The Anglican Pattern of Episcopacy

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I

The clearest and most convincing statement of the distinctively Anglican tradition with regard to Episcopacy that I have ever seen is contained in a booklet just published by the Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Cambridge, Dr. Norman Sykes, the full title of which runs as follows : *The Church of England and Non-Episcopal Churches in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries—An Essay towards an Historical Interpretation of the Anglican Tradition from Whitgift to Wake.*[1] In this paper I shall draw freely upon this invaluable essay, and I would strongly recommend every reader interested in the subject to obtain a copy and keep it as the definitive summing up of the historical Anglican position.

The chief of the relevant Anglican formularies are found in the Preface to the Ordinal, and Articles XIX, XXIII and XXXVI of the Thirty-nine.

The Preface to the Ordinal.

I quote the wording of the first edition (1550) :

> " It is evident unto all men, diligently reading Holy Scripture and ancient authors, that from the Apostles' time there hath been these orders of Ministers in Christ's Church : Bishops, Priests, and Deacons : which offices were evermore had in such reverent estimation, that no man by his own private authority might presume to execute any of them, except he were first called, tried, examined, and known to have such qualities as were requisite for the same ; and also, by public prayer, with imposition of hands, approved and admitted thereunto. And therefore, to the intent that these orders should be continued and reverently used, and esteemed, in this Church of England ; it is requisite that no man (not being at this present Bishop, Priest, nor Deacon) shall execute any of them, except he be called, tried, examined, and admitted according to the form hereafter following."

This paragraph was repeated almost word for word in the Prefaces of 1552 and 1662. The last adds the words " by lawfull authority " after " admitted thereunto ".

Article XIX. Of the Church.

The paragraph mentioning the ministry is as follows :

> " The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same."

Article XXIII. Of Ministering in the Congregation.

> " It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of publick 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 publick authority given unto them in the Congregation, to call and send Ministers into the Lord's vineyard."

[1] S.P.C.K., 1/6.

Article XXXVI. Of Consecration of Bishops and Ministers.

> "The Book of Consecration of Archbishops and Bishops, and Ordering of Priests and Deacons, lately set forth in the time of *Edward* the Sixth, and confirmed at the same time by authority of Parliament, doth contain all things necessary to such Consecration and Ordering: neither hath it any thing, that of itself is superstitious and ungodly. And therefore whosoever are consecrated or ordered according to the Rites of that Book, since the second year of the forenamed King *Edward* unto this time, or hereafter shall be consecrated or ordered according to the same Rites; we decree all such to be rightly, orderly, and lawfully consecrated and ordered."[1]

The Ordinal and the Articles were published at a time when the Reformers in England felt themselves to be very closely linked with the Reformers on the Continent in their stand against "the tyranny of the Bishop of Rome". But most of the Reformed Churches on the Continent had not retained historic episcopacy. It is significant, then, that these English formularies lay down the necessity of a duly authorised ministry in the Church of Christ, but do not insist that that ministry *must* everywhere be the threefold ministry of Bishops, Priests and Deacons. What they do claim is that "from the Apostles' time there hath been these orders of Ministers in Christ's Church," and that *in this Church of England* it is intended that "these orders should be continued and reverently used and esteemed". And further, it is insisted that the Ordinal contains "all things necessary to such Consecration and Ordering: neither hath it anything, that of itself is superstitious and ungodly." Here there is no note of attack upon the Reformed Communions on the Continent which had not retained the historic episcopate. On the contrary, the note is one of defence: the ordinal is not to be regarded by any who have not retained the ancient three-fold ministry as containing "anything that is of itself superstitious and ungodly."

Exactly the same line is taken by the Elizabethan divines, Richard Hooker and Archbishop Whitgift. Strong advocates of the Presbyterian system of Church government, like Thomas Cartwright, with their eyes on what they considered to be the more perfect models of the Continental Reformed Churches, went so far as to maintain that Presbyterianism, and Presbyterianism alone, was the form of Church government authorised by the New Testament. The reply of the Anglican divines is summed up in the two following quotations: the first from Whitgift and the second from Hooker.

> "That any one kind of government is so necessary that without it the church cannot be saved, or that it may not be altered into some other kind thought to be more expedient, I utterly deny; and the reasons that move me so to do be these: The first is, because I find no one certain and perfect kind of government prescribed or commanded in the scriptures to the church of Christ; which no doubt should have been done, if it had been a matter necessary unto the salvation of the church. Secondly, because the essential notes of the church be these only; the true preaching of the word of God, and the right administration of the sacraments; . . . So that, notwithstand-

[1] After half a century of controversy we have two of the Canons (7 and 8) of 1604. But they add nothing except a little ferocity.

ing government, or some kind of government, may be a part of the church, touching the outward form and perfection of it, yet is it not such a part of the essence and being, but that it may be the church of Christ without this or that kind of government, and therefore the 'kind of government' of the church is not 'necessary unto salvation.' "[1]

"Although I see that certain reformed churches, the Scottish especially and French, have not that which best agreeth with the sacred Scripture, I mean government that is by Bishops, inasmuch as both those churches are fallen under a different kind of regiment; which to remedy it is for the one altogether too late, and too soon for the other during their present affliction and trouble: this their defect and imperfection I had rather lament in such case than exagitate, considering that men oftentimes without any fault of their own may be driven to want that kind of polity or regiment which is best, and to content themselves with that, which either the irremediable error of former times, or the necessity of the present hath cast upon them."[2]

The position adopted by the Elizabethan champions of historic episcopacy, therefore, is clear. They defend the primitive and apostolic nature of episcopacy and are fully resolved to retain historic episcopacy in the Church of England. But they deliberately abstain from asserting exclusive validity for an episcopal ministry or "unchurching" non-episcopal churches. In other words, they plainly hold that historic episcopacy is of the *bene esse*, and not of the *esse*, of the Church.

