

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

REPRESENTATIVE AND CONSTITUTIONAL BISHOPS.

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY PARALLELS TO THE LAMBETH CONFERENCE PROPOSAL.

BY THE REV. T. W. GILBERT, B.D.

A MIDST the shower of approval which has greeted the Resolutions of the Lambeth Conference with reference to reunion with Nonconformists, attention has been fastened, and rightly so, upon the changed attitude of the Bishops towards the claims of Nonconformist orders. There is, however, one point of great importance referred to in these particular proposals which seems to have escaped much comment hitherto. On page 28 in Resolution vii. there occurs the following statement: "But we greatly desire that the office of a Bishop should be everywhere exercised in a representative and constitutional manner, and more truly express all that ought to be involved for the life of the Christian Family in the title of Father-in-God." The view that a Bishop should exercise his office "in a representative and constitutional manner," indicates an advance as great as the attitude towards the fourth article of the so-called Lambeth Quadrilateral, because if the tendency of one school of thought in the Anglican Church has been to make Episcopacy of the "esse" of the Church, and inferentially to nullify Nonconformist orders, it is equally true that there has been a tendency also to make the position of a Bishop something autocratic and prelatic. It needed a civil war in the seventeenth century to check the abuses which arose from the false position taken up by the Bishops of that day, and of course the curtailment of the political powers of the Bishops has made the repetition of the ills of the seventeenth century impossible. Yet there is no doubt that the chastening and moulding influence of the last few years have tended, and are tending, to modify the somewhat archaic and remote position which has been adopted by not a few Bishops of the Anglican Church. The Lambeth proposals of 1920 represent a refreshing advance to a healthier conception of Churchmanship generally, and a broader view of the ministerial office, whether episcopal or nonconformist. The phrase concerning the office of

a Bishop is indicative of this more reasonable attitude, and it contains the seed of something that may prove revolutionary in the general conception of the Bishop's office.

But whilst the phrase may seem revolutionary to the present-day position of the Bishop, yet the idea is by no means a new one in the history of the Anglican Church. During the times of the Commonwealth and Protectorate in the seventeenth century, the Anglican Church passed through the furnace of proscription, but during the years 1641 to 1660 there were many schemes of Church reform offered, and particularly with reference to the position of the Bishop, which are not without their bearings upon the present-day suggestion that that position shall be representative and constitutional. Starting from the year 1641-2 we see that the remedy offered for the ills from which the Church was suffering was the same which was suggested towards the end of the Commonwealth, and the main feature of the suggested reform was the appointment of a body of presbyters to act always with the Bishop. The chief of the plans offered was that by Usher, Archbishop of Armagh, a plan which is preserved in *Reliquiae Baxterianae* under the ponderous title of "The Reduction of Episcopacy unto the Form of Synodical Government received in the Ancient Church, proposed in the year 1641, as an Expedient for the prevention of those Troubles which afterwards did arise about the matter of Church Government." The four points of Usher's proposals are: (i) "In every parish the Rector, together with the Churchwardens and Sidesmen, may every week take notice of such as live scandalously, etc. (ii) Suffragan Bishops are to be appointed, who should hold monthly synods for rural deaneries. (iii) A Diocesan Synod to be held once or twice a year. (iv) A Triennial Provincial Synod to which all Bishops and Suffragan Bishops and elected Clergy are to be invited." The representative idea is conspicuous in the proposals, whilst the introductory statement about the necessity for the co-operation of the clergy with the Bishop in the government of the Church gives the keynote to most of the plans of reform during the period.

Another scheme was put forward by John Williams, Bishop of Lincoln, whose ideas are embodied in the Bill on Church Reform which was read twice in the House of Lords (July 1 and 3, 1641). The main fact in the Bill is the proposal to add twelve ministers to the Bishop for the purposes of ordination and of general jurisdiction.

