviction.

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Review of

L. WOODHEAD, *AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIANITY*

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45445.

An introduction to Christianity is a social study on the history of the Church from a moderately feminist perspective. It asks questions or traces developments that should make theologians think, and provoke church leaders to think twice. The title fails to deliver. The style of writing and the knowledge of church history and theology required to read this book intelligently place it beyond the reach of common mortals. But if you are a theologian, rejoice, you did not spend all those years at university in vain, because now one is supposed to be able to digest books such as this one!

Mrs. Linda Woodhead, senior lecturer at Lancaster University, covers twenty centuries of Christianity. The Pardoner in *Canterbury Tales* repeatedly stated: "My theme is always one and ever was". Mrs. Woodhead's theme is one of power: how Christianity gained control of the Western world and lost it. She thus concentrates on organisational issues when dealing with the early church rather than on the apparent innate power of its message. Divine activity and work of the Spirit of God do not feature in the author's mindset. Readers should not expect theological explanation in this social study. However, the author makes up for this by assessing developments in our present age that concern the church and theologians in particular. If not always right, she certainly stimulates intelligent thought about relevant issues.

Challenge

The book deals with Christianity in a circular way, the old theme of rise and fall:

Christianity returns to a marginal position in relation to social power, but does so with a heavy weight of baggage in tow. Above all it brings with it a history of alliance with higher power that sits uncomfortable with an age that exalts power from below (p. 409).

This ignores the mathematical difference of a few billion people who consider themselves Christians now compared to some 120 faithful in the Book of Acts. Nonetheless it begs a response to the apparent fact that modern Christianity has largely become a private affair in a secular world, perhaps even producing a secularised Church. Woodhead's answer to the challenge is embracing a subjective and liberal spirituality in which women will play a major role. She basically invites the Church to use its organisation and do something else than what Christianity was supposed to be about for two thousand years.

But the author calls our attention to the shift from the old confessional approach to the subjective theology of our times (362,63). The former started out with faith. It trusted revealed dogma from "above", embodied in Scripture and authoritative confessional summaries, but explored with reason. Since the seventeenth century, reason and experience were no longer evaluated from the perspective of an authoritative mind of God. The old faith was replaced by subjectivism — personal preference and experience as new masters of faith and morality, reaching its (temporary?) climax in our times. Woodhead shows that the Protestant church in general and evangelicalism in particular have to a large extent been affected by this paradigm shift in culture and in many cases we might add: dislodged from their original foundations.

Partiality

A broad theme such as 2000 years of Christianity requires a selective approach, but in this book the author's liberal American background or preference clouds the possibilities of fair assessment. The reader will meet with liberal Dutchmen like Jan Beukelsz (p. 196), Coornheert (p. 225), Erasmus (pp. 193-4, 200, 203, 220, 259), but will look in vain for Dathenus, Voetius, Witsius or Bogerman. The Roman Catholic agnostic Schillebeeckx (p. 381) is mentioned, while the great Jerome is only referred to in parentheses as the author of the Vulgate translation (p. 85). When in an introduction to the history of Christianity, the reader seeks in vain for Thomas of Kempen (*De Imitatione Christi*, one of the greatest bestsellers after the Bible throughout many centuries!), the bias becomes somewhat intolerable. Rather than living up to its claims, *An introduction to Christianity* serves as an intro-

duction to Mrs Woodhead's particular perception of Christianity. Relatively obscure names such as Peck and Chopra (p. 359) feature, but reformed giants such as Cranmer, Kuyper, Owen, Chalmers and Spurgeon are simply ignored. Edwards (p. 247) and Whitefield (pp. 221, 224, 246, 251) are introduced, but these men had the good fortune to minister in the United States of America. Neither South Africa nor its great missionary endeavours are on the author's map. Australia is not mentioned either, and William Carey, the father of modern missions, is an unknown entity.

Norman Vincent Peale's *Power of positive thinking* is classified among the "spiritualist versions of Christianity" (p. 358). Whether this is a matter of definition or a blunder of the second magnitude the careful reader may decide.

The author interprets Fundamentalism through American glasses, connecting the publication of the Fundamentals to an American sub-culture, introducing the Scopes trial without reference, stating that:

Central to the fundamentalist scheme of interpretation was a framework of "dispensational premillennialism" whose origins can be traced back to the work of the British writer and church leader John Nelson Darby (1800-82), leader of the proto-fundamentalist group commonly known as the Plymouth Brethren (p. 353).

This statement tends to grossly overrate the actual role of dispensational premillennialism in the hermeneutics of those who contributed to the Fundamentals and subsequent generations of likeminded scholars. Rather than being central to their interpretation of Scripture, it was a view which some of them held as a consequence of their literal approach to the Bible, not *vice versa*. Although a notable premillennialist such as Scofield contributed to the Fundamentals, so did bishop Ryle, James Orr and Benjamin Warfield.

The first volume deals exclusively with nineteen issues of Scripture authority and Bible criticism.

"Sex roles" and "gender relations" are recurrent themes. The reader simply has to read these, whether the issues were relevant to generations past or not. The index refers to women under "gender issues" that should have been "sex roles" or "grammar issues" when the Queen's English was still in vogue in England. Now even Cambridge Uni-

versity Press fails the language and Bill Clinton has been nominated as chancellor of Oxford. South Africans might as well give up on English altogether. At least 25 entries with numerous references tell us about Calvinism and women, Marcionism and women, etc. If one compares this with one lonesome reference to children and none to man or men, a remark that “women and blacks are still underrepresented in academic and theological circles” does not come as a surprise. That the same underrepresentation applies to theologically conservative married white men is no apparent concern of this author.

In dealing with Africa (pp. 397, 398) Woodhead highlights the surge of Pentecostalism. She connects this numeric success to doing the same thing as indigenous African religions and the lack of historical connection with colonialism. The essentially spiritual character of the African worldview (cf. Europe from 500 to 1500) seems to have escaped her attention.

Conclusion

An introduction to Christianity is a thought-provoking book. It helps the church to face questions, evaluate its current position, and relate to the world. The answers or suggestions provided by the author are less helpful for those who appreciate the Scriptures as God’s revelation and the apostolic teachings as authoritative.

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1988. *In mensetaal oor God se Woord. Huldigingsbundel opgedra aan Prof. A.H. van Zyl*. Kaapstad: Lux Verbi.

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ACHTEMEIER P

1997. Finding the way to Paul's theology. In: J.M. Bassler (ed.), *Pauline theology. Vol. 1. Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon* (Minneapolis: Fortress, SBLSS 4), pp. 3-21.

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