

## A reaction to the Kigali commitment

*A presentation based on this material was made to some Diocese of Melbourne Synod members at St George's Malvern on 3 June 2023*

There are a few things to be said here.

The first is that the Kigali commitment<sup>1</sup> is a private commitment made by GAFCON, which is neither a church nor a constituent part of the Anglican Communion.

The second is that in effect the burden of the Kigali commitment (or, more accurately, complaint) relates to one question only:

‘the majority vote by the General Synod of the Church of England in February 2023 to welcome proposals by the bishops to enable same-sex couples to receive God’s blessing. It grieves the Holy Spirit and us that the leadership of the Church of England is determined to bless sin.’

That the Kigali drafters can take it upon themselves to speak for the Holy Spirit is not only presumptuous but also, perhaps, indicative of their refusal to acknowledge that the same Spirit may indeed be working through the Church to bring about change.

The third thing to say is that the Kigali commitment was clearly orchestrated by the Diocese of Sydney, which provided the chair and another two members of the drafting committee of ten (which only included three Africans). Now Sydney is a victim of catch 22 – much as it might like to split the church in Australia, it can’t because if it did the rest of the church could continue along lines Sydney disagrees with – it would lose its power of veto.

As the Archbishop of Canterbury has pointed out, a unilateral statement like Kigali has no effect because the instruments of communion it rails against have not been included in the discussion – he has said ‘that no changes to the formal structures of the Anglican Communion can be made unless they are agreed upon by the Instruments of Communion’.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, in Australia Sydney is in danger of declaring itself to be in contravention of our Constitution<sup>3</sup>, which states at s6 ‘This Church will remain and be in communion with the Church of England in England and with churches in communion therewith so long as communion is consistent with the Fundamental Declarations contained in this Constitution’.

The fundamental declarations are threefold in nature:

- first upholding the faith as expressed in the Apostles and Nicene Creeds,
- second, receiving ‘all the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as being the ultimate rule and standard of faith given by inspiration of God and containing all things necessary for salvation’
- and thirdly that ‘This Church will ever obey the commands of Christ, teach His doctrine, administer His sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, follow and uphold his discipline and preserve the three orders of bishops, priests and deacons in the sacred ministry.’

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<sup>1</sup> ‘GAFCON IV – The Kigali Commitment’.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Lambeth Palace Statement on GAFCON IV Kigali Commitment’.

<sup>3</sup> Anglican Church of Australia, *The Constitution, Canons and Rules of the Anglican Church of Australia 2017*.

Now who interprets these provisions? I believe it is by Canon duly made under the Constitution (which gives any metropolitan see the right of veto if it is a matter of doctrine) or the Appellate Tribunal; it is certainly not by resolution of the General Synod. Now our tribunals have wide powers set out in section 73:

- (1) In determining any question as to the faith ritual ceremonial or discipline of this Church any tribunal may take into consideration but shall not be bound to follow its previous decisions on any such questions or any decision of any judicial authority in England on any questions of the faith ritual ceremonial or discipline of the Church of England in England.  
[It is clearly envisaged that opinions may change over time.]  
Nevertheless there is a delicious provision in 73(2)
- (2) A determination of any tribunal which is inconsistent or at variance with any decision of such a judicial authority in England shall have permissive effect only and shall not be obligatory or coercive.

Some of the developments we have accepted despite the scriptural evidence for contrary positions include:

- Abolition of the death penalty
- Permission for divorced persons to remarry
- Abolition of slavery

*The presenting issue: 'proposals by the bishops to enable same-sex couples to receive God's blessing'*

