

# PRESBYTERIANS AND THE LAMBETH ENCYCLICAL

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THE duty of working towards a closer unity of all the branches of the Church has been pressing with increasing weight upon the consciences of the followers of Christ, and there are evidences coming from many quarters to show how powerfully this ideal is influencing all parts of Christendom. Some think that this unity is to be found most effectively in a renewed spirit of love, and that Catholicity does not necessarily consist in uniformity of organization, ritual, service or creed. But many others feel that we should press forward to outward or corporate union, seeking to piece together the broken fragments of the Faith. They hold that only thus can we overcome our divisional and sectional spirit.

This trend of modern thought is illustrated in the rich and full stream of religious literature bearing upon the subject. Few themes are so continually canvassed. Some of the more recent works may be recalled:—Streeter's "Restatement and Reunion"; "Pathway to Christianity", a Free Church view; Newman Smyth's "Approaches towards Church Unity"; Bishop Gore's "Steps towards Unity"; Headlam's Bampton Lectures, "The Doctrine of the Church and Christian Reunion"; Shakespeare's "Christianity-at the Cross-Roads." The *Church Quarterly Review* has for a long while devoted several articles in each number to this subject, while the *Constructive Quarterly* was started to provide a forum where the estranged churches of Christendom might re-introduce themselves to one another. The first number of a new journal called *Theology* has in its opening paragraph these words: "One thing is plainly evident, and that is that among religious persons the idea of the reunion of Christendom is asserting an ever-growing importance." In the January issue of *The Modern Churchman* Dr. Rashdall, in speaking of this problem, says: "For myself, I regard nothing less than actual reunion as the ideal to be aimed at."

This literature receives illustration, too, in the actual events of our time. If we turn to Britain we note that in Scotland the divisions which have so unhappily rent asunder that religious people seem to be on the point of vanishing, so that the time is at hand when there will be one Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

To show how eager is this feeling let us take the remarks of Dr. Cooper, moderator of the Assembly held in 1917: "Reunion has been the dream of my life since I was a boy at school. I have hardly ever done or said anything without having that great aim and hope before me, and I think I have not lived in vain if I have been permitted to further the fulfilment of our dear Redeemer's prayer."

In Australia there have been approaches towards a close federal union on the part of Episcopal and non-Episcopal bodies. On the continent of Europe there are active movements towards a closer affiliation among the different liturgical churches. In Sweden we find a strong party seeking to join hands with the Anglican church, and thus by an official act of recognition bear witness to the idea of Church unity, while the vision of a more extensive federation which shall join together the Anglican and the Greek or Eastern church has never faded away since it appealed with such power to the minds of the late Canon Liddon and his friends.

Indeed, we may fairly say that this zeal for closer friendship has been displayed by every communion with the exception of the Latin church. The Roman Catholic church, indeed, believes in unity, and her priests and writers earnestly pray for the day when all schism and heresy shall cease; but for her this is to be won by the extension of her own borders. It is not unity in our sense that she contemplates, but absorption; not conference, but conquest. She acknowledges none to be members of the true Church who do not submit to her jurisdiction; she cannot therefore confer with others, although even here the signs are not lacking that within her own ranks there are the outburstings of this modern desire which is becoming impatient of old and outworn struggles. O Rome, even thou shalt come one day with thy olive branch!

Different causes have led to this sentiment of unity, among which we may mention (1) the feeling that much waste of energy and wealth is taking place in the duplicating of organization and the services of the ministry; (2) an expanding sense of brotherhood—an impatience with the unseemliness of rivalry and the inevitable strife that follows. Bitterness of feeling and unholy struggles have injured the presentation of the message of Christ. Just as in the late war the victory seemed to turn in our favour with the unity of command, so also the great forms of evil which contend with the Christian ideal can be effectively met and overcome only as we join together and present one common front to the enemy. (3) We are convinced that each separate branch has its contribution to give to the whole as well as its benefit to receive. Each of the denominations has a history of its own, having

arisen out of some religious movement of high significance. Each has emphasized some neglected aspect of truth. Each has its special mission, has borne testimony to a permanent element in the faith of Jesus, so that the full glory of Christendom can be realized only when all of these different members are united in the body of our Lord which is the Church. How often is it the case that our private judgments and decisions suffer from one-sidedness as long as we move within our own train of thought; but when we go out and mingle with the larger community they are corrected, refined and purified. Such is the enlightening and reinforcing value in the ideal of the United Church. (4) But most important of all is the spirit of union with a common Master which naturally moves towards a closer fellowship with all who serve the Lord. The real Catholicity of the Church rests in the common Saviour with whom we are all united by faith. The Church is where He is. "I am in the midst."

