Contemporary Commentary

A Quarterly Review of Church Affairs and Theological Trends

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LAMBETH AND AFTER

THE Lambeth Fathers have, according to the traditional custom followed by such assemblies, presented the results of their deliberations to the consideration of the Church in a series of resolutions and reports which must claim the serious attention of all considering churchmen. The fact that none of these resolutions possesses the force of law lays a yet greater obligation on churchmen to give them close and careful scrutiny. The Lambeth Conference report is likely to be a document of considerable influence in ecclesiastical circles, at least as much on account of the circumstances of its origin as for its intrinsic importance.

It would be a difficult task to assess the significance for the churches of the Anglican Communion of the eight Lambeth Conferences which have been held in the last eighty years. To assemble in what must have at least the appearance of an ecumenical council hundreds of bishops from every part of the world and of divers races, languages and customs, testifies to the existence of a more than human bond of unity and can only bring encouragement to the bishops themselves and to the people whom they represent. Anglican Christianity both in structure and in life is no insular phenomenon but manifestly understands that the Christian Church must be a world Church or repudiate its calling. Numerous comments by individual bishops published since the close of the conference have remarked on the closeness of the bond which held them together so that they became aware of something like a common mind emerging from their deliberations. They could but thank God and take courage.

The ordinary churchman, however, though rightly encouraged by the meeting together of the bishops in the face of the great difficulties imposed upon movement in this post-war world, will not blind himself to the dangerous weakness of many parts of the Church. If the Anglican communion can claim to be in truth a world church, so that a world map will show the presence of Anglican dioceses everywhere, it would be the utmost folly to forget that in very many parts of the world Anglican Christianity is spread very thin indeed. Some of the other separated Christian communities (Baptist, Congregationalists, Presbyterians) would be able to gather assemblies fully as representative of every part of the world as Lambeth, even if they lacked the glamour of some of that historic setting which surrounds the older parts of the Anglican communion.

The Lambeth Conference, though it has acquired an enduring place of importance in Anglican life and possesses a continuation committee of great consultative value, has so far resisted any tendency to define more closely its significance. It has not attempted to convert itself into a legislative synod nor been ready to establish an appellate tribunal or to concede a formal primacy to Canterbury. This notable absence of any centralized government exercised by or through Canterbury for every diocese of the scattered churches, though not without its parallel in the structure of the British Commonwealth of

nations, must stimulate churchmen to enquire into the true meaning of Lambeth and to see that their expectations are governed by a clear understanding of its purpose and of its limitations. In his sermon at the close of the conference, the Archbishop of York alluded to the fact that "many are waiting to see if this great gathering of bishops has any message for mankind in this hour of crisis." For some considerable time prior to July of this year, 'waiting for Lambeth' had become an important factor in Anglican calculations, yet it is evident that Lambeth cannot really discharge the functions either of a prophet or of a lawgiver. Perhaps that is why it may nevertheless have a distinctive part to play not only for Christians in communion with Canterbury but for the whole Christian world. But its procedure of discussion, resolution and advice is hardly calculated to produce that liberating word for which many look. It can do no more than reiterate the given Word of the Gospel and seek through the exercise of mutual support and criticism, patience and liberty, to articulate that Word in accents which can be recognized by the world of the twentieth century.

A study of the report may raise certain questions which will be of assistance in any attempt to appreciate more exactly the place of Lambeth in the whole life of our church. It is in origin, and remains until the present day, essentially a gathering for common counsel with a strongly marked domestic interest. Any Christian assembly must be conscious of the historic context in which it meets, and its deliberations should be influenced by that awareness. Thus the discussion of problems of marriage relationship, of Christian initiation and church unity, cannot be conducted apart from the attempt to understand and grapple with the tensions of the present order of history; and the results of the discussion, whether embodied in resolutions or not, will contain evidence of such thinking. Lambeth can and must seek to deal with the particular problems, marriage discipline, initiation, intercommunion and secularism which confront the discharge of the Anglican mission in the world, but it can hardly speak to the world in the way which is appropriate to Amsterdam. Domestic problems are never unique: nevertheless in the end they have to be settled mainly by the exercise of domestic wisdom and discipline. Amsterdam performs the invaluable function of putting domestic problems in an authentic ecumenical setting and of being able with whatever hesitations to speak to the world. The Lambeth resolutions which deal with the doctrine of man, human rights, war, Palestine, and education, are the least impressive, partly because they only repeat in sober terms what has been said on other occasions and in other settings, partly because they are inevitably very general in reference. It is doubtful whether general resolutions which urge the international control of atomic energy or deplore violence in Palestine do not prove more irritating than helpful. The judicious phrasing of these resolutions scarcely reflects the urgency of the issues nor do they help the majority of churchmen to interpret the perplexities of contemporary existence as an essential step towards effective ministry to a confused and despairing world. The resolutions which deal with definite pastoral issues (including relations with other

churches) are clear and definite and less hortatory. No doubt Lambeth was well aware that the world is not to be saved by conferences and resolutions, but this would suggest that the domestic reference should be its primary concern, and faithfulness in this respect will govern the extent of its usefulness to the whole Church.

