

ADAM CAIRNS

The story of Adam Cairns begins as does the story of so many famous people by stating that he came to Australia as a migrant. And each migrant who came to Australia brought with them a whole range of cultures which included language, lifestyle and religious belief. I don't have to tell you that the assimilation, integration or simply the acceptance of these differences has never been easy. For example, many of our early arrivals came from the United Kingdom. They were greeted by people who had arrived earlier and who spoke the English language and lived by English customs. So assimilation into Australian society was relatively easy for those who came after them. However, this was not always the case. For example, my ancestors came from Wales and like many who also came from Wales they only spoke the Gaelic. This placed them in the same predicament as present day migrants who come to Australia from Asian, African and Middle East countries and who have to cope with the English language. But fortunately, they generally found others who have also come from their mother country and were willing to help them.

But the particular issue associated with migration I want to address now is that of religion. You will of course be acutely aware of the present day problem which confronts migrants of the Muslim faith. There have been other religious issues in the past which have also caused considerable challenges. And the one I want to talk about is not the Catholics versus Protestants tussle but a disruption which occurred within one particular branch of Protestantism and that is the Presbyterian Church. Let me say immediately that I'm doing this because it's against this background that we can best understand the man who is the subject of my address. That man of course is Adam Cairns or to give him his full title, Rev Dr Adam Cairns.

I referred earlier to the wide range of cultures, customs, and languages and so on which migrants have brought to Australia. I want now to talk about what Scottish migrants brought with them. Let us quickly dismiss bagpipes, kilts and the haggis however colourful, or in the case of the haggis, inedible they may be. More importantly Scottish migrants brought with them the result of what is known in Scottish religious circles as the Disruption. That is, not every Scottish migrant who came to Australia belonged to the same branch of the Presbyterian Church. This is exemplified by the fact that whereas today there is only one Presbyterian Church in the Central Business District of Melbourne there was a time when there were four. There was and there still is The Scots Church in Collins Street. But just across the road in a building now aptly occupied by BHP, there was another Presbyterian Church called St Enoch's. A third Presbyterian Church was built at the top end of Swanston Street opposite the Public Library. It was called the John Knox Church named after a famous Scottish churchman. It's now occupied by the Church of Christ and I gather has a flourishing congregation.

The fourth Presbyterian Church on the edge of the Central Business District was located in what is called Eastern Hill. It was called Chalmers Church and its relevance to this talk is that this was the church where Adam Cairns was the minister and where he made his reputation as an outstanding preacher and a prominent citizen.

It's worthwhile now saying something about the situation in the Scotland which Cairns left and the Victoria to which he came, because there are some striking parallels. In the early part of the nineteenth century Scottish society consisted broadly of two groups. The first were the wealthy landowners and the second were the tenants or artisans who rented land from the landowners. By and large people in this latter category were poverty stricken and had little political power. The wealthy landowners were strongly Presbyterian. Not only did they build magnificent churches but they paid the ministers' stipend and actually had the power to choose the minister for their parishes.

Likewise in Victoria, Scottish migrants of the Presbyterian faith settled in the Western District, for example, worked hard to develop their properties and became very wealthy. They built imposing churches and provided most of the money to maintain their ministers. A classic example of this is the Neil Black Memorial Church in Noorat which is a magnificent building in a very tiny community. Many of these landowners or squatters as they are sometimes called eventually retired and came to live in Melbourne where they exercised a similar role of benevolence as far as the Presbyterian Church was concerned. I have written a book about one of them called Francis Ormond whom I'm sure you will know.

But times were changing both in Scotland and in Australia. The cause of this change is generally referred to as the Industrial Revolution and one of its major impacts was the rapid growth of large cities and with this a commensurate growth of urban churches. These churches were different in character from the rural churches and among other things featured a strong sense of independence. The focal point of much of this sense of independence centred on the rights of the church as opposed to the rights of the State. One might reflect that a similar situation has currently been alive in Australia in the matter of same sex marriages where the tradition of many churches was overridden by the state. Returning to Scotland for a moment a bitter division in the Church of Scotland over the church versus state debate led to the Disruption of 1843 when 470 ministers surrendered their stipends, left their manses and consequently the loss of all the material security for themselves and their families. It was an incredibly courageous sacrifice which these ministers made to regain the spiritual rights of their Church, which they judged to have been set aside by the Law Courts and Parliament. In a spirit of adventurous faith they formed the Free Church of Scotland to carry on the work of a new national church, but without the endowments they had previously enjoyed.