The reader of the Gospels is ever faced with this demand for a whole-hearted love for God and for all who name the name of Jesus. We are all members of the same vine, whose remotest branches possess the same common life. When we pass to the epistles we recall the zeal for unity which St. Paul exhibited, especially when he condemns the factions in Corinth and enjoins on them the duty of brotherhood. The same is illustrated in the widely applied usage of the word "fellowship", the maintenance of which was a desire close to the apostle's heart. He was persuaded that the magnificent sweep of the gospel could be appreciated only in a united community—"that ye may know with all saints the length and breadth and depth and height of the love of Christ." In this, as in all other parts of our Christian life, there is the obligation raised by the words of Jesus, "That they all may be one; even as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that Thou didst send me."

What a wonderful testimony and evidence such a truly united Christianity would present to the world! United, that is, not merely in outward form, but also in that unity of the spirit which is the only bond of peace. What moral and spiritual authority would flow from such a throne; how it would overcome the taunt of the scoffer, purify society, and bring a new appreciation of the mighty power of God!

It was such ideals as these that impelled the archbishops and bishops of the Church of England, gathered in Lambeth Palace in London last summer, to issue to the world an appeal which has been described by a Free Church leader, Dr. Lidgett, as "the greatest

ecclesiastical event since the Reformation." They believe that the Holy Ghost has called them to associate themselves in penitence and prayer with all those who deplore the divisions of Christian people, and are inspired by the vision and hope of a visible unity of the whole Church. They believe that God wills *fellowship*, and they bemoan the causes for separation that lie deep in the past and are by no means simple or altogether blameworthy; and they say: "The time has come, we believe, for all the separated groups of Christians to agree in forgetting the days that are behind and reaching out towards the goal of a reunited Catholic Church."

Ere we proceed to consider the proposals which are made, let us remind ourselves of some of the contributions which the Anglican church has made to religion and which claim from us a respectful consideration to whatever proposals she may offer. We call attention first to the many-sided gifts made to theological study by Anglican leaders, who have occupied chairs in the seats of learning, or held high positions in the church of the land. There has been a succession of scholars since the days of Henry VIII, but space will permit only a reference to some of more recent time. In the department of New Testament study we have been placed under a debt that can never be forgotten by such distinguished men as Alford, Lightfoot, Hort, Westcott, Swete, and by one whose lamented death was announced but the other day—Dr. Sanday—who was the most illustrious New Testament scholar of Britain. In the Old Testament it will suffice to mention the names of Cheyne and Driver. Historical study has been always a peculiar specialty of the great universities of England, and here mention may be made of Milman, Stubbs, and Creighton. In the sphere of pure theology we recall the great name of Hooker, whose *Ecclesiastical Polity* is a text-book both in Theology and in English Literature, while we must not pass by the name of Bishop Butler, whom Dr. Chalmers called "the Bacon of Theology." Also we are reminded of Bishop Berkeley, who did so much to lay the foundations of Modern Philosophy; for Kant himself said that he was aroused from his dogmatic slumber by the new thoughts which Hume had discovered in Berkeley. A church that can reckon among its leaders men of such renown and piety cannot be regarded but with deep respect and admiration.

Again, the Anglican church has sought to develop and maintain the more ornate and beautiful forms of worship. She did not cast aside too many of the ritualistic forms of the pre-Reformation church, and in her Prayer-book she has preserved much of the liturgical wealth that had accumulated through the centuries

of religious experience. The book has continued to be one of her prized possessions, and remains as perhaps the most effective bond of union among her members. This has lent a grace to her devotional life which may sometime be contrasted with the severe simplicity of other forms of service. There is, it is true, a freedom, and an opportunity for the outflow of deep religious emotion and experience in extempore prayer, which those who have been accustomed to it in its noblest form would not willingly surrender, but in many quarters there is a growing demand for some more or less authorized forms which may be employed as aids in the conduct of service, so that we may capture the fullest devotional life as it has been preserved in the great liturgical works of the past. We would also recall the amount of sacred song which has been bestowed upon us by members of the Church of England, whose hymns we use in all our services, by such saintly writers as Ken, Keble, Heber, Howe, Stone, Neale. This association of worship with beauty in architectural structure, musical service and noble liturgy furnishes us with an aspect of religious expression which appeals to a large number of people.

