

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

Kikuyu, and Our Relations with Nonconformists.¹

THE gravest danger which threatens Evangelicals at the present time is the temptation to settle matters of controversy upon grounds of expediency rather than principle. The tendency to succumb to this temptation is clearly seen in several directions, notably in the matter of Prayer-Book revision. It is sound policy to restore peace in the Church, so runs the argument; therefore, to attain this end, let us compromise, and make concessions upon such matters as vestments, reservation, etc.

I am glad to say that it is not my concern to discuss these questions to-day, and I am sure that if you are half as weary of them as I am, you will be equally glad. But the point I wish to emphasize is that, whatever practical decision we arrive at, must be decided upon grounds of principle, and not by an opportunist policy, however attractive it may appear upon the surface. The man who has got his principles clear is the only really safe guide—at any rate, in matters of religion. The basis of his position is truth, and not good policy. Statesmanship is subordinated to unflinching adherence to Scriptural truth, and, however pleasing a vista is opened before him by the statesman, however he may be reproached for his unbending determination, he persists in saying: "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter."

I have dwelt upon this point, because I am convinced that the only sound way in which we can approach the Kikuyu problem is by subordinating policy to principle. I can imagine no subject which involves so many Evangelical principles at one time as this. Policy dictates compromise. "Agree with thine adversary *quickly*," says the opportunist. The Church is near to a grave split; its external unity is menaced far more by this question than by any other. Already secessions have occurred. Even the Bishops, who usually veil their opinions in obscure and non-committal language which can mean several things at the same time, are ranging themselves definitely upon different sides.

¹ A paper read at St. Albans Clerical and Lay Union on November 9, 1915.

A serious controversy is upon us, and we must discover, not what is the wisest course to adopt, but primarily what is the right attitude to take.

Now, no time need be spent upon describing in detail the Kikuyu incident, nor the behaviour of the Bishop of Zanzibar. The suggestions made at that conference, together with Dr. Weston's amiable opinions, were submitted by the Archbishop to the Consultative Committee of the Lambeth Conference. This committee issued their report, and the Archbishop some months later published his opinion, which was in line with the advice given by the committee mentioned, though, perhaps, rather more sympathetic in tone. Four questions were submitted to the advisory body: Whether non-Episcopalians should be admitted to the Communion in the Church of England; whether non-Episcopalian ministers might be admitted to preach in the pulpits of our missionary churches; whether members of our Communion should be permitted to attend the Communion in non-Episcopalian Churches; and the general question of the united Communion Service at the Kikuyu Conference.

The advice tendered answered the two former questions in the affirmative, and the latter in the negative. The matter is now officially pigeon-holed till the next meeting of the Lambeth Conference in 1918. But to say that the subject is left at that point would be wrong. Pronouncements are being made by all sorts of people, chiefly those who dissent from the Archbishop. The party in the Church who speak in the loftiest way of the Divine character of the Episcopate have united upon a policy of intimidation of the "successors of the Apostles." They have presented an ultimatum to each missionary Bishop, asking whether he is prepared to support the policy outlined by the Archbishop, and, if so, declaring their intention to withhold their support of the work in his diocese. Several of their protagonists have attacked the Archbishop, and three or four diocesan Bishops have reassured their anxious clergy by declaring that the Archbishop's opinion has no binding authority upon them, and hinting that, if it is confirmed by the Lambeth Conference, there will arise a situation of the greatest anxiety. Upon this point there

can be no difference of opinion: The next Lambeth Conference will have to decide a most serious matter, and no man who loves his Church can face the possibilities of their decision without many a troubled thought.

Between now and then it is our clear duty to study the question at issue, and on grounds of principle decide what attitude Evangelical Churchmen should adopt. My paper is designed towards this end.

In the first place, let me offer a few considerations upon the significance of the advice tendered by the Consultative Committee to the Archbishop, and upon His Grace's opinion. The expressions of a body of this character and those of the Archbishop should carry the greatest weight with all Churchmen. It is manifest that these pronouncements were in no sense party opinions. They have given complete satisfaction to no section of Churchmen. The Archbishop's advisers have gone upon the principle of estimating justly the needs of the situation in the mission-field, and they appear to have been as little concerned to pacify the Bishop of Zanzibar as to concede everything that the Bishops of Mombasa and Uganda recommend. Whatever we personally may feel as to the details of the advice and opinion, we are bound to admit that the whole question has received most careful and thorough consideration by a body of Bishops representing the soundest scholarship and most far-sighted statesmanship in the Church.