In addition to the ministers there were also in Scotland laymen who had definite and conservative views on theology, and who felt it was an invasion of their most cherished religious right when they were forced to "sit under" a minister whose teaching they deemed unscriptural. Times haven't changed! However gradually the Church's protests died down and its leaders were content to accept the position as it stood under the Patronage Act of 1712. But early in the nineteenth century the position was altered by the rise to influence of a party in the Presbyterian Church known as "Evangelical", in opposition to the "Moderates", who had been dominant over the previous eighty years. With the growing importance of the Evangelicals came also an awakening to the importance of propagating the Christian faith through missions, both at home and abroad.

The word "Evangelical" gives rise to concepts of strong emotional preaching aimed at converting people to a particular faith, in most cases Christianity. It is also seen as strongly Biblically based often described as fundamentalism where the Bible is stated to be the only source of the word of God.

But in addition to its fundamentalism the Evangelical Church also had a strong element of activism which was expressed through missionary activity and social reform. It was the challenge of the appalling conditions of poverty in many parts of Scotland that led the Evangelicals in the Free Church to take up this challenge of social reform. In this movement the driving force was a man called Thomas Chalmers who in the judgement of John Buchan was "the greatest constructive mind that the Scottish Church has produced, and one of the noblest figures in any Church." Born in the little port of Anstruther in 1780, he completed his course in Arts and Divinity at St. Andrew's University at what has been described as "the precocious age of nineteen". Until he was thirty Chalmers' main interests were scientific, and he lectured with distinction on mathematics, chemistry and economics. Then, while serving as minister of the quiet parish of Kilmeny, he had a serious illness, leading to a religious crisis which altered the centre of gravity of his whole life and made him an evangelist. It was then too, that he carried out a bold and successful experiment for the relief of poverty and the improvement of social conditions in a densely populated city parish. Later he was the prime mover in providing two hundred new parish churches in neglected areas throughout Scotland.

Testimony to Chalmers' greatness was borne by Thomas Carlyle who said after his death, "I suppose there will never again be such a preacher in any Christian Church." Yet he was a man of great personal simplicity, shunning publicity and happy in the company of children.

Coupled with this evangelical approach to social reform was the on-going battle between the church and the state to assert its right to spiritual freedom. It was under such leadership as Chalmers that the General Assembly took up the question of patronage in 1833. Another equally

serious cause of dispute arose when the Courts held that the Church had no right to admit the ministers of the new church, or to give them any constitutional powers. Vigorous controversy followed, as the full bearing of the Church's claim to spiritual freedom and the strength of the forces opposing it became clearer. Restrictive decisions by the Courts multiplied, but were disregarded by Chalmers and his comrades. Efforts to find a "via media" were made and broke down. The conflict passed from the Law Courts to Parliament; but English statesmen of the era were unfitted by training to understand the Church's history and claims. So the Disruption became inevitable, and Chalmers spent his last four years as leader of a Church severed from the State and dependent on the free offerings of the people.

It's said that no two religious leaders could have been more unlike in temperament, in literary style and theological outlook than Chalmers (Presbyterian) and Cardinal Newman (Catholic). Yet in the years following 1833 both were contending for the same end—the freedom of the Church to deliver her message and do her work free from State control in matters spiritual. After Chalmers' death, the Free Church of Scotland forgot in part his social ideals, but accomplished work out of all proportion to her numbers in the diverse fields of foreign missions, education and biblical scholarship. The Church which remained established repaired her broken walls under the leadership of another great-hearted preacher, Norman Macleod, and in time obtained release from the laws which limited her freedom. In 1929 the two Churches, which now included the successors of the eighteenth-century seceders, came together in a union through which the deep wound of the Disruption was at length healed.,

We now turn to Adam Cairns. He was born on 29 January 1802 at Lonforgan, Perthshire, Scotland, son of Rev. Adam Cairns and his wife Elizabeth. His early education was at Lonforgan parish school, with private tuition from his father in ancient and modern languages. In the spirit of boyish adventure he went to sea, but one trans-Atlantic voyage as a cabin boy was enough to put an end to that ambition. He matriculated at St Andrews University in 1814 and went to Edinburgh in 1818 for divinity studies. From 1824 to 1833 he served in a number of parishes.