Further, the Anglican lays great emphasis upon the institution of the Church. This is the permanent gain that has remained from the Oxford Movement, which during the last century stirred England to its very foundations. Through its leaders Anglicans gained a new ideal of the church; a new spirit of reverence was engendered. The tendency to neglect the offices and sacraments of the church was checked: low conceptions of the ministry were corrected; and the vision of the glorious Church of the living God dawned upon these men. If they magnified this beyond its right proportion, as many think they did, and seemed to centralize everything in the one idea, it was perhaps the only way to recover a neglected element. There will always be two tendencies in our religious life: one of these is external and institutional, which accentuates what is outward, authoritative and formal. The other tendency is inward and personal, dealing chiefly with the problems of the soul in its direct approach to God; it listens to the inner voice of the spirit, rather than to the outer voice of the church; it is mystical and intimate. These two tendencies mingle, of course, but in different quantities, in all religious lives, and we may say that the Church of England has done much, at least among the so-called High Church leaders, to magnify the institutional aspect of Christianity.

These we may therefore regard as some of the distinctive gifts of the Anglican communion, and they are of so high a quality that

they constrain us to give respectful attention to the pronouncement which has been made through her official heads.

The bishops open their appeal for unity with a full and hearty recognition of the membership in the Church of those who belong to denominations other than their own. The antithesis between Anglican and non-Anglican has disappeared. They say, "We acknowledge all those who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and have been baptized into the name of the Holy Trinity as sharing with us membership in the universal Church of Christ." This is followed by a suggestive definition of the Church: "We believe that it is God's purpose to manifest this fellowship in an outward, visible and united society, holding one faith, having its own recognized officers, using God-given means of grace, and inspiring all its members to the world-wide service of the Kingdom of God. This is what we mean by the Catholic Church."

By this article the Bishops dissociate themselves from those who believe that the Church is a human society, dependent upon the will of the members for its rise and progress. They urge that it is divine. Here our *Confession of Faith* is at one with theirs in that our standards also state that the Church is the "home and family of God." In holding to this divine nature of the Church we do not thereby depreciate human institutions, as if they were without the blessings of God, but we mean that the Church was the direct result of the will of Jesus Christ, who founded it. Space will not suffice to give any full argument for this, but it is fitting to observe that the teaching and procedure of Jesus throughout the Gospels are the indirect support for the actual words of Matt. xvi. Also the subsequent history as given in the Acts, and the primary place of the Church in the epistles are scarcely consistent with anything else than the conviction that Jesus had himself founded the Church. St. Paul's statement that the Church is the Body of Christ, and his section on the Lord's Supper imply the earlier establishment by the same Lord of the institution whose sacrament He ordained. We are at one, therefore, with this appeal in placing the highest valuation on the Church.

Let us pass to the four essentials for unity according to this pronouncement. (1) The first to be mentioned is the *Scriptures*:—"The Holy Scriptures as the record of God's revelation of Himself to man, and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith." In this we are in complete harmony, since for us also this is the main external source of Christian truth; for if we cast discredit upon these records we have no other foundation upon which we can build. If these lose their authority, then we are left with nothing but the

imaginings of the mind of man. We can preserve our religious life in vigour and purity only as we continually refresh our minds at these inspired streams of truth. The Bible has proved itself to be an indispensable condition of Christian progress, and it remains still as a "faithful record of God's gracious revelation." The duty of exercising the prophetic ministry of the word has never been neglected by the non-Episcopal churches.

(2) *The Creeds*.—"The creed commonly called Nicene as the sufficient statement of the Christian Faith, and either it or the Apostles' Creed as the Baptismal confession of belief." We have not been accustomed to make much use of these early creeds in our worship, although the articles of the Apostles' Creed are generally accepted and sometimes publicly repeated. We have, as a church, taught the sufficiency of Scripture. Yet it is our firm conviction that God's Spirit was guiding the Church throughout her history, and not least of all in her attempts to give doctrinal form to the religious experiences of her members. It is not inconceivable that sufficient elasticity may be given in the mode of assent to these symbols to satisfy those who desire a measure of liberty, although it is doubtful if any use of such freedom will exceed that which is already exercised by members of the Anglican communion.

(3) *The Sacraments*.—"The divinely instituted Sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Communion." The Church of England has always given much consideration to the sacraments, and there has been great divergence of theory, some teachers approaching to what are usually regarded as Roman views. Baptismal regeneration, and the doctrine of the Real Presence as in the Roman Mass are defended by no inconsiderable party in Anglicanism. Indeed, there are those who hold that the ministry was appointed chiefly for the sacraments—all worship for them centres in the eucharist. In our own church such sacerdotal views have no currency, though the two sacraments are regarded as necessary means of grace. The chapter on The Lord's Supper in the *Confession of Faith* reads thus: "Our Lord Jesus, in the night wherein He was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of His body and blood, to be observed in His church unto the end of the world for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of Himself in His death, the sealing all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in Him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto Him, and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with Him, and with each other, as members of His mystical body."

