

Some of you may have noticed, a couple of weeks ago, that we prayed, in the ABM Prayer Cycle, for Mission agencies in Australia, including the Brotherhood of the Good Shepherd. Perhaps, like me, you did not know much (or anything) about this organisation. Coincidentally, this week we remembered the feast day of John Oliver Feetham, who had a strong connection with the organisation, so I share this reflection with you.

John Oliver Feetham was born in 1873 into an English vicarage family, whose sons spread across the professions, from the military to the arts. Schooled at Marlborough College (1886–92), he went on to read mathematics at Trinity Hall, Cambridge (1892–95). After graduation he lived at Oxford Hall in Bethnal Green in London's slums, working as a lay minister, before entering Wells Theological College. Ordained deacon in 1899 and priest in 1900, he served his curacy in Bethnal Green — this East London experience shaped lifelong concern for those in need. Alongside this, he admired British 'public school' education, which served as his model in establishing schools in North Queensland.

In 1902 Fredrick Campion had gone to Australia to found the Brotherhood of the Good Shepherd, a community of single clergy of Anglo-catholic persuasion who took vows to serve in the outback. Feetham followed Campion out to NSW in 1907, committing himself to ministry among the people of the Australian bush: he became the second Principal of the Brotherhood. An invitation to Townsville to conduct a clergy retreat led to his being elected Bishop of North Queensland in October 1912: he would remain as bishop until 1947, spanning crucial years in the development of the region.

Feetham contributed much to the spread of Christian faith in the outback, especially through the Brotherhood, whose clergy he inspired to see the people of the bush as epitomising Australian virtues. Under his influence, North Queensland became one of the most uniformly Anglo-catholic, as well as one of most lively, Australian Anglican dioceses.

As bishop, Feetham sought to replicate the British public school system, so that rural Queensland children could have the best of the British and Christian traditions: 'Church and Empire' was his motto. He invested enormous personal effort into these schools. Feetham's personal influence across the region of his huge diocese, especially among the clergy, was incalculable. Feetham "infected others with his own enthusiasm, into which his Christianity was fully integrated, was colourful, attractive and eccentric.

After World War II Feetham experienced ongoing illness, and in 1946 went to Brisbane for surgery. He announced his resignation from the diocese as from 30 September 1947, but died in Townsville on 14 September 1947.

May Matthew, John Coleridge Patteson, and all the Saints walk with you this week...

*Sam*