THE CHRISTIAN AND WAR

THE history of the last ten years has again confronted the Christian with the necessity of searching his conscience on the question of participation in war. Neither Lambeth nor Amsterdam was able to ignore this issue and both conferences were able to assert unanimously that war as a method of settling international disputes, "is incompatible with the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ," after which they proceeded to acknowledge that Christians might, in certain circumstances, lawfully engage in war. Certain comments may be allowed upon this dilemma which enlightened Christian thought seems unable to resolve. In the first place, the experience of modern warfare does not appear to have enabled the Christian Church to speak with any more insight on this urgent problem. Medieval attempts to limit the incidence of war assumed that it was unchristian, but since it was unrealistic to expect that resort to violence as an instrument of personal or state policy could be entirely prohibited, the most useful procedure was the endeavour to impose limitations on its ravages by laying down a code of rules for its conduct. The individual Christian was thus provided with some means of deciding on the extent to which he could justifiably participate in a war, though there is little evidence to show that he was encouraged to exercise such responsibility on the basis of material supplied by the philosopher and the theologian. In practice, the responsibility of decision was claimed as the exclusive right of the prince. The assertion of Article XXXVII, "it is lawful for Christian men at the commandment of the magistrate to wear weapons and serve in the wars," is really a declaration of the fact that peace and war are issues beyond the competence of the ordinary believer who can only submit to the actions of constituted authority without having any right to sit in judgment upon them. It is now apparently conceded that the individual has a right to formulate and act upon the deliverances of his conscience, though this concession would be withdrawn if too many consciences dictated action contrary to the policy of the State.

The conditions of modern warfare, with the unceasing application of scientific techniques for the purpose of mass slaughter, have obliterated the distinctions drawn by traditional theology designed to humanize the barbaric process of fighting. The development of aerial bombardment, the arrival of the atomic bomb and the threat of biological warfare make it no longer possible to distinguish between hospitals and factories, adults and children, fighting men and non-combatants, so that the Christian is faced with the issue whether war has not now become an activity in which he can have no part whatsoever. Such a conclusion would not assert that no Christian has at any time been justified in taking up arms, but that in war, as we now know it, he cannot participate. As long ago as the fourteenth

century John Wyclif said that the Christian should refrain from using the Lord's Prayer while serving in the army because the things he would be called upon to do were inconsistent with Christian discipleship. Yet the least theologically educated men are aware that Christian obligation cannot be put on or taken off like an overcoat in accordance with changing circumstances. This is the dilemma which confronted the authors of the report, *The Church and the Atom*. If it is too much to have expected that they might have helped to resolve that dilemma, at least the Church might have been given something better than text book scholasticism. The rarified atmosphere of scholastic discussions of the conditions of a just war is plainly remote from the actual conflicts in the minds of our contemporaries because the demonic forces inherent in modern warfare have destroyed both the traditional restraints on such violent action and the assumptions which made them possible. The ordinary man may well be a good deal nearer to the Word of the Lord in his stubborn conviction that the Christian Church will repudiate its Lord and deny its own nature if it sanctions, on whatever plea, the destructive horrors of atomic war. Except for the minority statement by Archdeacon Hartill, the report gives the impression of being more concerned to find ways of justifying the powers that be than of illuminating the darkness that surrounds the moment of decision. The Christian has to reckon with the fact that once the decision has been taken to engage in violent defence there appear to be no limits to what must be done if the defenders are not to be overwhelmed. In the act of consenting to such a measure of violence the Christian has involved himself in the terrible consequence of trying to save what is worth saving by methods which must destroy the very things he wishes to defend. This is the crucial issue on which we must have light if we are not either to perish or to become apostates. If there is no light for the wayfaring man, can the Christian claim to guide men into the way everlasting be any longer substantiated?

THE RENASCENCE OF WORSHIP

THE liturgical movement which has influenced so deeply Roman Catholic life in Flanders and in parts of France and Germany, like all genuine movements of the Spirit, has not been confined within long established ecclesiastical frontiers. The evangelical churches of Europe have in the same epoch manifested a quickened sense of churchmanship and of the central importance of worship in the life of the believer. The impact of these movements has been much less clearly marked in England than on the continent, another token of the persistent and enfeebling isolationism of so much church life in this country. Evangelicals in the Church of England are only just beginning to emerge from that deplorable phase of their history when worship was relegated to a secondary position in the scale of priorities. The lack of a rich and virile tradition of worship during the last two generations, which should nevertheless have been unmistakably evangelical in origin and inspiration, has given currency to the false doctrine that evangelicals have no distinctive word to speak on the subject. Recent discussions have emphasised the fact that liturgical

worship is the only possible expression of the evangelical genius since it has no meaning apart from the priesthood of the whole worshipping body. Only liturgical worship can be true congregational worship. The continental reformers of the sixteenth century valued liturgical forms as much as the makers of our English prayer books and were moved by the same desire to restore the primitive pattern of Christian worship wherein Word and Sacrament formed essential parts of one rite.