II

In the next generation the Caroline divines reacted further from the rigid Puritanism which was manifesting itself in various forms in Great Britain, but they still refused to unchurch the continental reformed churches for their lack of episcopacy. This is true, for instance, of Lancelot Andrewes (Bishop of Winchester, 1619-1626), John Bramhall (Archbishop of Armagh, 1661-1663) and that stout assertor of episcopacy Herbert Thorndike (Prebendary of Westminster, 1661-1672). The only exceptions are a few extreme controversialists like Richard Montague, who cannot possibly be regarded as representing the main body of the Church of England at that time.

The general attitude of seventeenth century Anglicanism is well summed up in a letter of Archbishop Wake's dated 9th July, 1724, in which he refers both to William Grindal (Archbishop of Canterbury, 1576-1583) and to Lancelot Andrewes.

"The Licence granted by archbishop Grindal's vicar-general to a Scottish Presbyterian to officiate here in England, I freely own, is not what I should have approved of, yet dare not condemn. I bless God that I was born and have been bred in an episcopal church; which I am convinced has been the government established in the Christian church from the very time of the Apostles. But I should be unwilling to affirm that where the ministry is not episcopal, there

[1] *The Works of John Whitgift* (Parker Society, Cambridge, 1851), Vol. I, pp. 184-5. Dr. Sykes' own correction of his quotation from Strype's *Life of Whitgift* on page 5 of his booklet should be noted. The words quoted are those of an opponent of Whitgift.

[2] *Ecclesiastical Polity*, III, xi. 16.

> is no church, nor any true administration of the sacraments. And very many there are among us who are zealous for episcopacy, yet dare not go so far as to annul the ordinances of God performed by any other ministry. See for this in Bishop Andrewes' *Opuscula* his letters to Du Moulin. You will there find one of the most tenacious assertors of the episcopal government nevertheless far from unchurching all the other reformed churches for want of it."[1]

As to the occasional licensing of Presbyterians to officiate in the Church of England, the conclusion of Dr. Claude Jenkins is certainly to be accepted. "It seems to me," he writes, "impossible to deny that the English bishops recognized the foreign churches as churches. It seems to me equally impossible to deny that there were probably isolated cases of men not episcopally ordained having ministered in the Church of England. But it is not merely probable, it is certain that such cases indicate no weakening at any time of the Anglican view of the ministry contained in the Ordinal, nor of what was requisite in England."[2]

The actual practice of the Anglican divines was in accordance with the principles set forth in their writings. Thorndike refers to "the communion which hath always been used between this church and the reformed churches."[3] The evidence that visiting members of the reformed continental churches during their residence in England were received to Holy Communion is, as Dr. Sykes says, "clear and copious". And, when visiting the continent, many English people had very close relations with the Protestant Churches there. John Cosin, for example, afterwards the High Church Bishop of Durham, describes his own practice when an exile at Charenton in France in these words :

> "I never refused to join with the Protestants either here or anywhere else, in all things wherein they join with the Church of England. Many of them have been here at our church, and we have been at theirs . . . I have baptized many of their children at the request of their own ministers. . . . Many of their people . . . have frequented our public prayers with great reverence, and I have delivered the Holy Communion to them according to our own order, which they observed religiously. I have married divers persons of good condition among them; and I have presented some of their scholars to be ordained deacons and priests here by our own bishops . . . and their church at Charenton approved of it; and I preached here publicly at their ordination . . ."[4]

When consulted about communicating with the reformed church in France, Cosin's reply was :

> "Considering there is no prohibition of our church against it (as there is against our communicating with the papists, and that well-grounded upon Scripture and the will of God), I do not see, but that both you and others that are with you, may (either in case of necessity, when you cannot have the Sacrament among yourselves, or in regard of declaring your unity in professing the same religion, which you

[1] Wake to Courayer, 9th July, 1724.
[2] C. Jenkins, "The Reformation and the National Church," in *The Anglican Communion*, ed. H. A. Wilson, pp. 56-7.
[3] See H. Thorndike, *Works* (L.A.C.T.), vol. V, pp. 426 ff.
[4] J. Cosin, *Works*, vol. IV, pp. 397-8 (L.A.C.T.).

