

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

LAMBETH AND UNITY.

BY THE REV. A. W. GREENUP, D.D.,

Principal of St. John's Hall, Highbury (University of London).

WHEN the question of Christian Unity is raised it is natural for an English Churchman—and particularly for an Evangelical Churchman—to turn first of all to those who share with him the fundamental truths for which the Reformation stands. Till the Roman and the Greek become *reformed* Churches all talk of reunion with them is but idle talk—while reunion with our separated brethren of the Free Churches comes within the sphere of practical Christian politics.

It is, of course, a truism to say that there is a real *spiritual* unity between all disciples who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, whatever name they be called by, and to whatever Church they belong: but no one reading the New Testament can doubt that our Lord's high-priestly prayer that "they all may be *one*" implies the possibility and the ultimate certainty of the organic union of all members of the one Body.

Our present concern is with those represented by the Church of England and our Nonconformist brethren. The Church of Christ, to which both they and we belong, is not merely a society for the edification of its own members, but a militant organization for the overthrow of the strongholds of sin and Satan—it is a mighty army under *one* Leader; and unless its battalion are imbued by *one* spirit, heartened by a common discipline, taking the same "sacramentum" in common fellowship, its warfare must suffer and give occasion to the enemy to blaspheme, as indeed he does. And it is a melancholy fact that the churches themselves are to blame for the present state of affairs. He who does anything in the way of healing these divisions is rendering a service to the whole army and to the supreme Commander.

It is hardly necessary to point out the importance of our subject in its bearing on the question of having in our midst a real Church of England—a national Church, which is one more than in name—of the necessity of the union of Church and State, since those ethical problems, which are the controlling principles of all sound

government, demand that there should be harmony, not discord, between them, and the welfare of the State is comprehended in Christian Ethics. Nor is it necessary to point out at any length the bearing of the question on that of Foreign Missions, since the Church of Christ is a missionary Church, a matter accentuated by the Bishops in the last Lambeth Encyclical in these words :—

“ The winning of the Nations to Christ, in fulfilment of His own great commission to His Church, is a matter of much more general concern to Christian people than ever before, and we realize the imperative *necessity* for effective and *visible* co-operation among the workers. The waste of force in the mission field calls aloud for *unity*.”

It was before Catholic unity was subverted by Papal imperialism that the great conquests of the Church in the Mission Field were made ; and it is a significant fact that no great people has been converted to Christianity since the original unity of the Church was lost.

After dealing with the Mission Field, the Encyclical goes on to say :—

“ Nor is this (unity) less necessary for the effective conduct of the war against the mighty forces of evil in *Christian lands*. With the realization of this need has come a new demand for unity, a penitent acknowledgment of the faults that hinder it, and a quickened eagerness in prayer that, through the mercy of God, it may be attained.”

For the sake of the State, for the propagation of the Gospel in heathen lands, for the battle against evil at home, unity is desirable. Add to all this the situation to-day, when owing to the circumstances in which we are unhappily placed, the idea of unity is taking hold of the minds of men in a way which it has never done before—when men are facing the naked realities of the spiritual life, when first things must of necessity be put first, when new “ values ” are being placed on differentiating factors, and when the study of the *consensus* of Christianity is seen to be of vaster importance than that of the *dissensus*. The War will have a beneficent effect on the whole situation ; and the experience of chaplains of different denominations, who have worked side by side in the face of danger, who in many cases have ministered together at the Lord’s Table, who have come to understand one another and have brushed away all prejudices and misunderstandings—such experiences will create a demand for unity which cannot rest unsatisfied, and which will outweigh the academic discussions of scholars and

the resolutions of episcopal bodies. The War will create a "union of hearts" which is the essential preliminary to ecclesiastical unity; it will create, is already creating, we believe, the *spirit* of unity, without which all efforts at external unity are quite useless; it will forbid us to exalt denominational differentiæ into principles, and help us to realize the spirit of fraternity and the profounder agreement of Christian brethren. The battlefields of Europe will be mightier factors in facilitating Christian union than the council chambers of Lambeth.