Before the last meeting of the Australian General Synod in 2022, when this was the 'big' issue clouding everything else before the Synod, two books were distributed to Synod members. One, from the Doctrine Commission, presented eighteen essays by Australian Anglican scholars around the themes of Context; Scripture and Hermeneutics; History, Theology and Ecclesiology; and finally the Case For and Against.<sup>4</sup> The other book, *The Line in the Sand*<sup>5</sup>, included fourteen essays opposing the Appellate Tribunal majority opinion (five to one)<sup>6</sup> upholding Wangaratta's 'legislation to authorise a service to bless marriages in accordance with the *Marriage Act 1961* of the Commonwealth of Australia', which of course now includes same sex marriages. Among its appendices this book included the full text of the opinion of the one member of the Appellate Tribunal who dissented from the majority opinion, but only the contributors' version of the majority opinion. Perhaps the unoriginal title of this latter book was prescient – after all the changing tides obliterate any lines in the sand, which do not endure for ever. More to the point, it is indicative of the general approach, which is not to engage in any debate or acknowledge the possibility that 'they' may be wrong.

*Some antidotes to certainty:*

'Moral certainty is always a sign of cultural inferiority. The more uncivilized the man, the surer he is that he knows precisely what is right and what is wrong. All human progress, even in morals, has been the work of men who have doubted the current moral values, not of men who have whooped them up and tried to enforce them. The truly civilized man is always skeptical and tolerant, in this field as in all others. His culture is based on "I am not too sure"'

— H L Mencken

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<sup>4</sup> *Marriage, Same-Sex Marriage and the Anglican Church of Australia: Essays from the Doctrine Commission.*

<sup>5</sup> Tong, Smith, and Leite, *The Line in the Sand: The Appellate Tribunal Opinion and the Future of the Anglican Church in Australia.*

<sup>6</sup> Appellate Tribunal of the Anglican Church of Australia, 'Primate's References Re Wangaratta Blessing Service'.

‘The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts.’ — **Bertrand Russell**

### *Now for some politics*

While GAFCON Australia has members throughout the Australian Church it would appear to be strongly influenced by the Diocese of Sydney (chaired by the Bp of Tasmania, Sydney’s present and immediate past archbishops are directors and the Executive Officer is a Sydney priest operating from a Sydney address).<sup>7</sup> In my opinion that diocese is in a place strangely analogous to that of the Liberal Party of Australia. It is painting itself into a corner of negativity, increasingly out of touch with the broad range of society.

There is only one independent measure of the place of the Anglican Church in Australia – the number of Australians who identify as ‘Anglican’ in the Census. As we all know the number of ‘no religion’ Australians has been growing rapidly over recent censuses and the number of Anglicans has been in decline. From 1991 to 2021 the proportion of Anglicans in the population of the Diocese of Sydney has declined from 24.1% to 9.2% - a slightly faster rate of decline than for Australia as a whole (23.9% to 9.8%) – see first graph on page 6.

It is difficult to obtain any reliable data on the financial state of Australian dioceses, but Sydney is rumoured to be facing difficulties, partly because it borrowed to invest and lost on those investments (gambling anyone?). Also, it is committed to supporting the Diocese of Bathurst, which would otherwise founder financially.

Another curious feature of church life in Sydney is that there are few ordinands from elsewhere ministering in the diocese. In 2020 92% of Sydney active clergy had been ordained deacon in that diocese, compared to 83% in 1961 (for Melbourne 49% in 1961 and 70% in 2020). So Sydney would seem to be increasingly inward looking and self-referencing.

Anglican clergy are much given to marrying but it is not possible to obtain full details because 16% do not reveal their marital status. Nevertheless, 93% of Sydney’s active clergy in 2020 are known to be married compared to 81% for Australia as a whole (only one diocese, North West Australia, had a higher proportion – 95%). For the Australian population 53% of the population aged 25 to 64 are married and 33% have never been married (the remaining 14% being separated, divorced or widowed).<sup>8</sup> Is marriage being used as a de facto test for heterosexuality? It is disturbing that the clergy in Sydney seem so rarely to be role modelling the singleness that such a large part of the population experience.

I suggest that the Anglican Church of Australia is increasingly becoming one church with two cultures.<sup>9</sup> Our challenge is to ensure that one of those cultures does not frustrate the other.