The wording of the Bill is as follows :¹ " And to the end that Archbishops and Bishops within their several dioceses may have such assistance as may hereafter tend and be for the better execution of their said offices and places, be it therefore enacted by the authority aforesaid, that within every shire or county of each several diocese within the kingdom of England and dominion of Wales there be nominated, in such manner as is hereafter expressed, twelve ministers being in Holy Orders, and being fit both in respect of their life and doctrine to be assistants to every such Archbishop and Bishop, together with the Dean and Chapter of each several diocese, in conferring of Holy Orders and in the exercise and administration of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and for such other purposes as be hereafter declared : and that none of the said Archbishops or Bishops at any time from henceforth shall confer any Holy Orders upon any person or persons without the presence and approbation of four of the said assistants at the least : and that none of the said Archbishops or Bishops, or any Dean, Archdeacon, Chancellor, Commissary, Official, Surrogate, or other person, having or exercising any ecclesiastical jurisdiction within any of the dioceses aforesaid, or within any places of peculiar or exempt jurisdiction whatsoever, shall pronounce any sentence of degradation, deprivation or suspension against any minister or other person in Holy Orders, or any sentence of excommunication . . . without the presence and approbation of two, or at the least of one of the said assistants. . . ." The Bill goes on to declare that the twelve assistants shall be chosen by the King, by the Lords and by the Commons—four each—and that in case of vacant bishoprics, the assistants, together with the Dean and Chapter, are to present the names of three of the ablest divines to the King, who will choose one of the three.

The schemes propounded by the Archbishop and Bishop have a similarity to the proposals which were put forward by Dering in 1641 (June and July). Dering's suggestions were (i) that in each diocese twelve or more chosen, able, grave divines to be appointed by Parliament to be of the nature of an old primitive constant presbytery, and (ii) that over each of these a president, " let him be a bishop, or an overseer, or a president, or a moderator, or a superintendent, or a ruling elder, call him what you will."

¹ Cf. Gardiner, *Constitutional Documents*, p. 170.

This scheme of "pure primitive Episcopal presidency," as it has been called, is again seen in 1644 in the negotiations which took place between Charles and the Parliament. The "Propositions of Uxbridge," which demanded the abolition of Archbishops and Bishops, etc. (the Propositions are printed in Gardiner's *Documents*, pp. 275-286), called forth from the Commissioners appointed by Charles the offer "That the Bishop shall exercise no Act of Jurisdiction or Ordination without the consent and counsel of the Presbyters, who shall be chosen by the Clergy of each Diocese out of the Learnedst and Gravest ministers of that Diocese," and also that "the Bishop shall not receive any one into Holy Orders without the approbation and consent of the Presbyters, or the major part of them." These different extracts will suffice to show that the reformation of the abuses which had arisen in the Church was to be obtained by a reversion to the primitive conception of the Bishop as *primus inter pares*, and that this plan had the strongest support from those who were loyal sons of the Church of England. Had the course of events not been complicated by political and military affairs, it is quite probable that there would have emerged a synodical form of Church Government with Bishops at the head. Most men were at one in reverence for the office of the Bishop, the same men were unanimous in condemnation of the ritual excesses of the new school of Bishops and of their crying up of the divine right of King and Bishop, but the unanimity ended there. "I can tell you, sirs," said Cromwell to two members of the House of Commons, "what I would not have, though I cannot, what I would."

Such was the temper of many men. And while the country was hesitating about accepting the new scheme of Bishops and boards of Presbyters, the fortune of war brought another solution. Disasters on the field of battle forced Parliament to the taking of the "Solemn League and Covenant," which bound the Parliament to set up a Presbyterian Government on the Scottish model, and by natural sequence to proscribe episcopal government. Into this latter question, however, it is not our purpose to enter, because this proscription was based as much upon political expediency as was Charles's offer to restrict Episcopacy to certain parts of England.¹

¹ In Charles's conferences with the Scots after he gave himself up to them at Newark, May 5, 1646, "His Majesty proposed to admit the establishment