We differ by a less frequent celebration of this sacrament, but this is a matter of procedure rather than of principle. While there is much to be said for the Anglican usage, there are benefits accruing from our own. No one will question the solemnity, the prominence, the religious value of the rite as administered according to the best traditions of Scotland, and I may quote the remarks made by a distinguished leader of the English Church in this connection: "It may suggest to us that it is possible that the excessive repetition of the service of Holy Communion and the continuous desire to make it the service on every occasion may have the effect, not of increasing reverence for it, but of diminishing it, that we are more likely to look upon it as the principal service if it is not made the common service of the church."

The feature in this appeal, however, is that no theory is given. No interpretation would be acceptable to all, and the absence of this is probably of set purpose. I shall close this section on the Sacraments with words from the Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford: "The Sacraments are an essential part of the Church's worship. It is the duty of the Church to celebrate them in accordance with her Lord's commands. It is her duty to make such rules and ordinances as are necessary for their due celebration. But our Lord gave no command as to a particular definition or belief. The basis of union is not to be in a belief in any particular theory about the sacraments."

(4) The fourth point is the *Ministry*—"a ministry acknowledged by every part of the Church as possessing not only the inward call of the Spirit but also the commission of Christ and the authority of the whole body." Thereupon they proceed to state their conviction that the Episcopate is the one means of providing such a ministry. Here we are at the most delicate and crucial part of the finding, since it is well-known that many of the Anglican teachers regard the form of ministry as part of the divine commission. They insist that Jesus instituted the Church and also the ministry, that the form of episcopal organization is of the essence of the Faith, so that all who are not ordained in the succession possess no valid ordination, while all who are not confirmed by the hands of the bishop are not genuine members of the Church. All who cleave to the doctrine of Apostolic Succession make episcopacy a divine necessity and thereby, even though they do not wish to do so, place all others outside the borders of the Church of Christ. It is narrated concerning the late Dr. Liddon of St. Paul's, London, who held such a belief in the divine institution of Episcopacy, that he was discussing the cause of his attachment to the



Episcopal system and said, "I tell you I dare not plead for Episcopacy on ground of expediency. I see many objections to it. But I suppose that God knows best how the Church is to be governed. The Episcopacy, if not necessary to the Church (as a divine institution) is surely a wanton cause of division among the reformed Christian communities, to say nothing of the evils of ecclesiastical ambition which it sometimes occasions." It is this attitude that has stood in the way of all possible approach, and it is like an impenetrable wall of separation; for the non-Episcopal churches are not convinced that Apostolic Succession is scriptural, and they regard their own orders as founded on and agreeable to the word of God. They think that the chief thing in Christianity is not the ministry but the relation of the believer to Christ—that true Catholicity is found in Christ, not in a ministry, while they not unfairly point to the spiritual achievements resulting from their labours. Their successful proclamation of the Gospel both at home and in the foreign field warrants their belief that they possess the power of God's Holy Spirit. Are they not justified in their claim to be branches of the Church, whose characteristics are the adoration of Christ and the presence of the Spirit?

So long, therefore, as the divine right of Episcopacy is maintained there is no avenue of mutual approach. The only way is that of surrender. But, if I read this appeal aright, this barrier has been removed. It thus becomes a monumental finding, not differing in principle from the decision reached at the first Council of Jerusalem, when the problem was the requisite for valid membership in the Church. Had the Conference said that Episcopacy was of divine origin, transmitted by Apostolic Succession, the door would have been shut more tightly, but instead of that the Church of England, in so far as the Lambeth Conference represents that church, makes a clear pronouncement that she acknowledges the members of non-Episcopal churches as members of the Catholic Church, while she gives recognition to the ministerial orders of non-Episcopal bodies. The section on membership has already been quoted, and the passage on the ministry of non-Anglicanism is as follows: "It is not that we call in question for a moment the spiritual reality of the ministries of those communions which do not possess the Episcopate. On the contrary, we thankfully acknowledge that these ministries have been manifestly blessed and owned by the Spirit as effective means of grace." Perhaps the inference may not be justified, but I gather that this appeal defines the essence of the Church in terms of the spirit of fellowship with Christ rather than in terms of ministry.

It is to be carefully noted that, though the appeal seems to withdraw the claim to the divine right of Episcopacy, yet the authors are not prepared to surrender Episcopal rule. They present it anew, only not as a divine necessity but as a system justified by the testimony of history and experience. They present arguments for its retention, whose cogency appeals to reason. They plead the continuity of Episcopacy and its suitability to present day conditions. They do not dogmatize, they debate.