Due to the strength of his preaching and scholarship Cairns was called to the charge of Cupar, the county town of Fife, and was inducted on 1 September 1837. While at Cupar his other three daughters (there was one prior) and his son were born. Despite continued illness he worked energetically in his parish, and also took a strenuous part in the Disruption - to deny the State's right to interfere in religious matters and gain the Church of Scotland's spiritual independence, which included removing the practice of ministers being appointed by the State and upholding the right of each congregation to select its own minister.

In 1847 he suffered the first of the “strokes” in which he always saw the hand of God upon him, and the consequent expectation of death. To regain his health he went to Gibraltar where he set up the first Free Church mission. In 1853 respiratory troubles influenced his decision to lead a Free Church mission to Victoria.

Adam and Jessie Cairns sailed from Glasgow on 8 June 1853 on the "Hurricane" with their six children aged 6 to 17, their servant Ray Margaret Dixon, and the Rev William Henderson, Rev. Archibald Simpson and Rev. Alexander Adam with their wives. They arrived in Melbourne on 10 September 1853, a three month trip.

Also despatched on the same ship were a prefabricated iron church to seat 500 and an iron house, because it was known how short the gold rush colony of Victoria was of building materials and labour. The house was brought out at a cost of £1000 but it cost almost as much to erect it due to the hugely inflated wages of the time. It was erected on Eastern Hill beside Scotch College (which was then on the site on which St. Andrews Hospital and then the Peter McCallum Cancer Institute were later built). However the iron church was not needed because when Adam Cairns first preached in the Temperance Hall in the morning and John Knox Church in the evening it was immediately obvious that the congregation would far exceed its capacity. Donations of £1000 enabled a spacious unfloored wooden building to be erected by 20th November 1853, capable of accommodating 1000 people. The church was filled at both services on the first Sunday. As for the iron church shipped with Cairns its destiny is uncertain. It was later sold, but no evidence has been found to back the story that it was shipped to Invercargill, New Zealand.

The new church was named Chalmers' Free Church, in honour of the late Rev. Dr. Thomas Chalmers, social reformer, Professor at St. Andrews and Edinburgh, leader of the movement towards a Free Church of Scotland, and its first Moderator.

It is known that the State of Victoria offered to the various churches a site of land within the precincts of Melbourne. Thus St Paul's Anglican, St Patrick's Catholic, Wesley Methodist, Scots Church Presbyterian and others were built on the sites they now occupy. So far as the Free Presbyterians were concerned the question of acceptance from the State of ecclesiastical sites was fought and won at the Synod by the new ministers, so Chalmers church was built on land on Eastern Hill. It adjoined the original site of Scotch College and was in Gipps Street West, now St. Andrews Place, East Melbourne. About 1856 "a worthy stone edifice costing £8000" was built, and the iron manse (7 rooms + 2 kitchens) was also replaced, possibly around 1858 when the Cairns' address was shown as Albert Street. In 1859 it was being used for classes by the science master at Scotch College.

Adam Cairns had won his first battle to strengthen the Church of Scotland in Victoria; his mission now was to unite the various Scottish factions in the colony into one Free Church of Scotland in Australia. Costs of rent and food in Victoria were far higher than the newly arrived clergymen had expected, so Adam Cairns organised a meeting in John Knox Church to raise a fund of £800 to assist ministers in an emergency according to their need until each had an income.

Adam Cairns was a prime mover towards the union of the various Presbyterian churches in Victoria, and expended much time, energy and patience before the goal was reached in 1859. All the Church of Scotland Synod, nearly all the Free Churchmen, and two of the three United Presbyterian groups joined in the Presbyterian Church of Victoria in the Assembly on 7 April 1859 at Scots Church, Collins Street, Melbourne.

