

# 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](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

[*Cheltenham Conference Paper*]

## THE POSITION OF THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION IN THE CHRISTIAN WORLD.

### I.

BY THE REV. CYRIL C. B. BARDSLEY, M.A., Honorary Secretary of the C.M.S.

THE term "Anglican Communion" dates from about the middle of last century, and originates from nobody knows where. It was used to describe the Church of England and her sister Churches in Ireland and Scotland, and her daughter Churches all over the world, including the Protestant Episcopal Church of America.

The story of the Anglican Communion and the history of the expansion of the Empire go together. Three hundred years ago missionaries were sent to the American Colonies and the West Indies. The American Revolution led to the separation of the American Church, but the Church secured its succession from Scotland, and fellowship continued with the English Church. With the growth of the Empire the Church spread to South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, India, etc. With the growth of Missions it spread to Africa, China, Japan, Persia, South America and other parts of the world. Now there are nearly 300 dioceses—102 in the United States of America, 122 in the Overseas Church Dioceses in connection with our own Church, 41 in England, 7 in Scotland, 13 in Ireland. All these dioceses are linked together, possessing the same ecclesiastical order, using practically the same Prayer Book, translated into many languages, united together in one spirit of fellowship. Upon the Anglican Communion the sun never sets.

The only authoritative statement as to conditions of membership is that adopted by all its Bishops, known as the Quadrilateral. (i.) The Historic Canons of Scripture; (ii.) The two historic Creeds; (iii.) The Sacraments; (iv.) The Historic Episcopate. The Quadrilateral does not assert that Episcopacy is of the *esse* of the Church. As a matter of fact, the Lambeth Conference, in one of its Encyclicals, speaks of "Non-episcopal Churches." I must confess I sometimes find it hard to be patient with men who seem to seek for other expressions than that of "Church" in speaking of our Free Church brethren. What the Quadrilateral says is that Episcopacy is of the *esse* of the Anglican Communion, and so it has been for 1,300 years. Its numbers are large, but not relatively to some other Churches. In China the number of members is less than 10 per cent. of the whole. In India Protestant Christians are two-fifths of the total number, and the Church of England members are less than a quarter of the two-fifths. At the same time, the position of the Anglican Communion is very strong. What are the reasons for this?

It has been pointed out that the Eastern Churches take their stand on the infallibility of the first seven General Councils, and that they lack the power of adaptation to subsequent thought.

The Roman Church recognises the principle of growth and development of doctrine, but, with its principle of infallibility, when once fresh doctrine has been enunciated, it has been continually forging fresh theological chains. The other Churches which have come into being since the Reformation have, except in the case of the Presbyterian and Lutheran Churches, lost to a large extent their connections with the past.

The Anglican Communion, on the other hand, is rooted and grounded in the past. It maintains the faith once for all delivered to the saints, the ancient Orders of the Ministry, the Sacraments, the Holy Scriptures as containing all things necessary to salvation. It has its ancient lineage and its rich inheritance, but it has, compared with the other ancient Churches, a far greater power of adaptability; for, repudiating their doctrines of infallibility, it has a greater freedom. Its position as between the other ancient Churches and the other Reformed Churches is clearly of immense importance.

2. Its position is strong because, in the eyes of a great part of the Christian world, it stands for so much that is devout and sane and strong. It is honoured for its saints and its scholars, and not least for its missionary enterprise. The fact that it has definite leaders in its Bishops undoubtedly helps to give it, again and again, a position of leadership in the Mission Field, the Bishop in his Diocese, with courtesy and friendship, constantly being invited by representatives of other Churches to preside at united gatherings. We shall not lose the respect which others have for us unless we deserve to lose it.

3. Its position is strong because of its comprehensiveness. It is difficult for those outside to understand how this can be. They seem to see so much that is conflicting in its different elements. Yet—I do not include the definite Roman cult—the Church would be the poorer and the weaker without these varying elements. The Lambeth Report of 1897 quotes a distinguished Roman Catholic, who declared his conviction that the English Church was endowed with a quality analogous to that possessed by chemical intermediaries of combining irreconcilable substances.

One very important change needs to be realized. The Anglican Communion is no longer Anglo-Saxon. To-day it is not a racial Church. The word "Anglican" implies limitations which no longer exist. As we look over the world, one of the greatest forces to-day is the growth of the spirit of Nationality. We have to recognise this in the distant parts of the Empire, in the nations of Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. The change in the Anglican Communion is, most of all, due to the fact that it now includes Indians, Chinese, Japanese, Africans. Technically, every Indian baptized in an Anglican Church in India is a member of the Church of England in India. The Archbishop appoints Bishops over a large number of Dioceses linked with the Church of England. The Church in the Mission Field is, in many cases, rapidly passing from one stage to another in its history. Undoubtedly the development of Diocesan organization in Japan, China, India, and the

organization of Provinces, is strengthening the position of the Anglican Communion. We need to remember that our aim is not to anglicanize these new Churches. We rather desire that the Church in these countries should maintain and express the personality and national character of the people. One of the great hindrances to the growth of the Church in India is its State connection. Seven of its Bishops are State officials. It is an established Church. Our ambition is a truly Indian, Chinese, Japanese, African Church. The world is suffering from an acute attack of Nationalism. It is of vital importance to discover the true doctrine of Nationalism and its relation to Internationalism. Lord Hugh Cecil said: "I am a Christian first and an Englishman afterwards." I believe that the right place of Nationalism will be found in and through the Christian Church. We must not ignore or depreciate nationality; rather, we have a message for nationality to-day; we have a vision of each nation as a Province in the Kingdom of God.