The Church of Scotland, like the Church of England, has suffered the deformation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of its authentic reformed insights, but a notable company of scholars like R. S. Simpson, Wotherspoon, Milligan, M'Millan, Hyslop and Maxwell, has been making available for the Scottish churchman the long forgotten treasures of his heritage. Recently a parish minister, the Rev. Colin Miller, has published a volume entitled *Prayers for Parish Worship* designed to assist parishes to take their part in the revival of worship. Taking as his working assumption the well known fact that the characteristic act of Christian worship has always been the Lord's Supper, Mr. Miller has compiled a series of liturgies with eucharistic associations but without the Eucharist for every Sunday of the year. In this endeavour he has followed Calvin, whose service was the Communion office without the Communion where a celebration could not be had. It is doubtful whether the provision of a different service for every Sunday will contribute towards the aim of making the Eucharist the central act of parish worship. It is more likely to confirm the Dissenting desire for a new service designed for the needs of the occasion.

These proposals raise two questions which must be faced by Anglican Evangelicals as well as Scottish churchmen. Is a weekly Eucharist with the ministry of the Word and the full communion of the people a legitimate and practical aim in a parish? If Evangelicals are right to maintain the reformation insight that communion must normally be the climax of participation in the Eucharist, is it likely that the primitive custom of weekly communion will be restored in any measurable space of time? Must it be conceded that the conditions of church life (including its own past history) make monthly communion the only possibility which is not unrealistic? The second question is whether the new-found emphasis on the primitive and reformed pattern of worship will be able to avoid the error of the Tractarians who had recovered the same insight, but largely mis-read its significance? Mr. Miller castigates the present Scottish order of worship for being an imitation of Anglican Matins, adopted at a time when Anglicans had not yet been able to put Matins in its proper place.

To write down Matins on the ground of its monastic origins is to be blind to the place it has come to occupy through many generations of use. Its devotional order and its extensive use of Scripture have made it into a unique medium of worship which cannot be set aside without serious loss. Morning Prayer has for more than three centuries stamped a characteristic pattern of piety on the sons of the Church of England and no recovery of lost insights must be allowed to obscure this fact. To restore the Eucharist to its proper place in parish worship and so to provide a genuine parish communion is a

necessary objective for Evangelicals at the present time, but it must be done without casting away what has been gained over the centuries. It is neither a sign of grace nor evidence of enlightenment when a proper respect for the Eucharist leads to contempt for Matins.

PROBLEMS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

THE Education Act of 1944, in making explicit provision for religious instruction and corporate worship in every school, gave expression to the widespread demand that children should understand the difference between right and wrong and to the equally widespread conviction that the inculcation of this understanding is the one important and distinctive function of religion. Christians could never be content with such a definition of the significance of their faith, but they have been presented with a great opportunity for better and more extensive religious education. The crucial question is whether these opportunities are being seized as they should be. A recent report of a commission appointed in the Liverpool Diocese entitled *Unto a Perfect Man* has given a full survey of work in the Day School and Sunday School, amongst adults and young people, with useful notes on method, including the use of films, film-strips and drama. A close study of its pages will repay the time spent upon it.

The most interesting and valuable section attempts to relate what has been learnt about General Intelligence through the researches of Sir Cyril Burt and others, to the problem of religious education. The great mass of the population lies on or about the middle line of intelligence with an Intelligence Quotient of about 100. In addition, a large proportion of the remainder is to be found in the category of poor average. This proportion is greater than that which can be classified as good average. A further substantial group can be described as slow learners, or even as dull and backward. The obvious conclusion seems to be that much religious education fails because it is presented as religious instruction, relying on hearing and reading as the chief means of education. The great majority of people learn more by seeing and doing than by hearing and reading, so that formal deficiencies in religious knowledge may be due to defective methods of teaching.

The necessity of taking into account the problem of low intelligence in tackling the religious education alike of church members and of outsiders is very great. Thus it may well be that films, pictures, plays and other activities are far more effective means of religious education than lectures, classes or even discussions. "When we talk in terms of method and approach, the key words are 'seeing,' 'doing,' 'experiencing'." The tendency to rely almost exclusively on sermons and talks may be an illustration of the tendency to follow the line of least resistance, since the parson has himself been educated in this way and does not easily adopt other techniques. But if he is to be helped to tackle the majority of his parishioners, whose intelligence is average and poor average, he must be given far more detailed help both in method and in understanding the workings of the average mind than this report offers with its rather tentative suggestions.