Cairns was an active founder of many benevolent institutions, and had a particular interest in education. He was prominent in the early administration of Scotch College and agitated strenuously for a National system of primary education. Until the opening in 1866 of the Theological Hall, of which he was first principal, Cairns was Melbourne's main instructor of Presbyterian theological students. But he was best known as a fearless preacher and denouncer of everything he thought to be evil. After recurring illness in 1865 he visited his beloved homeland where he eloquently pleaded for more missionaries of better quality for Victoria. When he retired from Chalmers' Church in 1876 he made another brief trip to Scotland. The Cairns scholarship, founded at the University of Melbourne in 1877, was raised by public subscription. In his last years he wrote two of the eighteen pamphlets, lectures and sermons which he published in Melbourne. He died at his home in Richmond near Melbourne on 30 January 1881, survived by his wife, who died on 26 August 1906, and two daughters.

Tall and handsome, and of commanding appearance, Adam Cairns had become known as Melbourne's outstanding preacher. Some of the most influential and wealthy of Melbourne's Scots were communicants of his church, and he and Jessie quickly became strong supporters of local philanthropic causes and active founders of many benevolent institutions including the Benevolent Asylum, the Orphan Asylum and the Refuge and Reformatory for Fallen Women. He "was a man endowed with many gifts... he exercised the influence that only belongs to a commanding personality". With his strong character and impetuous temperament, Dr. Cairns was too robustly human to be always in agreement with everybody else, but on every hand he was thankfully recognised as one of the stalwarts of righteousness in colonial life. His rousing sermons often fulminated against those who would breach the rectitude of Melbourne Sundays and against the "wild passion" of the theatres.

When his health broke down, his congregation arranged for him to revisit Scotland and to take rest for a year. He left for Liverpool on 16 March 1865

on the SS Great Britain. In Scotland he reported to the General Assembly on the 12 years' progress, during which he had seen "a city, little better than a collection of hovels built of brick, of wood, of zinc, or corrugated iron, of canvas, of lath and plaster, of wattle and daub, rise and expand into the form and dimensions, with something of the beauty and something of the splendour, of a magnificent metropolis. I have seen a state of social anarchy and utter confusion give place to one of order and comfort. I have seen a population of 70,000 or 80,000 multiplied eight times. I have seen a country, whose only roads were bush-tracks, intersected with railways of admirable construction. I have witnessed also the origin and development of those philanthropic institutions which attend the progress of Christian civilization; hospitals for the sick and maimed; refuges for destitute and helpless; asylums for orphan and stranger, the deaf and dumb, etc.

"I have assisted at the setting up and establishing of a system of common schools, which has ripened into a liberally supported educational system, almost commensurate with the necessities of the population. Alongside... is our own Scotch College.... And this educational edifice is crowned, as it ought to be, with a university built at great cost, with a competent staff of professors... Twelve years ago there were in the colony just fourteen members (ministers) of all sections. These were divided amongst themselves. Now the Presbyterian Church, the disposal of our Home Mission and eligible for calls, and two missionaries - one to the Chinese and one to the Aborigines". He eloquently invited more missionaries of better quality for Australia.

He spoke also of his love of Scotland and of often experiencing "the agony of homesickness, a vehement craving for my native country", but assured the Assembly that "My choice is Australia; my deliberate choice is Australia. I will soon go back never to return, with no wish to return, because I believe such is the will of the Lord.... There is the sphere of my ministry, the home of my children, and by-and-by in its soil this anxious body will find a quiet tomb".

There are two stories I would like to tell in concluding my story about Adam Cairns.

One is how he influenced the great Francis Ormond to turn his attention to philanthropy and in particular to the establishment of a residential college at the University of Melbourne called Ormond College.

Around 1870 Francis Ormond now a wealthy pastoralist suffered the loss of his mother and then the next year suffered another grievous loss when his married sister Isabella Sutherland, aged only twenty seven, died on December 11, 1871. Ormond was much attached to Isabella not only as a sister but also as a woman widely admired for her excellent character. Wishing to perpetuate her memory he offered to provide two stained glass windows in St Georges Presbyterian Church Geelong where the Ormond

family worshipped. He commissioned the design of the two windows which would be placed either side of the central preaching pulpit in the church. However when his father Captain Ormond heard of it he begged his son not to proceed with the plan. Having lost his wife a few short years earlier Captain Ormond had come very close to his daughter and believed she represented all that was good and gracious in a woman. Her death at such a young age devastated him. He felt that the possibility of sitting in St Georges every Sunday and looking at the windows on either side of the pulpit would only serve as a constant and painful reminder of his loss. The young Francis Ormond deferred to his father's wishes though it may be that deep disappointment remained with him for the rest of his life.