It is for such reasons that we resent the way in which the Archbishop's opinion has been received in certain quarters. By some of our leading Bishops he is described as if he were a kind of ecclesiastical Pooh-Bah, who speaks with one voice as Metropolitan of the Anglican Communion, and with another voice as the Archbishop to whom these extra-provincial missionary dioceses are related. And by some of the more reckless spirits he is lectured in a way which rouses the indignation of those who are old-fashioned enough to give "honour to whom honour is due."

To disparage the Archbishop's opinion as merely an individual expression is clearly wrong in fact. It is, in essence, the unanimous judgment of the Consultative Committee of the Lambeth

Conference, which consists, among others, of the Archbishop of York and the Bishop of Winchester, who are justly credited with being statesmen of no ordinary calibre, and who have given no evidence of being biassed in favour of Evangelical opinions. Indeed, this last remark applies to the whole committee. The advice to His Grace was tendered by a body of Bishops in which High Churchmen were strongly represented, and Evangelicals only very slenderly. Yet the decision is resented by High Churchmen, and Evangelicals are prepared to make the very best of it. Here is food for thought.

The only right way in which to examine this difficult question is to examine the principle underlying the advice and opinion, and to see to what extent it is reconcilable with our own principles. To avoid the possibility of misunderstanding, let me say at once that I think that we shall find that the expressions of the Archbishop and of those who advised him are in complete harmony with Anglican principles, and in line with those charitable judgments which, since the Reformation, have, with few exceptions, been characteristic of all our great divines. The logic of the position may lead some of us to feel that His Grace should have gone further; that he should have approved members of our Communion attending the Communion in non-Episcopal Churches when out of reach of their own; that he should have given his benediction to the united Communion at Kikuyu. But cold logic is not always a sound guide. Provided principle is not involved, sound policy deserves all consideration, and we may well believe that the wise hand of statesmanship has, for good reasons, drawn the line beyond which naked logic must not be pressed.

Now let us examine the principle behind Kikuyu.

We Evangelical Churchmen believe that our Lord founded a Church. The nucleus of this world-wide society, which looked to Him as Founder and Source of its life, was the Apostles. Within this society corporate dwells the Redeemer; pulsing through it is the Divine Spirit of God. This society is, moreover, a visible Church, known and read of all men. It is a holy society, separated unto God from the world, and though in the world,

conspicuous as a "city set on an hill," and keeping its environment free from corruption as the salt which retains its savour, it is yet not of the world, in the sense that its final ideals and its ultimate standard of conduct is heavenly. Membership of this society is obtained by repentance of sin and belief in Christ, confessed in Baptism. By Baptism the individual is admitted into the visible Church—by that, and by that alone. Once admitted, he becomes qualified, *ipso facto*, to eat the one Bread and to drink the one Cup.

The more we read the New Testament, the more we become convinced of two things: one is the absolute clarity of these essential facts, and the other is the wide gulf between these and every other test or mark which is advanced as distinctive of the Church. If we approach the New Testament with bias, we can make out a pretty good case for several other criteria of the Church; but I am bound to say that a person with a bias in the opposite direction can make out an equally good case for something exactly opposite. On the level of undisputed fact stand these statements: the Church is one holy and visible society, indwelt by the Spirit of God; it worships one Lord and Redeemer, whom each member confesses at the one Baptism which marks the beginning of his life as a Christian; it commemorates its Lord and enjoys Communion with Him in the one Holy Feast appointed by His own command.

But what about Church government? you ask.

So far as the advice of the Consultative Committee and the opinion of the Archbishop are concerned, we may at any rate at this point walk round the whole of this question. It does not yet arise. The question before His Grace's advisers was, stripped of all decoration, simply this: Is every baptized Christian to be regarded as a member of the Church of Christ? If the answer is given in the affirmative, the inevitable deduction follows: every baptized person is eligible for admission to the highest privilege of the Christian—that is, admission to the Holy Communion. If the answer is in the negative, then it amounts to this, that Baptism does not admit into Church membership, or else that some other additional qualification is required—a position which is devoid of all Scriptural foundation.

There is one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, and one Church which worships the one Lord, enshrines the one Faith, and acknowledges the one Baptism. The Archbishop's opinion is in complete harmony with the pronouncements of Scripture, and those who assail him, let it be plainly said, are assailing Scripture. In throwing open our Communion in the foreign field to native converts separated from their own Churches, His Grace is not doing merely the charitable thing, but that which Scripture in principle enjoins. These native converts are baptized, that is beyond dispute; for even assuming that the ministry which led them to Christ is "invalid," their Baptism is not impaired, for antiquity pronounces that even a layman can baptize. Nor can the exclusionists resort to the argument that schism has separated them from Communion, for no one will seriously maintain that a heathen African converted to Christianity by a Presbyterian is a schismatic from the Church of England.

