

Project Canterbury

How Annexation Affects the Anglican Church in Hawaii

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A Pastoral Letter by the Bishop of Honolulu

My Dear People:

Many inquiries being made whether the present status of the Anglican Church in Hawaii is affected by the absorption of the Hawaiian Islands into the United States of America, and, if so, what changes may be looked for, the wish has been expressed that I should give some information on the subject.

In complying with this request, I should say at the outset that, there being no union between Church and State, either in the United States or in the Hawaiian Islands, the action of the Government at Washington assuming the Sovereignty of these Islands does not, by *itself*, touch the status of the Anglican Church in Hawaii. It only brings into view the probability that the Anglican Church in Hawaii will, in the near future, be brought into closer relationship to the Church in the United States. Until the General Convention expresses its desire for this to be brought about, the present relation of this bishopric to the See of Canterbury remains unchanged. Up to the present I have received no direct communication from the Church authorities in the United States on the subject. You will see, therefore, that I have very little definite information to give. It may be useful, however, if I call your attention to certain matters of history, and also certain principles which are sure to guide the deliberations of the General Convention of the Church in America in the event of any questions about the jurisdiction of the Hawaiian Islands coming up for consideration.

1. First of all I feel sure that the subject will be entered upon *with a due regard for the debt that the American Church owes to the Mother Church of England*. For it is entirely due to the action of the Church of England for a period now verging on forty years, that the American Church finds in this new possession of the United States a Church in full communion with itself, that embraces in its membership people of three nationalities in whose languages the services are conducted and the Sacraments administered. It will be carefully borne in mind that the Church of England sent a Mission to these Islands on the application of Bishops of the United States, in consequence of the inability of their own Church to undertake the responsibility. The leader in the movement was the late Bishop of California, Rt. Rev. Dr. Kip, and the important part he took may be learned from the following extracts from a letter written by him to the *Pacific Churchman*, dated September 21st, 1866:

"Previous to 1860, I had received repeated applications from the Islands to send a clergyman of our Church. The late Hon. R. C. Wyllie, Minister of Foreign Relations, several times wrote to me on the subject. Unfortunately, we had no clergy to spare, there not being half enough for the work of our own diocese. I applied to members both of the Domestic and Foreign Committees in New York, but received no encouragement. . . . In the summer of 1860 I went to England. .... Hopeless of obtaining any clergy from our own country to establish the Church in Hawaii, I agreed to further that object in England.

"Accordingly when in London, in July, 1860, I brought the matter before the Bishops of Oxford and London, both of whom entered heartily into it.

"It was agreed that it should be a Joint Mission--that two or three clergy should be sent out by the Church of England, and the same number by the American Church, when practicable. On that occasion the Bishop of London remarked: 'I am happy that the application for this Mission comes from an American Bishop, so that it cannot be said that the Church of England is obtruding itself on the Islands.'

"I would mention also that the Bishop of New York, who was then in England, being consulted, gave his cordial approbation to the measure.

"The application which I made was only with reference to sending some clergy to Honolulu. The plan was afterwards expanded to embrace sending a Bishop also as head of the Mission, until it assumed its present form, wisely presenting the Church in its entirety."

After a short trial the plan of a Joint Mission was not found practicable, and the Church of England remained solely responsible for the support of the Mission.

In 1870 Bishop Staley resigned the See of Honolulu. The Church in the United States was then urged by the English Bishops to fill the vacancy and take charge of the work in the Island. It was not till this invitation had been declined that a successor to Bishop Staley was sought for in England, and consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

2. Secondly, it will be borne in mind that the intention of the founders of this Mission was to found *an independent Church in the Pacific in communion both with the Church of England and the Church in America*. The basis on which the Mission was started was declared in the following statement put out in 1861:

"POLYNESIAN CHURCH.--The Committee for Promoting the establishment of a Church in Honolulu, *in communion with the Churches of England and America*, having taken into consideration the King of Hawaii's desire to receive a Mission from the Church of England headed by a Bishop, are of opinion that measures should be taken for fulfilling the desire thus put, we trust, by God into the heart of His Majesty.

"That having respect to the importance of these Islands as a probable centre of Christian influence in the North Pacific Archipelago, as well as the immediate needs of the actual population of the Hawaiian group, an earnest appeal for support be made to the Church at home.

"That as it appears by letters from the Bishops of California and New York that there is a readiness on behalf of the American Church to unite in this effort, the Committee hail with gratitude to God such an opening for common missionary action between two great branches of the Reformed Catholic Church.

"That the Bishops of California and New York be requested to convey to the Church in America most earnest invitations from this Committee to unite in this work."

3. The See of Honolulu has now a history of thirty-six years. In that history lies the assurance that, whatever changes may now ensue, *nothing will be done to break the continuity of the history of the Anglican Church in Hawaii*. If there is one thing unlikely to happen, it is that the Hawaiian Islands will cease to form a separate jurisdiction, and will be merged in the Diocese of California. So far from this being likely, all may rest assured that if any action is taken by the General Convention, it will be in the direction of supporting and strengthening the work of the past, not of supplanting it, not of replacing one organization by another, but of removing the present hindrances to growth, and of giving to the Church in the Islands, through union with itself, the strength and stability to put forth more vigorous shoots.

4. Another point to which I would call attention, is that, whenever the Church in the United States resolves to relieve the Church of England of its responsibility with regard to these Islands, *the lines are already laid down with the common consent of the Bishops of the Anglican Communion by which this diocese may become part of the organization of the Church in the United States*. The steps by which a Missionary Bishopric should be united to a Provincial organization were carefully considered at the Lambeth Conference of 1867, and form the subject of Resolution XI. The most important clauses are these:

"VIII. That the conditions on which a Missionary Bishopric should be brought within a Provincial organization should be:

"1. The request of the Missionary Bishop, addressed both to the Church from which he received mission and to the Province which he wishes to join.

"2. The consent of the Church from which he received mission, that consent being given by the Metropolitan or Presiding Bishop.

"3. The consent of the Province he wishes to join, that consent being given by the Provincial Synod.

"IX. That the status, jurisdiction and designation of the Bishop thus received into a system of Provincial organization should be determined by the Synod of the Province to which his shall be then attached."

5. You may naturally ask whether I intend to take any action under the above resolution. My reply to this is that in the present case, there is a financial question which has first to be settled. It does not appear to me that any action in the direction of such union should or can be taken here until an agreement has been arrived at between the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel on the one side, and the General Convention and Board of Missions of America on the other, for the transfer of the maintenance of the See from one side of the Atlantic to the other.

6. On the other point a word may be said. Should the change of flag be followed by the adoption of the Prayer-book of the American Church in place of the Prayer-book of the Church of England? Not until the diocese is received into the organization of the Church in America. Until then our relation to the See of Canterbury is unaffected by the political change. With the exception of the change in the State Prayers about which notice has already been given the services will continue to be conducted in all our churches according to the use of the Church of England.

But should American Churchmen in Honolulu, Hilo, or elsewhere, be desirous of at once erecting a church in which the American Prayer-book may be used, to be served by an American clergyman for whom an adequate support is guaranteed, I may state that it is quite within the authority of the Bishop to grant permission for its use, the conditions required for the erection of churches being duly observed. If any American Churchmen desire to proceed in the matter and will confer with me on the subject I shall be most happy to facilitate their wishes to the utmost of my power.

Your faithful friend and Bishop,

ALFRED WILLIS