However in the strange turns and twists of life which often shape our destinies this disappointment led to the beginning of Ormond's magnificent philanthropic contributions to his 'ruling passion' which was to provide educational opportunities for as many young people and adults as possible. As a respected member of the Presbyterian Church, Ormond frequently mixed in a circle which included what could be called the church's "elder statesmen". One of these was Rev Dr Adam Cairns.

This was the man whose inspiration and encouragement brought Francis Ormond to the great turning point in his life and marked the beginning of his philanthropic efforts in the cause of education. It was the Rev. Dr. Adam Cairns who on one occasion suggested to Ormond that any money he desired to devote to the benefit of his fellow colonists might profitably be spent in the promotion of some form of higher education. That, of course, fell in line with Ormond's own views, and towards the close of 1872 he consulted with the Rev. Dr. Campbell, his father's minister at St George's Presbyterian Church Geelong on how to implement this proposal. Campbell's suggestion was that as Ormond couldn't gratify his wishes in placing windows in the church as a memorial to his sister, he might apply their estimated cost, some £300, to assist in founding a scholarship in the Presbyterian Theological Hall where Cairns himself was the leading light. Ormond at once accepted that suggestion, and after mature deliberation, gave not £300, but £1,000, which was the first scholarship given for undergraduate student ministers and worth £50 per annum. Of course we know that this was only the beginning of Francis Ormond's amazing philanthropy. Ormond of course went on to found Ormond College, the Working Men's College now RMIT and many other institutions.

Finally I want to turn to another famous Presbyterian although one who functioned in a different way from Francis Ormond. He was Rev F A Hagenauer and he was at one time minister of Cairns Memorial Church. Rev. Hagenauer died in 1987 at an age in excess of one hundred years. I often heard him giving forth in the annual Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church. He was practically blind but could still blister the paint from the walls of the Assembly Hall. He was unashamedly aggressive when dealing

with matters of political or social controversy and this was reflected in his sermons many of which made space in the local newspapers.

One in The Age of 14 April 1947 was as follows. It was headed

STATE'S LENIENCY TO COMMUNISTS BITTERLY ATTACKED

The State Government were a lot of cowards when it came to dealing with the Communists, Rev F. A. Hagenauer said yesterday at Cairns Memorial Church, East Melbourne, when appealing for food for Britain.

We are ready to supply the people of Britain with food and clothing, but it was now doubtful if the unions would sail with the big ship he said. The government had been entrusted with the responsibility of arranging transport by trains but after its Chief Commissioner of Railways had said on Saturday night that the trains would run on Monday, a Communist had replied that the trains would not run. We were told if the trains did not run to the wharf the food for Britain would not travel by other ships and the Orion would sail without the Food for Britain.

Hagenauer added that if the government took no action when the Communists held up transport, and so deprived the people of Britain the food sent by us, then the Government were a lot of cowards. They had nothing to fear, but if an ordinary citizen defied the Communists he was threatened that he or his wife would be maltreated, or perhaps his house burnt down. Communists would not dare to do those things to the Premier or his Government. Ministers of the Crown and members of Parliament had nothing to fear except the loss of their salary. They were a lot of cowards to let the Communists browbeat them.

That is a mild example of the kind of sermon Rev Hagenauer preached even in his declining years. It could be said that in those years the members of the Presbyterian Assembly treated him with amusement and sometimes with contempt. But as I watched him standing up there in the elevated pulpit I couldn't help but remind myself that along with the churches' changed attitude towards things like Sabbath Day Observance and dances on church properties there was another change which was of a symbolic nature. That was the movement of the pulpit from a central position to one on the side of the sanctuary. Because you see the old Presbyterian Church used to regard the reading and preaching from the Bible as the central act of worship. And ministers like Cairns and Hagenauer used the large central pulpit to good effect. Scots Church had a central pulpit as did Toorak Presbyterian Church, Union Memorial Church in North Melbourne and many others. And when this changed to having

the preaching of the word of God pushed to one side it is said by some that this has led to a decline in the standards of preaching.

Well I'll leave it to you to decide whether that is true but it is certainly true that preachers like Chalmers in Scotland and Cairns and Hagenauer in Victoria today a rare breed.