Successive Lambeth Conferences have given to the question of Reunion an importance which otherwise it could not have attained. But the idea was not initiated by them. There is a whole history, creditable both to the Church of England and to Nonconformists, lying far back up to the time subsequent to the rise of Dissent. But to come to recent years. The Lower House of Convocation in 1861 passed a resolution urging the Bishops to commend the matter to the consideration of all Churchmen; and in 1870 a committee was appointed to consult on the subject with the chief Nonconformist bodies. What was done—if anything—I do not know; but the leading organs of Nonconformity at the time, and particularly those of the Wesleyan body, gave considerable attention to the matter. And shortly before 1870 the Home Reunion Society, of which Earl Nelson was the leading spirit, was formed with the object "of presenting the Church of England in a *conciliatory attitude* towards those who regard themselves as outside her pale, so as to lead towards the corporate reunion of all Christians holding the doctrines of the ever-blessed Trinity and the Incarnation and Atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ." These words, taken from the official paper of the Society, are noteworthy, and seem to me to point the path to unity—the basis to be doctrinal, not ecclesiastical. The Chicago Convention in 1886 formulated articles of reunion, which were adopted by the Lambeth Conference of 1888 and became known generally as the Lambeth Quadrilateral. These articles are:—

- (1) The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the revealed Word of God;
- (2) The Apostles' Creed as the baptismal symbol, and the Nicene Creed as the sufficient statement of the Christian Faith;
- (3) The two Sacraments—Baptism and the Supper of the Lord

—ministered with unfailing use of Christ's words of institution and of the elements ordained by Him ;

- (4) The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of His Church.

These resolutions were re-affirmed by subsequent Lambeth Conferences ; and the cutest comment on them that I have read was one delivered at the Pan-Anglican Congress of 1908 by Mr. Silas McBee, an American. His criticism is of such importance that I venture to quote what forms its salient feature :—

“ The Quadrilateral sets forth the *results* of unity as the conditions of unity. It separated essential facts and principles from the life that produced them. The four essentials of that declaration grew historically out of the *oneness* of Christ's body. It is inconceivable that they could have produced it. It is a ruinous error to confuse the possessions and instruments of the Church with the Church itself as the Living Body of Christ. . . . The idea of monarchical rule is taken over from human dynasties. It is not inherent in the Church, but is antagonistic to it. The Kingdom of Christ is a universal democracy. Its King is among His people as One who serves. The exercise of autocratic authority destroyed unity. The recovery of representative authority can alone restore it.”

Now, despite this able and, to my mind, just criticism, the Lambeth resolutions have their value as at any rate offering a basis for the discussion of the whole question. The first three articles would probably be accepted by all orthodox Nonconformists, and I do not propose to deal with them. It is only the fourth—relating to Church government—which is the subject of any controversy.

When the articles were first published in 1886 the editor of *The Presbyterian Review* wrote : “ The four terms set forth as essential to the restoration of unity among the divided branches of Christendom are, in my judgment, entirely satisfactory, *provided* nothing more is meant by their authors than their language expressly conveys. There is room for some differences of interpretation ; but these terms ought to be received in the same generous manner in which they are offered, in the hope that the differences will be removed by conference and discussion.”

What is meant by the “ Historic Episcopate ” ? Various opinions are held, represented say by Gore for the extreme High Church party, Gwatkin and Lightfoot for the Evangelicals, Hatch for the Broad Church. *The Lambeth Conference of 1888 left the matter open.* “ Nothing is said here,” as one of the American

Bishops reminded us, "of episcopacy as of divine institution or necessity, nothing of Apostolic Succession, nothing of a scriptural origin or a doctrinal nature in the institution. It is expressly proposed here only in its historical character, and as locally adapted to the varying needs of God's people. All else, unless it be its scripturalness, is matter of opinion, to which this Church has never formally committed herself. Her position here is the same broad and generous one taken in the preface to her Ordinal. The phrase 'historic episcopate' was deliberately chosen as declaring, not a doctrine, but a fact, and as being general enough to include all variants."