A further illustration of the change in emphasis is the concession made to the democratic trend of our times. Our age is impatient of *ex-cathedra* announcements, and of actions resulting from official authority. The old monarchical ideal is passing. Hence the important addition: "We earnestly desire that the office of a Bishop should be everywhere exercised in a representative and constitutional manner."

This appeal from Lambeth summons us to a reconsideration of our own position, that we may see what things are essential and wherein there is room for concession. The bishops do not wish us to be blind to our own contribution to religious life. Their proposal is not that of absorption within their ranks, but of communion within a larger unity, where the best features of all the churches may be preserved. As a church, we have never doubted the validity of our ministry, and have been satisfied with the succession maintained and authorized by Presbytery. We hold that our church is, in the best sense of the term, democratic. We acknowledge the parity of the ministers. We rather shrink from the official pre-eminence of the bishop, even though in most cases it is due to pre-eminence of character, ability, and leadership. In our eldership we have an equal representation of what is called "the laity," and in this way the voice of the people finds free expression. We further believe that our system is founded on, and agreeable to, the word of God, while its past honourable history and wide expansion, especially in the new world, give it the sanction of experience. We would be inclined to describe our contribution to the ministry in terms of liberty and representative government.

But, just as this appeal refrains from setting forth any theory of the *jus divinum* of Episcopacy, so we should not lay down any doctrine of the divine right of Presbyterianism. If it can be shown that the bishop provides the best bond of unity, and becomes the most effective centre of authority, if the voice of history and experience is on this side, then the unprejudiced mind will duly appreciate such claims. And we would presume that if it were made convincingly clear that the Presbyterian form of government is

more congenial to the modern spirit, preference might be given to it. As a matter of fact, it may possibly come to pass that the two types are not so very far apart or so irreconcilable, so that the best features of each may be retained, thus enabling the newer Episcopacy to give fuller admission to the rights of the Presbyters along with a completer recognition of the governing function of the Church as a whole.

It would not be wise to refrain from all reference to those features in the finding of Lambeth which have led in some cases to a less favourable judgment. These consist of the suggestion of Article VIII that all ministers who have not been ordained episcopally should receive such a commission, and of the resolutions on pages 30 and 31 which very considerably restrict the manner in which the Lord's Supper is to be offered to those who have not been confirmed by a bishop. These sections do indeed seem to take some of the heart out of the welcome, and, if they were regarded as the chief aspects of the pronouncement, then the document *ipso facto* would cease to have any great significance. But we prefer to take the more generous reading of the encyclical, until there is an authoritative rejection of such an interpretation. We regard these insertions as temporary concessions for the sake of expediency, not unlike some of the legislation which was passed by the first council at Jerusalem, and at a later time lapsed into disuse.

It is scarcely conceivable that those who hold the view of the membership and ministry expressed in the main body of the Letter, can, after mature consideration, require re-confirmation and re-ordination on the part of those whose membership they have already admitted. These reservations are surely inconsistent, and will be corrected after maturer thought. It only requires that the clergy of the Anglican communion pause to consider how they would regard the demand of re-ordination by Rome, for them to appreciate the kindred emotion aroused among non-Episcopal ministers by the suggestion of Article VIII. Fortunately, the Bishop of Zanzibar has given utterance to this thought. In *The Christ and His Critics*, page 8, he thus describes his indignation at what he regards as the presumption of Rome: "And we, who are in Holy Orders, must go still further—we must deny our Orders, we must deny that we have ever offered the Sacrifice, and administered Holy Communion!"

But these are not the aspects we should emphasize. This is merely part of the old leaven. The bishops have gone so far that they must go farther. They have opened the door which cannot be shut again. Some will criticize the narrowness of the opening,

others will rather rejoice that the key has been turned and the latch lifted. Time is all on the side of the wider opening of the door.

We therefore rejoice in the earnest and moving appeal which comes from this quarter. The high religious standing of the Conference, and the spiritual tone of its pronouncement place a new obligation on us all, calling us to lay aside all that is unessential in the interests of the new fellowship which our Lord desires to impart. The difficulties which stand in the way may at first seem very great, but these will lessen as we concentrate our attention upon the pressing duty of Christian love. Friendship is the most effective of solvents. We cannot claim that we are free from denominational pride, or that we have never failed in charity and judgment, but we are now asked to make a new adventure of Faith. We must seek for a fuller spirit of our Master who alone can guide us into the ways of truth. The sainted Ignatius said: "Where Jesus Christ is, there is the whole Church."