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<sup>7</sup> [www.gafconaustralia.org](http://www.gafconaustralia.org) accessed 6 June 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. Census of Population and Housing: Household and families data summary, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> At General Synod it is the practice for the daily eucharist to be celebrated by the metropolitans in turn. In 2022, the Archbishop of Sydney declined the invitation to celebrate so an assistant bishop of the host Diocese of Brisbane took his place. On the last day of Synod the Primate (Adelaide) presided with the Archbishops of Brisbane, Melbourne, and Perth worshipping together in the front row.

To that end I suggest it might be advisable to put a motion to the forthcoming Melbourne Synod affirming this diocese's continuing communion with the Church of England in England (s6 of the Constitution) and affirming the other instruments of communion.

#### *An observation about Australian society*

In contrast to fifty years ago, when public demonstrations tended to be left leaning and focused on issues such as the Vietnam War, international peace (the Palm Sunday marches), social justice, and industrial issues, in recent times they have been right leaning and focused on personal rights such as the anti-vax marches and the invasion of local government meetings by anti-gay groups. Recent demonstrations, although disruptive, have not attracted the scale of support of those in the past (in Melbourne police have often been close to outnumbering demonstrators).

To the casual observer many of today's demonstrators are driven by fear and misinformation – they are a plea from the self-perceived disempowered and disadvantaged.

Does this apply to dissent in the church? If so, what is the real fear and how can it be assuaged?

#### *Breakaway churches from the Anglican Church of Australia (ACA)*

The GAFCON-inspired **Diocese of the Southern Cross** is but the latest in a series of churches that have broken away from the ACA for various reasons. It currently has five parishes – three in Brisbane, one in North Queensland, and one on the southern outskirts of Perth in the Diocese of Bunbury. All five parishes are led by priests formerly licensed in the ACA, the WA one by a female priest – so much for GAFCON principles of headship.<sup>10</sup> One of the ministers, Trevor Saggars (for Northern Hope Anglican in Cairns), is also a board member of GAFCON Australia.

The **Traditional Anglican Church in Australia**, which began as the Anglican Catholic Church of Australia<sup>11</sup> is now led by a former Anglican priest, Bp David Robarts, and has five parishes on mainland Australia with services held in Tasmania. It does not have any presence in NSW.<sup>12</sup>

The **Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of the Southern Cross** was erected by Pope Benedict XVI for former Anglicans in Australia, Japan and Oceania in 2012. It has three congregations in NSW, four in Queensland, one in SA, 2 in Victoria, and one in WA. Five of these 11 congregations are led by former Anglican priests, and one currently is leaderless.<sup>13</sup>

There was also a split in the **Torres Strait** in 1998, partly over the amalgamation of Carpentaria with North Queensland but also over the ordination of women.<sup>14</sup> Bishop Keith Joseph of NQ says there is a gradual return to the ACA.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> [www.scd.org.au](http://www.scd.org.au) accessed 28 April 2023.

<sup>11</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglican\\_Catholic\\_Church\\_in\\_Australia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglican_Catholic_Church_in_Australia) accessed 29 April 2023.

<sup>12</sup> [www.traditionalanglican.org.au](http://www.traditionalanglican.org.au) accessed 29 April 2023.

<sup>13</sup> [www.ordinariate.org.au](http://www.ordinariate.org.au) accessed 29 April 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Wetherell, 'Whatever Happened in Torres Strait?: Interpreting the Anglican Split of 1998'.

<sup>15</sup> Conversation with the author, General Synod 2022.

## Conclusions

- GAFCON appears to be obsessed with one issue about which it is clear from this Church's Doctrine Commission report that differing views can legitimately be held
- Families have differences of opinion – is this one of such significance that the family should split?
- Earlier splits from the ACA have not exactly thrived
- We should continue to maintain our right to co-exist by affirming that which holds us together

Colin Reilly

June 2023

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Who was at Kigali? According to the GAFCON website there were '1,302 delegates from 52 countries, including 315 bishops, 456 other clergy and 531 laity'.<sup>16</sup> No indication is given as to how the delegates were selected; it is more likely that they were self-selected than a representative body.