The answer seems to be inevitable: the Archbishop is right.

But there are not wanting some who attempt to evade this line of argument. Mr. Leighton Pullan has taken it upon him to rebuke the Archbishop sharply. Let us glance at his view.

"How are we to regard baptized persons who are not in Communion with the Church, but living in good faith?" he asks. "If they are baptized, they are beyond question members of Christ, and nothing can exaggerate the importance of that fact. . . . No baptized person who is penitent and loves God can be lost" ("Missionary Principles," p. 21).

This is clear enough, but bewilderment begins when Mr. Pullan begins to limit the implications of his own sound statement. He continues thus: "Any portion of the body which organizes itself into a polity which has not evolved from Christ's own appointment necessarily ceases to be part of that body. It places itself as a system or body outside the Church" (*ibid.*, p. 36).

Mr. Pullan cannot mean that when a body of Christians revolt from Episcopacy, for that is the polity described by him as "evolved from Christ's own appointment," that they *individually* become outside the Church, because in the previous passage

quoted he has already declared that in consequence of their Baptism "they are beyond question members of Christ." He can only mean that, though in a corporate sense such a body of persons is not the Church, yet individually they are members of the Church.

I do not wish to enlarge unduly upon this, because I may not have caught Mr. Pullan's opinion correctly; but if it is really his view, it is a very odd argument. A body of members of the Church, by amalgamating into a secondary society, at once loses corporately that status which each one enjoys as an individual! It is a grave illustration of the maxim, "Save me from my friends."

But even supposing that this really were so, it does not affect the question of the admission of non-Episcopalians to our Communion; for if the individual Christian claims his privilege in virtue of his Baptism, the subtle question of the status of his own society in its corporate capacity does not arise.

A similar view is held by Dr. Swete.

"Baptism," says this writer, "admits not into a particular Church, but into union with Christ, and therefore into union with His Body, the universal Ecclesia" ("The Holy Catholic Church," p. 12). And again: "Baptized members of such societies" (*i.e.*, "non-Episcopal societies") "are, by virtue of their Baptism, members of the Body of Christ" (*ibid.*, p. 16). But, like Mr. Pullan, Dr. Swete will not allow that an aggregate of members of Christ's Body of this description is a Church "in the New Testament sense." What privileges they enjoy individually they sacrifice collectively, because they "have thrown over the threefold ministry, and cut themselves off from the historical Body of Christ" (*ibid.*, p. 40). Now what, we ask respectfully of such a ripe scholar as Dr. Swete, does this mean? How can an association of people collectively be "cut off from the historical Body of Christ," and at the same time all the members of that association individually be, "by virtue of their Baptism, members of the Body of Christ"?

Either by their "act of explicit rebellion," as Bishop Gore called it, against Episcopacy they have nullified their Baptism, which no one appears to hold, or else their Baptism, despite all

their errors, stands firm, and they are members of Christ. In which case they are eligible to participate in Communion with the Church Catholic. I can see no other possible alternative.

So we feel that the Archbishop is not merely charitable in sympathy, but also sound in principle when he states: "I have no hesitation in saying that, in my opinion, a diocesan Bishop acts rightly in sanctioning, when circumstances seem to call for it, the admission to Holy Communion of a devout Christian man to whom the ministrations of his own Church are for the time inaccessible, and who, as a baptized person, desires to avail himself of the opportunity of communicating at our Altars" ("Kikuyu," pp. 27, 28).

Now, it is not difficult to see how this affects our relations with Nonconformists here at home. The Archbishop's opinion amounts to this: The baptized Nonconformist's status as a Christian is as sound as our own. So far from unchurching them, or looking doubtfully upon them, he reaches out the hand of brotherly acknowledgment, and invites them cordially to the Feast of Love in our Church when precluded from attending their own. The great barrier between us and them is broken down. The patronizing air, which gives more pain than a direct insult, is, as it were, authoritatively forbidden. This, rightly interpreted, should mean the clearing of the air in every parish in the land.

At the same time, it must be noted that His Grace's opinion gives no sanction for the issue of general invitations to all the Nonconformists in our parishes to attend Communion in their parish churches.