The normal attitude of Englishmen towards Episcopal Government was the attitude of Reform and not of Revolution, a Reform which would tend to prevent abuses, and also approximate Church government to the rising democratic feeling of the time. The tumultuous times which followed on the outbreak of the Civil War and the general association of Anglicanism with support of the Royalist cause¹ made any dispassionate consideration of Episcopacy very difficult, if not altogether impossible. Since Prelacy had become coincident with opposition to Parliament, it was inevitable that the success of the latter should involve trouble for the former, and the trouble culminated in the legal proscription of Episcopacy. This proscription carries with it the obvious inference that to the dominant party Episcopacy was by no means of the esse of the "Church," whilst the questions put by Parliament to the Synod of Divines during 1646 suggest that they had a conception of Divine Right which was very modern in its working. *Jure divino* ideas were not simply for Anglicanism, but also for Independency and Presbyterianism as well, the main difference between them being that to the average parliamentarian Divine Right spelled a spirit and not an organization. However, we must turn from such considerations to examine some further suggestions of reform which were promulgated towards the end of the Protectorate.

And first of all let us consider the suggestions of Dr. John Gauden. Gauden was the reputed author of *Eikon Basilike*, the work which professed to record the acts and meditations of Charles; prior to his execution, and which caused such a revulsion of feeling in favour of the king. Gauden managed to retain his benefice throughout the Commonwealth and Protectorate and became Bishop of Exeter after the Restoration. In 1659 he published a book entitled *Ecclesiæ Anglicanæ Suspiria*, and the subsidiary title explains its contents as "The Tears, Sighs, Complaints, and Prayers of the Church of England, setting forth her

of episcopacy and presbyterianism, in order to destroy the influence of the independents and the other sectaries. He declared that he would be content to restrain episcopal government to the dioceses of Oxford, Winchester, Bath and Wells, and Exeter, leaving the rest of England to the presbyterian discipline."—*Life of Bishop Hall*, by the Rev. John Jones, p. 334.

¹ It is well to bear in mind that there were Puritans who supported Charles throughout the war and that there never was any rigid division of classes, districts, or even of religion throughout the war, whilst many districts refused to take any part in the war.

former constitution, compared with her present condition: and also the visible causes, and probable cures, of her distempers." In this volume, of some 700 pages Gauden deals with seventeenth-century diffuseness, upon the condition of the Church to which he belonged, and he faces the problem with refreshing candour. The remedy, he declares, must begin with the clergy, for "many if not most of us, were loth to see and hard to be convinced of our pristine errors and indiscretions, our immoderations and transports, our Popish and popular compliances, our Jesuitick evasions and pretensions, our politick salvoes and distinctions, our pompous and empty formalities, by which we made either the power of godliness odious, or factions popular, innovations pious, and factions plausible, untill God overtook us with all His just, though sharp chastisements. Some Church-men thought their hill so strong that it could never be removed: whereas no policy availes, without true and exact piety, to bear up the honor of Church-men, when once people see without spectacles" (p. 429). Admitting thus the inevitableness of the blow which had fallen upon the Church, Gauden in one or two passages incidentally reveals his ideas with reference to Episcopacy, and also of the relationship of the contemporary ecclesiastical organizations to Episcopacy. An example of the latter is contained in his "appeal to all sober Ministers, whether they do not think that Episcopacy, as now it is stripped and devested of all secular greatnesse, and reduced to primitive poverty, might be as safely restored, as any of their crude and new Associations in their several stations and formations, with their mutable moderators and temporary Presidents, either in greater or lesser Circles, which are but the *thin parings, small shreds, and weaker shives of Episcopacy*. . . ." (P. 461.) Gauden's own ideas with regard to Episcopacy, which he mentions as typical of those of other men, are brought out when he is dealing with the difficulty of the restoration of the lands belonging to the Bishoprics. He declares (p. 478): "For my part, I can look upon Episcopacy in its primitive poverty and present barenesse, with as much respect and reverence as in its greatest pomp and superfluity. I value it and desire it not for state, but conscience, not for secular ambition, but spiritual satisfaction. Let them keep the lands that have justly got them, or paid a valuable consideration for them, provided they will but help to restore Primitive and Catholick Episcopacy, without which