The Anglican Communion, as a spiritual Communion, is essentially non-racial and non-Imperial. It stands for a higher citizenship which transcends and over-rides all racial distinctions. Each nation has its own contribution to bring to the enrichment of the whole. The Anglican Communion is not Anglo-Saxon. It is non-racial.

But this fact raises a new problem, and vitally affects the whole question of Re-Union. Upon our attitude to this vital question our whole future position very largely depends. We have a God-given opportunity and responsibility. If we rise to it, if we have sufficient courage, humility and sacrifice, a new stage will be reached in the history of the Christian world, and new hopes will be opened up for the evangelization of the world. There are some who fear Re-Union with other reformed Churches, because it will compromise—in their judgment—our position with the Church of Rome. Even if Rome would unite with us—which she is not willing to do—we could not unite with her as she is. She must be cleansed first. To delay action for this reason means indefinite postponement and the failure to follow the guidance of the Spirit of God with regard to Re-Union with the Free Churches. My own conviction is that a great united reformed Church, such as we foreshadow, would have a real influence upon the Church of Rome. Many of its members look with apprehension at what they call the Pan-Protestant Movement. Edinburgh of 1910 gave a new vision of this possibility to some of the leaders of the Church. We have to face the fact that Re-Union with the Free Churches will be bitterly opposed by a strong section of our Church. We have a deep respect for many members of that section. Many of us have very intimate friendships with some of them. We do not desire anything that will bring strife; but we cannot allow them to prevent our Church following a course which we believe to be in accordance with the Mind of our Lord. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the Lambeth Conference. Re-Union is the chief subject. It will be brought up in a very definite way, most of all through the scheme for Re-Union in South India. If

clear guidance is not given immense harm will result, and the glorious opportunity which is now given to us will be lost. Many Free Church leaders at home are ready to accept Episcopacy which is not prelacy—Episcopacy which is essential for unity, not for grace. In the Mission Field the position is the same, and even more so. The need of personal supervision and direction is felt in the Mission Field. A striking illustration is given by the adoption among the Congregationalists of the system of district superintendents. The great hindrance comes from those who insist on the doctrine commonly known as the doctrine of Apostolic Succession. Our brethren in these other Churches are ready to accept the *bene esse*. We have no right to press the *esse* upon them. The late Professor Gwatkin wrote as follows :—

“ Our debt to episcopacy is enormous. Imagine what our history would have been if Anselm and Langton, Cranmer and Parker, had never held Augustine’s Chair, and the seven had never stood for the liberties of England. Only we must not make it more than the government which God’s good Providence has given to ourselves. To claim for it a binding command of Christ or His Apostles is a defiance of history, and to make it necessary for other Churches, without such a command, comes near to a defiance of Christ Himself.”

We have to realize how pressed the Free Church leaders are by many of their followers who are anti-episcopal. All honour to them for their courage and for the way in which they are holding out the hand of fellowship to us. There cannot be indefinite delay. If we fail to meet their advance, we must expect Re-Union amongst themselves, and the results will be :—

(i) The great Church so formed will be poorer without our contribution. Not least will it miss our contribution of discipline.

(ii) Our own Church will be in a much weaker position.

(iii) The Re-Union which we so desire will be indefinitely postponed.

(iv) A great set-back will be given to that movement of co-operation in the Mission Field abroad and at home, which is of such incalculable value to the whole missionary enterprise.

Another point of view needs to be grasped. Can we expect Indians, Chinese and Africans who are members of the Anglican Communion to refrain from uniting with their fellow-Christians? Can we desire it? Dare we wish our divisions to be perpetuated amongst them?

Fears of secession at home will be expressed and used continually to postpone Re-Union. The greater fear is the secession of these growing and virile Churches in the Mission Field. Please God, neither secession will take place, but, if there is to be any secession, which will involve the greatest loss? Look thirty, forty or fifty years ahead, and think what it will mean in loss to the whole Anglican Communion if these Churches in the Mission Field are separated from us. Our position is now full of immense opportunity for promoting that Cause which we know to be so dear to the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ. There are immense difficulties, but no situation is beyond God; there are no problems which He cannot solve. There comes to us, as His servants, a great challenge to courage, faith and, above all, to prayer.