Stories abound about problems that arise between tenants in unit blocks. Some tenants have been there for many years and have developed a certain type of lifestyle. Differences occur when new tenants arrive. Especially if they are from different backgrounds to the established tenants. The new arrivals seek changes to fit in with their particular lifestyle and attitudes, rather than looking to fit in or work with the establishment. Some would say that such changes are progressive, others see them as disruptive, due to friction and argument. If anyone doubts this, ask a real estate person.

A similar situation is now being seen at the country level. Especially within the Commonwealth of Nations, one of the larger associations of countries in today’s world. The group now consists of 54 nations, most of whom were members of the British Empire. There is little interest today in the origins of the organisation, yet its history provides insight into the ways things have changed, not always for the better.

Through its exploration and trading activities, England governed many countries around the globe, becoming a major world power by the end of the 17th century. Then in 1707, the Act of Union united England with Scotland and Wales, under the name Great Britain. England had governed Ireland for centuries, and in 1801, Ireland joined with Great Britain to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Throughout this period, the British Empire continued to grow.

Several of the countries within the Empire were largely settled by descendants from Great Britain, and starting with Canada, gained self government as Dominions. Foreign policy and defence requirements were provided by Great Britain and the Crown was Head of State, represented in each Dominion by a Governor-General. This meant that if Britain was at war, the Dominions were also at war, providing troops and support as required.

This close, family-tie like arrangement continued into the 20th century, continuing to develop as each Dominion sought total self-governing independence. At their annual Imperial Conference meeting in 1926, the group of Dominions issued the Balfour Declaration which stated that they were:

“Nations of equal rank, united by a common allegiance to the Crown and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations”

The Declaration was officially recognised by the 1931 Statute of Westminster, which with Great Britain, consisted of:

- Canada - achieved dominion status in 1867.
- Newfoundland - became a Dominion in 1907. (Later joined Canada as a province in 1949.)
- Australia – gained Dominion status in 1901,
- New Zealand - recognised as a Dominion in 1907.
- The Irish Free - State gained Dominion status in 1921.

One of the early developments was the Commonwealth Preference trading system, allowing imports from other member countries without tariff impositions. The Commonwealth was like a family, all with ancestral connections, following similar conventions and activities. The member countries understood each other, worked together, and assisted each other as needed. The organisation remained unchanged through the Depression and Second World War.

The period immediately following the Second World War saw many countries re-evaluating their situation, especially with the formation of the United Nations in 1945. Within the British Empire,
India was the first of the members outside of the existing British Commonwealth countries to seek self government. This immediately became complicated due to significant religious differences in the sub-continent. Pursued by both the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, the only acceptable result was partitioning, even though it created major relocation problems for the people. The partitioning in 1947 resulted in two new dominions – the Union of India and the dominion of Pakistan. This was the start of major changes within the Empire.

India and Pakistan became independent Dominions in 1947 and became members of the British Commonwealth of Nations. However, India was moving towards becoming a republic, which would be contrary to the rules of membership of the Commonwealth, as there would be no ties to the Crown. At a meeting of the Commonwealth heads of Government in 1949, the decision was taken to amend the British Commonwealth of Nations in several ways. The first was to remove the word British from the title. The second was to remove the requirement of allegiance to the British monarch. This was replaced by an agreement having the British Crown as the symbolic head of the organisation. The only membership requirement was that the new member country had previously been part of the British Empire.

But, the changes did not stop there. As often occurs when differing opinions are raised in an organisation, further amendments were going to be promoted. The first of the subsequent changes was to a large degree, inevitable. There were a number of countries that were dependencies of some of the original British Commonwealth members, such as Papua-New Guinea with Australia and Samoa with New Zealand. The change allowed these countries membership of the Commonwealth of Nations upon gaining independence.

The next change was even more significant. For reasons not made public, the Commonwealth of Nations leaders granted membership in 1996 to Mozambique, a former Portuguese colony. The main reason seems to be that the country was surrounded by former British colonies. This move was repeated in 2009 with Rwanda being allowed membership on the basis of the “exceptional progress” made in this country in the previous years. Rwanda was originally part of German East Africa, then becoming a Belgian colony during the First World War and now a republic.

To quote its own words:

The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 54 countries that support each other and work together towards shared goals in democracy and development.

The Commonwealth is home to two billion citizens of all faiths and ethnicities and includes some of the world’s largest, smallest, richest and poorest countries. Over half of its citizens are 25 or under.

Member countries come from six regions: Africa (19); Asia (8); the Americas (3); the Caribbean (10); Europe (3); and the South Pacific (11).

Most recent members are: Rwanda - admitted at the 2009 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting; Cameroon; and Mozambique - the first country with no historical or administrative association to the Commonwealth to join.

From its own activities, comes the conclusion that the Commonwealth of Nations has little in common with the British Commonwealth of Nations from which it grew. Such is its membership that its future will be of its own making, most likely with diminishing reflection upon both its beginnings and association with the British monarchy.

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1 The general assumption is that the British monarch will always be the Head of the Organisation. But the fact is the organisation can choose the position of titular head of the Organisation when and as they see fit. With the membership now consisting of more republics than monarchies, the head of the Organisation could easily change with the death of Queen Elizabeth II.

2 Tanganyika (now Tanzania), Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), Nyasaland (now Malawi and Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe))
It is interesting to note that many of the leaders of earlier British colonies tried to achieve formal British recognition honours and/or titles before taking their country away from British connections. They wanted the kudos, but without involvement.

Sir Robert Menzies, the former government minister and Prime Minister of Australia during much of the changes to the British Commonwealth, speaks of one such incident. In his book “Afternoon Light”, he speaks of the practice within the British Commonwealth of the leaders of the member countries being made Privy Councillors to the Crown:

The precedent thus established has been followed, as it inevitably had to be, with the result that modern applications by former British colonies to be members of the Commonwealth ‘as Republics’ have become commonplace, and are accepted, save in the case of South Africa, almost as a matter of routine. Nkrumah of Ghana emphasised how much a matter of routine it was when he went to London, was sworn in as a Privy Counsellor – and, as I know, the Privy Counsellor’s oath is just about the most royalist expression in the world – then promptly returned home and declared for a Republic, of which he would be the first President!

After that cynical performance, it was not possible for me to have any personal respect for him, but at least he did make it clear that the old Commonwealth bond had gone. When we were all related by a common allegiance, our relationship was organic and internal; it still is for most of the older members. But for the Republicans, the relationship is in a sense functional and certainly external.”

Conclusion

Of the 54 countries that make up the Commonwealth today, 33 are republics and 16 Commonwealth Realms. Of the latter, only four were members of the original British Commonwealth of Nations. Great Britain itself consists of three countries (England, Wales, Scotland), which together with Northern Ireland, Australia, Canada and New Zealand are 7 countries that have very close ties – people, government, legal procedures, religion and social practices. This association, the original British Commonwealth of Nations, is still unique in today’s world. But the leaders and populaces of these countries are totally unaware of its significance.

For those who have read the paper, *America-Manasseh – Fact or Fallacy?*, you will already be aware of the significance. For those that have not, suffice it to say that the seven countries have a significance in Scripture beyond that of any other collection of countries.

Despite the efforts of those who would diminish our origins, and dilute our British connections by the sheer numbers of non-British immigrants, the significance will not change. The only change that is taking place is the increasing disinterest in Scriptural matters, which only serves to highlight the statement made by Jesus

….. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith The belief on The earth? (Luke 18:8)