Ecclesiasticall authority, yea and Ministeriall power, seemes to me and to many wiser men, if not wholly dead, and void or null, yet very defective, dubious and infirme, as one that is lame and maimed yet is still a man, having an esse or being as a true man, but yet *esse defectivum*, a being short of that fulness, firmness, and perfection which might be, were he so complete as he ought to be according to the pattern of God and nature. . . .” After this cautious and balanced estimate of Episcopacy Gauden proceeds to unfold his scheme of general reform in which he suggests various points, i.e. (i) Smaller dioceses—“if the Diocese committed to the presidential inspection of one worthy Bishop were of so moderate an extent, as might fall under one man’s care and visitation. . . .” (ii) Assistants for the Bishop—“if the generality of the Clergy or the whole ministry of each Diocese might choose some few prime men of their Company to be the constant Electors, chief Counsellors, Correspondents, and Assistants with the Bishop. . . .” (iii) Election of Bishops—“if in case of Episcopall vacancy, the generality of the Clergy meeting together, might present the names of three or four or more prime men, out of which number the Electors should choose one, whose election should stand if approved by the Prince or chief Magistrate, if not they should choose some other of the nominated. . . .” (P. 535.)

The second point about the association of some of the clergy with the Bishop is referred to in other places. On page 465 Gauden asks “that neither Bishops should be wholly ejected as superfluous, nor yet Presbyters despised as mere ciphers,” and again on page 453 he declares, “restore to Presbyters their priviledges in such publick counsel and concurrence with their Bishops as may become them . . . restore to Bishops that primitive precedency and Catholic presidency, which they ever had among and above Presbyters, both for that chief Authority or Eminency which they ever had in ordaining of Presbyters and Deacons, also in exercising such Ecclesiastical Discipline and Censures, that nothing be done without them. . . .” He finally makes the bold demand—which we are hearing in our own day—of finding some place for the choice or approval of the clergy by the people, i.e. “Restore to people their Liberty in some such way of choosing, or at least approving their Ministers, and assenting to Church-censures, as may become them in reason and conscience.”

Such are some of the main proposals offered by Gauden, and it is well to notice that the general idea of associating a number of clergy to act with the Bishop was not confined to men of one school of thought. There was no higher Anglican than Henry Thorndike, and yet he advocates the same proposal. In a book entitled *An Epilogue to the Tragedy of the Church of England*, published in 1659, "he expressly avows his approval of prayers for the dead, of the invocation of the Spirit on the elements of the Eucharist, and of the practice of penance; but whilst he contends for Episcopacy in the Anglican sense, he wishes to see Presbyters restored to their ancient position of a council to be consulted by the bishop."¹

From this brief examination of some of the writings of the time it is possible to realize that "divine" and "monarchian" ideas with reference to Bishops were far from being accepted by the Church during the period 1640-1660, and contemporaries who stood outside of Anglicanism were quite quick to draw the necessary inferences from the reforming proposals which were being advocated. It will suffice to quote one author. There was published in 1659 a pamphlet by Mar. Nedham entitled *Interest will not lie or a View of England's True Interest*, which purported to be an answer to a pamphlet, *The interest of England stated*. The latter was an attempt to secure the interest of the Presbyterian party in favour of the exiled Prince and endeavoured to do so by minimizing the difference between Presbyterians and Anglicans, i.e. "the differences are speculative and their contests with the Episcopal Divines are in the opinion of moderate men of either Judgment, easily atoned." A couple of quotations from the criticisms of Mar. Nedham are worth recording. In one place he declares, "They may talk what they will, yet there being no visible footstep in Scripture of its (i.e. episcopal government) institution, more than there is of the other waies of government practised by others, why should wise men contend for that as divine, which is merely prudential? seeing that the late King pleaded conscience for his insisting to maintain it, only upon this account, that he was sworne to do so, and we saw he did his utmost for it; which when he had done, then, seeing the necessity of affairs required the abolition of it, he in the Isle of Wight Treaty became content it should be abolished: to let his friends see, that having done what he could to preserve it, the thing itself