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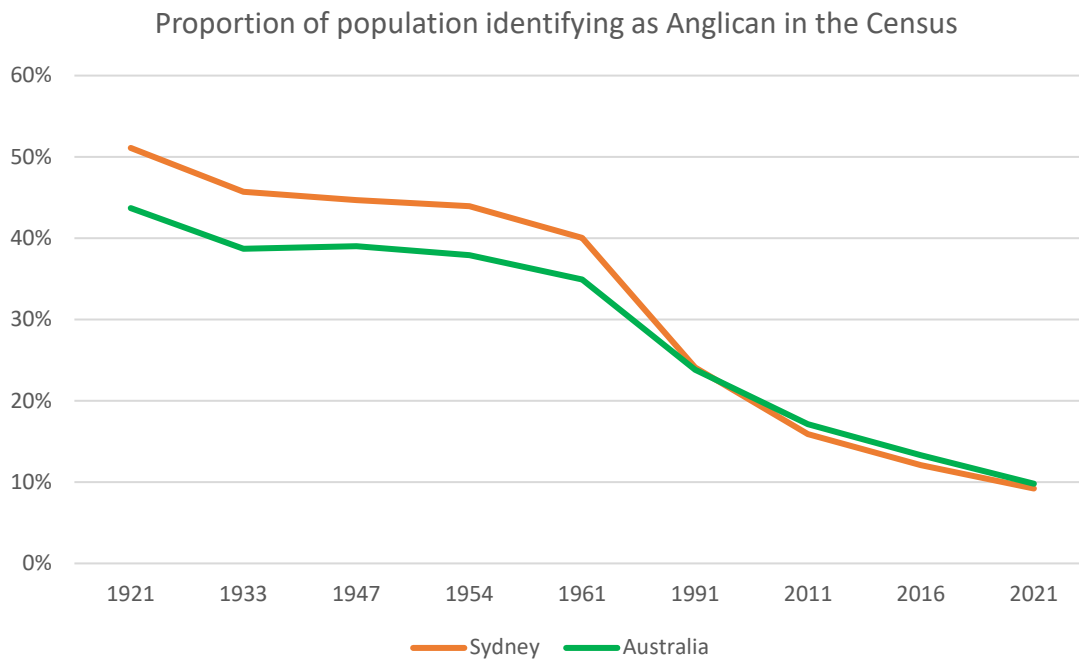
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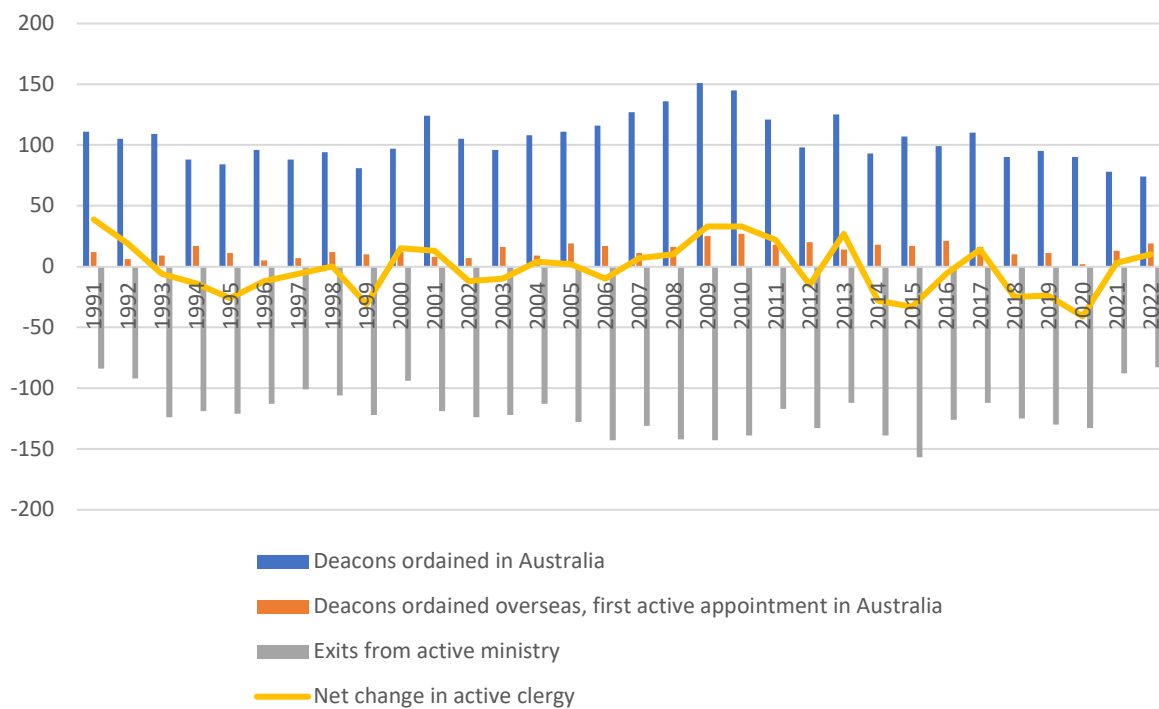
<sup>16</sup> <https://www.gafcon.org/> accessed 28 April 2023.