Alas! what the good Bishop wrote in 1889 he could not have written in 1909, for the Lambeth Encyclical and Report of the Committee of 1908 make it clear that by "Historic Episcopate" the majority of the Bishops mean the theory—I won't call it doctrine—of Apostolic Succession, and all that it connotes. Indeed, one of them, in a paper read so lately as January, 1917, at the Birmingham Ministers' Conference, speaks of "those securities for unity which the Church of England has maintained in the Historic Episcopate and the Apostolic Succession." The fact is, as can be seen from the Report, what the Bishops desiderate is a narrow sectarian view which was unknown in pre-Tractarian days. They speak of full union on the basis of Episcopal ordination; and the seventy-fifth resolution insists on the historic episcopate as a distinguishing mark of "the Church of Christ as He would have it." But such a narrow theory is not upheld, indeed is disallowed, by the Thirty-nine Articles. The only Article referring to the principles on which the Church of England ministry rests is the twenty-third, which reads:—

"It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching, or ministering the sacraments in the congregation, before he be lawfully called and sent to execute the same. And those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the congregation, to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard."

Not a word is said here about episcopacy; and, as the Article is based on a Lutheran formula, it is significant for the view taken by our Reformers of Churches lacking in episcopal government; and it is amusing to see how Bishop Gibson gets over the whole difficulty by saying that the omission in the Article is made up elsewhere, and so it was not considered necessary to introduce a

more formal mention of the episcopate here ; and by urging us to remember that the Articles were not designed to be a complete system of Theology. We agree to *that*, and, nevertheless, beg to maintain that they were not meant to place the theory of Apostolic Succession amongst the things to be included in the theology of the English Church. Bishop Gibson refers us to the Preface to the Ordinal, and we have no objection to his reference, for there we have a ministry which satisfies the Article. "It ought to be perfectly clear," says Canon Simpson (*C.Q.R.* 3, 361), "that nothing in this statement (of the Preface) either modifies, or is intended to modify, the silence of the article with regard to non-episcopal ministries. When a principle is stated which applies to the Church Universal there is advisedly no reference to bishops. The formularies cannot be interpreted as 'defacing foreign churches.' Moreover, the moderation of the historical statement must not be forgotten. It is simply maintained that this form of ministry, universal at the beginning of the Reformation, has been in the Church from Apostolic times. It is *not* said that it was universal in the primitive Church, still less that it obtained an exclusive privilege from the Apostles themselves. That the English Reformers probably were not contemplating cases of non-episcopal ministers of national churches who might seek office in the Church of England, is proved by the fact that Archbishop Grindal thought he was within the law in admitting Scottish ministers to English benefices, when he had been granted a certificate that they had been ordained according to the custom of their own communion." This has been impossible since 1662 owing to the clause then inserted, "hath had formerly episcopal consecration, or ordination."

The reason for the "exclusion" clause is obscure ; but there is good cause for thinking, with Dean Goode, that it had reference to irregularities during the time of the Commonwealth ; and there is ample evidence that leading English Divines looked upon the clause as one inserted for reasons of expediency only ; and amongst testimonies going to show this I may select out of Goode's examples the letter written in 1719 by Archbishop Wake to the congregations of Geneva, in which he says :—

"The Reformed Churches, though differing in some points from our English Church, I willingly embrace. I could have wished, indeed, that the episcopal form of government had been retained by all of them. Mean-

while, far be it from me that I should be so iron-hearted as to believe that, on account of such a defect . . . any of them ought to be cut off from our Communion, or with certain mad writers among us to declare that they have no true and valid sacraments, and thus are scarcely Christians."