¹ Stoughton, iii. 34.

was of no such sacred authority, but that it might be cashiered by authority when prudence did require it to be done. And therefore our author likewise, having a point of prudence to dispatch, which is to hedge in the 'Presbyterian' to his 'Royal' party, he also makes the divine 'darling' of 'Episcopacie' a mere prudential matter, to be dismissed as his Master's occasion shall require. . . ." Therefore Nedham goes on, "if the Divines of both parties shall by consent accomodate and comply with each other (which appears to be one part of the present designe for bringing in Charles Stuart), what else do they both thereby but plainly confess, that the frames they have so long contended for are but political, and liable to alteration as prudence shall direct?" This is very plain speaking, and only evidences the views which the average man has always had with reference to the differing forms of church organization.

From this review it can be safely inferred that the Anglican of the Commonwealth times had a profound regard for Episcopacy, but the constant proposals for the association of a board of presbyters to act with the Bishop, and the continual insistence that the Bishop should assume the position of a president amongst a body of clergy, effectively destroy any idea that the *jure divino* theory had any deep hold upon Churchmen of the time. The attempt of a section of the Church during the reign of James I and Charles I to insist upon the Divine Right of Bishops received its answer in the reiterated demand for a "constitutional" episcopacy, and only the reaction which followed the Restoration prevented the adoption of a scheme which would have kept the Church of England more truly national than it eventually became. The inevitable further reaction has now set in, and it was a striking stage in this reaction when Lord Halifax in 1883 suggested, amongst other things, the election of Bishops by the Clergy and Laity, and that the Bishops so elected should govern their dioceses constitutionally with the advice of their Diocesan Synods. These suggestions and the statement of the Lambeth Conference of 1920 show that the seventeenth-century reformers, when compelled by adversity, were seeking a solution on sound lines. They felt—to use the words of Gauden in a sermon preached at St. Paul's, February 28, 1659—"that the whole Clergy of a Diocese, and the concerns of Religion, might not be exposed to one man's sole jurisdiction, without the such joint counsel, consent and assistance of Ministers, as is best for Bishops, Presbyters

and People . . . that Church-government might not seem to be a tyranny, or an arbitrary and absolute domineering over the faith and consciences of Christ's flock, but a mutual and sweet conspiring of the Shepherds with the sheep, to make each other happy, in truth and love, by orderly authority and due subordination."

T. W. GILBERT.

TRUTHS WHICH CALL FOR EMPHASIS.

In the Manifesto on "Unity and the Evangelical Message" issued by the National Church League, and referred to in our Notes, the following truths are set out as among those which specially call for emphasis at the present time:—

The Being and attributes of God, the Maker and Sustainer of all things; His infinite perfection, righteousness, holiness and love; His providential ordering of the world.

The essential Deity and true Humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ as manifested in the four Gospels and further declared in the Epistles.

The work of the Holy Spirit as the Giver of Life, the Sanctifier, the Teacher who is to guide into all truth.

The unique Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and their supreme authority in matters of faith and morals.

The reality and hatefulfulness of sin as the transgression of the perfect law of God; a corrupting taint and tendency in man's inmost being; its disastrous results; the need for pardon and redemption.

The salvation of men from the guilt and power of sin as the central purpose of the Gospel, and as resting solely upon the one perfect and complete propitiation made by Christ upon the Cross.

The immediate Justification by the free Grace of God for Christ's sake of every sinner who with hearty repentance and true faith turns to Him.

The direct access of the human soul to God through our Lord Jesus Christ, the sole Mediator between God and men.

The efficacy of the Sacraments as means of grace only by the blessing of Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit in those who by faith receive them.