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Anglicans in Canada

Alan L. Hayes

Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004

323 pages, \$36.68 Hardcover

Alan Hayes has taught courses on Anglicanism for over a quarter of a century and thus brings a rich and comprehensive knowledge of his subject to these pages. For this reason many might consider the book to be of interest primarily or even only to Anglicans. The author's subtitle *Controversies and Identity in Historical Perspective*, however, accurately defines the humanity in this Anglican story that the author makes no attempt to hide. All Christians can appreciate the struggles and human drama that helped to weave the Anglican Church of Canada into what it is today.

The first of the book's six chapters deals with "Questions about Missionary Work" and has more of an encyclopaedic than narrative nature. It clearly demonstrates how the Church and many missionary societies in the mother country worked to help their brothers and sisters in the newly developing colonies establish and maintain their congregations and church structures. It will be of special interest to those who seek specific information on support grants and policies. In his discussion of Indian Residential Schools the author describes the "premise of assimilation" as being informed by "the imperturbable confidence of white society that it is superior to all others."

The sixth chapter is devoted to gender issues and describes the struggles and frustrations that are so very familiar to almost all Christians in our time. The journey of women toward equal status with men in congregational life as well as in things like ordination to the priesthood is not unique to Anglicans but can be found in many denominations. While the author touches upon the ordination of gay and lesbian persons and same sex marriages he recognizes that his church is still wrestling with these questions. Many will find this chapter of the greatest interest.

The middle chapters of the book dealt with the development of structure in the Anglican Church and the place of that church in Canada and in Canadian society generally. It's helpful for Anglicans and non-Anglicans to realize the privileged place Anglicans held within the colonial structure and then within the new nation of Canada. The Canada Act of 1791 "gave no special constitutional

privilege to Anglicans” but “it lavished on (them) a hugely generous financial endowment” in the form of a variety of land grants. While some of these land grants were also given to Roman Catholics and Presbyterians, the Nova Scotia Act of 1758 allowed that Dissenters (including Lutherans) had the right to exist but were to be excluded from such privilege (Document 9). The church’s first cathedral was built in Fredericton in 1845-53 and its dedication was as much a political as an ecclesial event.

It becomes rather clear that to study the history of colonial Canada and to some extent the early years of the Confederation, is to study the Anglican Church of Canada. The author recognizes this and sees the years from approximately 1860 to 1960 as a time when this privileged status came to be shared by all Christian denominations. After 1960 Christians were increasingly just one religious group among many in the nation.

A very useful portion of the book consists of the inclusion of 50 documents which have considerable historical interest. They bring conflicts of the past into the present. Some (Human Sexuality: A Statement by the Anglican Bishops of Canada, 1997) are quite recent and can be helpful in current discussions. I appreciated the partial text of the funeral sermon Bishop John Strachan (Toronto) preached in 1825 on the “Death of the Late Lord Bishop of Quebec” (Document 15), and the reaction it solicited from Egerton Ryerson (Document 16). Bishop Strachan’s sermon together with Ryerson’s response “is often seen as the beginning of the decline of Anglican privilege and influence in Ontario.”

Throughout this book there are several interesting discussions of the high church and low church dialogues and/or controversies that may surprise some non-Anglicans. The sign of the Cross, chasubles and weekly Eucharist were all contentious issues during the middle to last decades of the nineteenth century. All Christians and, indeed, all Canadians can benefit from this book’s honest appraisal of the history of the Anglican Church in Canada.

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