In passing, I may say that there is ample sanction for this in the literature of the seventeenth century, where Episcopal pronouncements and sermons abound pleading with Nonconformists to attend the Sacrament in their parish churches. Indeed, in the same century, as no doubt you remember, Acts of Parliament were passed imposing severe penalties upon those Nonconformists who refused to communicate. But though we may feel convinced that we have full legal right to invite our baptized Nonconformist parishioners to claim their privileges, though we dare

not refuse them if they come, yet it is worth while weighing well the advisability of broad-cast invitations. The Archbishop's words apply only to Nonconformists who are shut off from the ministrations of their own Churches. He has considered carefully each word he has spoken, and, we may be sure, has good reasons for going no further.

We do not want to encourage religious vagrancy, for that is what roaming from church to church means. A plant does not grow well if it is plucked up and planted in a different place each week, and neither does the spiritual life flourish under such circumstances. There is a good deal to be said in favour of not attempting to disturb our Nonconformist fellow-Christians, but rather to urge them to stand loyally by their own Church and ministry.

But, personally, I feel very strongly that, at any rate, so long as our Church claims the proud title of "Church of England," at least occasionally general invitations should be given, as a witness that the Mother-Church has not forgotten her obligation to the half of her children. For instance, when peace is proclaimed, would it not be a truly happy inspiration if our Bishops were to bid us to arrange a united Communion Service in every parish in the land? I believe, laying aside all higher considerations, that such a thing would do more to check Welsh Disestablishment than all the fulminations of prelates and politicians combined.

But even a casual student of the Kikuyu literature must discover that the seat of the difficulty lies deeper than the question of admitting Nonconformists to our Communion. We have got to face boldly the question whether we acknowledge their societies as Churches and their ministries as valid. I have said enough upon the principles which must guide us in deciding the status of their societies; by no logic can a gathering of baptized Christians be denied the title of Church. A few words must now be said about non-Episcopal ministries.

It is really helpful to find the Archbishop digging a little deeper the grave for that hateful and poisonous word "valid." "I purposely avoid the words 'valid' and 'invalid,'" he says, "as

I have always found myself unable, without a feeling of intolerable presumption, to give to that phrase the meaning which in popular parlance it would seem to carry " ("Kikuyu," p. 30). His Grace will have every loyal Churchman with him when he urges the danger of regarding the threefold ministry as " trifling or negligible."

We need not dwell even for a moment upon a defence of our own ministry. We are satisfied with Episcopacy, thankful for it, and firmly determined to abide by it. But, as Bishop Andrewes said, because we " prefer a better thing," we do not therefore " damn " every other system.

A study of Church government discloses an interesting fact. Originally the two ideas which, for want of better words, we may describe as democratic and aristocratic were blended. The Church chose its ministers—this was the democratic side of ministerial appointment; the highest officials in the Church ordained the chosen men—this we may call the aristocratic side. The stress laid upon the former seems to have been as great as that laid upon the latter. You see this in the New Testament and in Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians. Cyprian described the election by the Church as of " Divine tradition and Apostolic observance "; Julius of Rome stigmatized a high-handed act where no such election had occurred as " lawless and contrary to ecclesiastical canon." Leo said: " No reason can tolerate that persons should be deemed to be Bishops who were neither chosen by the clergy, nor called for by the laity, nor ordained by the Bishops of the province with the approval of the Metropolitan."

In medieval times popular election lapsed entirely, and the stress was laid upon ordination by the highest officials of the Church. At the Reformation it was revived, but by the non-Episcopal Churches. They have retained to the present day the democratic ideal, and among them the essence of a true ministry is the call of the Church. We, in common with all other Episcopal Churches, failed to revive this Scriptural and ancient practice. Our Bishops became lackeys of the Court, and were often sycophants who earned their high positions by supporting the Crown. We may console ourselves that this has

practically entirely ceased; we may be persuaded (as I personally am) that appointment of Bishops by the Prime Minister works well, and that a better scheme has yet to be devised. But the fact remains that we have lost one of the primitive criteria of a properly ordered ministry. This was one of the gravest objections that the early Puritans lodged against our Church.

The nice question then remains: Which ministry is in the safer position to cast stones at the other—the one which has retained the ancient form of ordination and rejected the election by the Church, or that which has retained election by the Church and rejected the ancient method of ordination? Perhaps we should decide that, as both are in a glass-house, it would be well to suspend stone-throwing altogether.

The test of a ministry is the fact of its approval by God, witnessed by the fruits of the Spirit. Let us, therefore, in our dealings with our Nonconformist neighbours, suspend academic dispute, which ministers to ungodliness, and enter into a holy competition with them to outrival them in making our flocks patterns to the Church of Christ.

H. A. WILSON.