> and they do), go otherwhiles to communicate reverently with them of the French church."[1]

In a debate in the House of Lords in 1703 on "occasional conformity" John Sharp, the High Church Archbishop of York (1691-1714) said that "if he were abroad, he would willingly communicate with the Protestant churches where he should happen to be"[2], and during the same debate Gilbert Burnet, the Bishop of Salisbury (1689-1714), said that he himself had been an occasional conformist in Geneva and Holland. "I think," he added, "occasional conformity with a less perfect church may well consist with the continuing to worship God in a more perfect one,"[3]

One more quotation must suffice. It is from the pen of James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh (1625-1656)—he was buried in Westminster Abbey. The Archbishop is writing (in 1655) of the non-episcopal churches of the Low Countries and France,

> "which I do love and honour as true members of the Church Universal, I do profess that with like affection I should receive the Blessed Sacrament at the hands of the Dutch ministers if I were in Holland, as I should do at the hands of the French ministers if I were in Charenton."[4]

In a letter which I have just received from Professor Sykes he tells me that since writing his booklet he has found further important evidence, *viz.*, that Archbishop Wake formally *approved* as well as allowed reciprocal intercommunion between the Church of England and the Swiss Reformed Churches in respect of members of each visiting the other's country. And it must be remembered that Wake was, as the late Dr. A. J. Mason put it, "one of the greatest prelates who have occupied the throne of St. Augustine and of Cranmer."

III

Archbishop Wake brings us into the eighteenth Century; but before we proceed further we must look back a moment and note what went on in Scotland in 1610 and 1661. After the first consecration of Bishops at the former date there was no re-ordination of men in Presbyterian orders. Similarly, after the second consecration in 1661 there was little or no attempt to impose episcopal ordination upon the existing clergy. There seem, indeed, to have been a few Presbyterian Ministers who did not receive episcopal ordination but nevertheless stuck to the episcopal church after the revolution of 1690.

Going on now into the eighteenth century we observe that for many years both the S.P.C.K. and the S.P.G. employed Lutheran clergy, not episcopally ordained, as chaplains and missionaries in India. While William Law and the Nonjurors stood for the "divine right of episcopacy," the general opinion of responsible Anglicans was that expressed by Sir George Pretyman Tomline, Bishop of Winchester (1820-1827), commonly accounted a High Churchman:

[1] J. Cosin, *Works*, vol. IV, p. 407.
[2] See *Life of Archbishop John Sharp*, vol. I, pp. 377-8, by T. Sharp (2 vols., 1825).
[3] See Cobbett, *Parliamentary History*, vol. VI, col. 164 seq.
[4] H. Parr, *Life of Ussher* (1686), p. 5, Appendix.

> " I readily acknowledge that there is no precept in the New Testament which commands that every Church sould be governed by Bishops. No Church can exist without some government; but though there must be rules and orders for the proper discharge of the offices of public worship, though there must be fixed regulations concerning the appointment of ministers, and though a subordination among them is expedient in the highest degree, yet it does not follow, that all these things must be precisely the same in every Christian country; they may vary with the other varying circumstances of human society, with the extent of a country, the manners of its inhabitants, the nature of its civil government, and many other peculiarities which might be specified. As it has not pleased our Almighty Father to prescribe any particular form of civil government for the security of temporal comforts to His rational creatures, so neither has He prescribed any particular form of ecclesiastical polity as absolutely necessary to the attainment of eternal happiness . . ."[1]

No bishop has come closer to the English ideal of episcopacy than the eighteenth century Bishop of Sodor and Man, Thomas Wilson. He went to the island as Bishop in 1697 and died, in his fifty-eighth year of office, in 1755, at the age of 93. The income of the see was only £300, but the Bishop was unremitting in his labours for improvement of social conditions of his people. His goodness overcame all ecclesiastical differences. Roman Catholics and Dissenters thronged to hear him preach. Cardinal Fleury wanted much to see him and invited him to France, saying that he believed that they were the two oldest and poorest bishops in Europe; and he obtained an order from the French Government that no privateer should attack the Isle of Man. Bishop Wilson accepted an invitation from the Moravian Synod in London to become their Superintendent; and it was his custom to pray for a blessing on " all the Reformed Churches " in the prayer which preceded his sermon.

But we must hasten on into the next century; and the position at about the middle of it is sufficiently indicated by a statement of the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Bird Sumner, in 1851. The Archbishop had been asked " whether it is really the sentiment of the Church of England that those excellent foreign clergymen (whom we have most certainly led to believe that we recognise their orders) are not as truly Pastors of the Church of Christ as even the Bishops of the Established Church; or, whether, on the other hand, we should regard them . . . as mere laymen? " To which the Archbishop had replied, " I hardly imagine that there are two Bishops on the bench, or one clergyman in fifty, throughout our Church, who will deny the validity of the orders of these clergy, solely on account of their wanting the imposition of episcopal hands."

To this statement of the Archbishop's, that stout controversialist, Henry Phillpotts, Bishop of Exeter (1830-1869), took strong exception, and so did the Tractarians. But, as this rapid survey has shown, the exclusive claim for episcopacy advanced by the Tractarians is not in accordance with the predominant tradition of the Church of England. It is precisely in the combination of a positive affirmation of the value

[1] See *Exposition of Articles* (ed. 1799), pp. 396-8 (Article XXIII).

(*concluded on page* 78.)