After quoting other testimonies the Dean says: "From these it is quite clear that the original doctrine of the Church of England, the principles on which our Church was founded, and the opinion of nine-tenths of her great divines, are all in favour of the cultivation of brotherly communion between that Church and the foreign Protestant non-Episcopal Churches."

Not only is the Lambeth view not that of our Articles, but it is not that (as Dean Goode says) of representative men of the English Church. Hooker did not hold it. In the Seventh Book of the Polity he says:—

"Where the Church must needs have some ordained, and neither hath, nor can have, possibly a bishop to ordain; in case of such necessity, the ordinary institution of God hath given oftentimes and may give place. And therefore we are not simply without exception to urge a lineal descent of power from the apostles by continued succession of bishops in every effectual ordination."

Andrewes expressly disclaimed the Lambeth attitude, and Spottiswoode of Glasgow, referring to the events of 1610, when the Church of England definitely committed itself to the recognition of the validity of Presbyterian Orders, says:—

"A question was moved by Dr. Andrewes, Bishop of Ely, touching the consecration of the Scottish Bishops, who, as he said, 'must first be ordained presbyters, as having received no ordination from a bishop.' Archbishop Bancroft maintained, 'that thereof was no necessity, seeing where bishops could not be had, the ordination given by the presbyters must be esteemed lawful. . . .' This applauded to by the other bishops, Ely acquiesced, and at the day and place appointed the three Scottish bishops were consecrated."

Enough has been said, I think, to show that any refusal to recognize non-Episcopalian Churches is not a doctrine of the Church of England. But I will just mention one other matter. The "exclusion" clause must be read in the light of the Caroline Act of Uniformity, since in that Act there are recognized the orders of non-episcopal churches, by providing "that the penalties in this Act shall not extend to foreigners or aliens of the foreign reformed churches allowed or to be allowed by the King's majesty, his heirs and successors in England." As Dr. Henson says, "This provision clearly disallows the interpretation which is now often placed on the Preface to the Ordinal, as if it were not only, what it certainly

is, a statement of the Anglican rule, but also a declaration of an 'essential principle' as to valid ordinations."

With the Lambeth Encyclical before them, I cannot see how any of the Nonconformist bodies can with any respect to themselves negotiate for union with the Church of England. Had Lambeth in 1908 simply affirmed the principles laid down in 1888, and been content to leave them as they stood, the case might have been different. We can only hope for better things at the next Lambeth Conference.

Now the impression produced by the Encyclical is deepened when we consider what has happened in the case of the Moravian Church, that glorious little missionary Church on whose labours the sun never sets. The Anglican proposals were brought before the General Synod of that Church in 1909 by Bishop Hassé, and were met in a most sympathetic manner. Through the kindness of a Moravian Bishop I have seen the official correspondence which passed between the Synod and Lambeth. The third resolution of the Synod ran:—

"We hold that inter-communion with the Anglican Church must rest on the same mutual recognition and freedom to co-operate as now exists between us and several churches, episcopal and other, in Europe and America; and, corporate union not being in question, we regard our position as that of an independent branch of the Church Catholic, 'an ancient Protestant Episcopal Church,' as described in the Act of Parliament," etc.

The Archbishop of Canterbury invited a Pan-Anglican committee to consider Moravian Orders, with the result that, although that Church claims a true episcopal succession, that Archbishop Potter allowed it in 1737, and it was recognized by Parliament in 1749, this Committee held the succession to be "not proven." Can anything show more clearly that by "historic episcopate" the Lambeth Fathers mean "Apostolic Succession"? Dr. Henson was right when, preaching at Westminster, he said: "Something will have been gained if we cease to look to Conferences of Bishops for the solution of this problem. The ultimate solution must come from the rank and file of the churches, not from the official leaders."

It is on this last sentence I fasten. How can we, the rank and file, contribute to the ultimate solution? Lambeth gives some suggestions.

