

ANGLICANISM AND THE BRITISH EMPIRE  
C 1700-1850  
by Rowan Strong

What an exciting title! And daunting. However, once I got going I found it very interesting. The chapters are very long and therefore quite difficult to measure in sensible chunks. It might be helpful if I suggest how you might tackle the book and then try to do a brief summary of the chapters.

Read the Introduction because that sets the scene and tells you what the book tries to do and what it does not. In essence it's about how Anglicans of the period saw the role of the Church of England in relation to the state and the empire. It is not a critique of their view. It is based largely on records of sermons and reports, particularly from SPG which was regarded in the period in question as the official "overseas" arm of the C of E, and later from CMS, as well as the comments of many bishops and other worthies. So there's plenty of quotation which I have tended to skip in my highlighting. Even so there is much too much highlighting and what I now suggest may save you a lot of time.

Chapter 1 could be skipped . It contains a summary of the way in which various writers and historians have viewed the subject in the past. The main point is that a lot of material is written on the assumption that the evangelicals, especially CMS, were the main protagonists in the field, whereas Strong point out that SPG, founded nearly one hundred years before CMS, was a major player and retained a permanent interest.

Having read the introduction I would read the last chapter, Conclusion, in full because it gives an excellent summary of the main contention of the book (See below).

In essence the book divides up historically as follows:

Chapter 2

1700 to the loss of the American colonies in 1783 when the relationship of the C of E to the state was taken for granted in terms of the establishment arising out of 1688. The Church was assumed to be the religious arm of a Protestant Christian state. The main tension was the failure to get state approval for the appointment of bishops in North America. Read pages 108 to end of chapter for an overview first, then pick and choose.

Chapter 3

This covers the period from the end of the American War of Independence to the period leading up to the Great Reform Act of 1832 and focuses on India. The state appeared to give much greater support to the Church at this time as the East India Company established itself. A bishopric was established in 1814 in Calcutta with four archdeaconries. Although CMS was much stronger here than in North America, the same assumptions are made by supporters of both in terms of the view of the Anglican role in relation to Empire and the need for an Episcopal structure. Read pages 191 – end first.

#### Chapter 4

The Great Reform Act and the political liberalising atmosphere of the time made it clear that the C of E was not going to enjoy the same hegemony in the future. A new “paradigm” emerges which reflects the sense that in future the Church is going to have to strike out more independently. (This was as true of the church at home as it was in the colonies). This led to the setting up of the Colonial Bishops Fund so that bishoprics could be set up in the colonies without having to rely on funding and direct appointments by the state. Bishop Blomfield of London was the prime mover. Read pages 218-end first.

#### Chapter 5

Developments in Australia and New Zealand up to 1850 are used in this chapter to illustrate the way in which the new paradigm of Anglican independence as a truly episcopal church in the colonies worked out. It describes how Bishop Broughton, the first Bishop of Sydney, gradually moved in his own thinking from an old establishment figure to one who perforce adopted the new paradigm. You could read pages 240-250 passim. The story of Bishop Selwyn, first Bishop of New Zealand, is also worth reading passim, pages 273-80. Read pages 280-282 for an overview of this period.

#### Conclusion

As well as summarising what might be called the political movements within the scope of the book, this chapter seeks to draw the conclusion that the Anglican “missionaries” of the period, though constrained by the bonds of establishment and empire, certainly had a strong sense of their Christian responsibilities. They regarded the indigenous people of the colonies as benighted and in the grip of Satan and needed to be evangelised. They saw the English/British Empire as a providential creation which gave the Christian state and Church, by which they meant the C of E, the best of all forms of Protestant religious phenomena, the responsibility for this process of evangelisation. It was called upon even to counter the insidious and satanic influence of the Roman Catholic Church. Another theme throughout the book is the perception of the colonisers generally as degenerate and a danger to the indigenous populations and an obstacle to their evangelisation; thus the need for ministry to them as a priority. The general thrust of the book is to show that all shades of churchmanship within the C of E shared a similar outlook in terms of the relationship between Church and Empire and a common sense of Christian responsibility to both colonised and colonisers, even though this was in certain respects (notably on slavery) not infrequently compromised.

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26<sup>th</sup> April 2008