## Some indicators of real issues facing the Anglican Church of Australia

**Relevance** – a declining proportion of the Australian population identify as Anglican



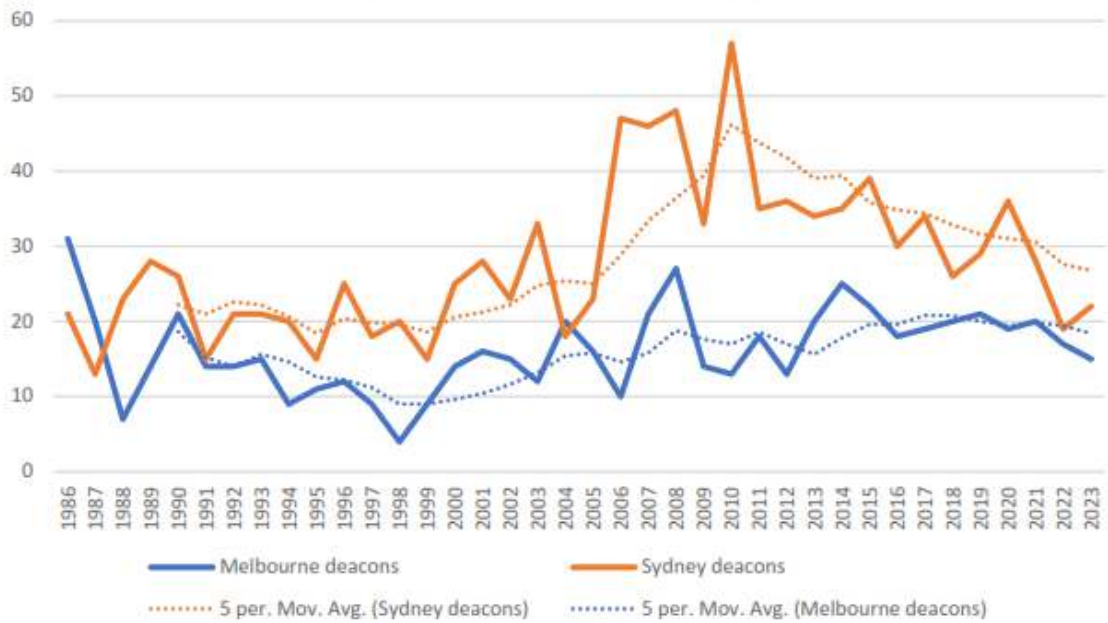
**Clergy supply** – more clergy are exiting active ministry than are being ordained in or migrating to Australia



**Two cultures** – the diaconal ordination experience of our two largest dioceses

**Diaconal ordinations: Melbourne & Sydney**

Total 1,680 (Melbourne 37%, Sydney 73%)  
 Melbourne avg 16 per annum, Sydney avg 28



**Diaconal ordinations: proportion female**

Total 356 female deacons  
 (Melbourne 249 - 40% of total 615;  
 Sydney 107 - 10% of total 1065)