(1) I quote from one of the Committee's paragraphs: "few things tend more *directly* to godly union and concord than co-

operation between members of different communions in all matters pertaining to the social and moral welfare of the people." This suggestion, good as it is, is open to some criticism. It is like putting the cart before the horse. We are not likely to unite in Christian fellowship through social service, a duty incumbent on every one as a citizen, be he Jew, Turk, Infidel or Christian. Discipleship is the way to Christian fellowship and unity, not social service.

(2) "Take pains to study the doctrines and appreciate the position of those who are separated from us." This is rather a large order for any than a professed scholar. But something can be done by the ordinary man. *Curtis' Bampton Lectures on "Church and Dissent"* will make a good beginning, though it is a book to be read with caution. His delineation of the truths for which each denomination stands is worth thoughtful study; and he suggests that each of these truths can be secured within our Church—the Independents contending for the purity of the Church in its external relations, the Baptists in its internal relations, the Quakers for its spirituality, the Wesleyans for the development of feeling in religion; and so on. Each has emphasized some one important aspect of Christian truth, and the Lambeth Committee "would commend to the Church an ideal of reunion which should include all the elements of divine truth now emphasized by separated bodies; in a word, the path of efforts towards reunion should be not compromise for the sake of peace, but comprehension for the sake of truth, and the goal not uniformity, but unity."

(3) "We must avoid in speech and act anything savouring of intolerance or arrogance." Sad that such a warning is necessary to those who profess and call themselves Christians! I transcribe, without comment, a letter from a leading Nonconformist divine in the *Westminster Gazette* when a correspondence on the interchange of pulpits was taking place:—

"Some months back a squireess of a Lincolnshire village, meeting me in the train, did me the honour of mistaking me for a member of the English Church, and said, 'I always think that I can tell a Dissenter. They are so different from you and me. There is something about them so underbred, isn't there?' She was quite the nicest old lady I had met for a long time, and she was only repeating a postulate of her caste, clerical and lay. Hence her significance."

(4) A last suggestion is made in these words: "the Committee venture to suggest that the constituted authorities of the several

churches of the Anglican Communion should . . . arrange conferences with representatives of different Christian bodies, and meetings for united acknowledgment of the sins of division, and intercession for the growth of unity." Nothing has come of this—and one could hardly expect it in view of the Lambeth interpretation of "historic episcopate." You don't enter into brotherly conference when your brother wants to swallow you up! "If it be laid down," said the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, "that one system is exclusively divine, the only one acceptable to the great Head of the Church—to such assumption, in the name of God's truth, of past history, and of Christian liberty, we can give place, no, not for an hour. Else we should barter our Christian freedom for sacerdotal bondage."

We might, however, take a hint from the Committee's suggestion, and local conferences of Churchmen and Nonconformists should be encouraged for the purposes of study and prayer. The more we can see of one another; the more we can realize each other's difficulties; the more we study and pray together, the better are we preparing ourselves for the coming unity.

All that Lambeth suggests falls far short of any real inter-communion; and nothing but the unscriptural, un-Anglican theory of Apostolic Succession prevented them going further and suggesting the old pre-Tractarian practice of occasional conformity on the part of Nonconformists in their admission to the Lord's Table in our Parish Churches. The rubric in the Confirmation Office is no bar (for reasons I cannot go into now) to this; and every baptized Englishman has a right to the ministrations of the National Church—any clergyman repelling such, unless he be a "notorious and evil liver," does so at his own peril. But there should be no talk of repelling—there should be welcome—and on special occasions the example of the Bishop of Hereford should be followed: there should be a hearty invitation. "There are many," says Mr. Wilson in his excellent book, *Episcopacy and Unity*, "who insist that before Dissenters can be admitted to the sacraments they must sever themselves from their old spiritual home and practically repudiate their previous religious history. Such an attitude is unchristian, unhistorical and unscriptural, and will raise an effective barrier to all hope of that better understanding which is an essential antecedent to Christian reunion."

A. W. GREENUP.