

The Church of England in South Africa

BY THE REV. F. C. SYNGE, M.A.

MR. HUGHES' article under this title in the June number of *The Churchman* 1948 is distressingly one-sided. Just because I sympathize with much that he writes I think it is important to correct some of his half-truths. It is perfectly true that the Church of the Province is mainly of one colour, the Anglo-Catholic colour, and many of us regret that the Evangelical wing is not more strongly represented. But it is quite unfair to suggest that it is not represented at all. The tragedy is that the body calling itself "The Church of England in South Africa" will not add its evangelical leaven to the lump, but stays outside in a condition of rivalry.

Let me turn to the errors and half-truths of Mr. Hughes. "It displeased Gray to find upon his arrival that the churchmanship of the Cape Province was prevailingly Evangelical and that his 'high church' views were by no means generally popular." The word Evangelical is misleading in that sentence. Evangelical in the sense of evangelistic they were not: Gray was horrified to find that missionary work was almost non-existent. Evangelical in the sense of rejoicing in the Gospel of their salvation they were not. They were Erastian through and through: the Anglican Church catered for the well-to-do and the comfortable in conscience. It was this Erastian outlook which spurred Gray on to "snap the ties" with the home-country. He was Tractarian, he was unwise, he was headstrong, he was, if you like, arrogant; but he was not anti-Evangelical.

"The new organization, which was in effect to be ruled by bishops and in which the laity were to be an unimportant majority." This is, indeed, a surprising charge. For what Gray did was to introduce synodical government in which the laity were represented—and this at a time when in England the Church was governed by bishops and clergy in Convocation without any House of laity at all. Gray gave the laity much more say in the governance of the Church in South Africa than the laity of England were to get until sixty years later. It was on this point that the split first shewed itself; for the Erastians (whom Mr. Hughes chooses to miscall Evangelicals) refused to have any part in this Synodical and relatively 'democratic' government. And they are the founders of "The Church of England in South Africa". It is an over-simplification to present the strife as one between wicked Anglo-Catholics and ardent Evangelicals.

"The Evangelical Church of England congregations were . . . inspired by their common loyalty to the doctrines and practices of the Reformation, as enshrined in the Book of Common Prayer." That looks uncommonly like an attempt to suggest that the Church of the Province has abandoned them. In fact, the Book of Common Prayer

is still *the* Prayer Book. It is true that it is in process of revision ; but the revisions are permitted only ; they are not ordered. The 39 Articles are accepted still. If the Evangelical congregations are "inspired by their common loyalty, etc.", so are all the other congregations. There is no mark of difference there. The insinuation that there is smells odiously.

I wish I knew what Mr. Hughes' doctrine of Episcopacy is. "The Church of England in South Africa is, by a great injustice, denied the right of having its own bishop." There are fourteen diocesan bishops in the Province willing to serve its needs. It is not the bishops who withhold their ministrations, but the "Church of England in South Africa" which refuses to acknowledge their jurisdiction. What, I wonder (though I think I know) would be Mr. Hughes' reaction if, given an extremely Evangelical Bishop of London, the Anglo-Catholics, refusing his ministrations, demanded "their own bishop"? I cannot avoid blunt words. The plain fact is that these "Church of England" congregations are dissident congregations. They are the only Anglicans in the whole wide world who reject the bishops of the Church of the Province. The Archbishop of Canterbury accepts them, and all the other bishops accept them, as is evident from the fact that, as I write, they are assembled in Lambeth in the great Conference of Anglican bishops. There is something ingenuous in the attitude of a dozen or so congregations in South Africa : first they reject the ministrations of bishops whom the entire Anglican Communion acknowledges, and then, if you please, they complain of injustice because they have no bishop "of their own."

I could continue to point out Mr. Hughes' mistakes, but I would rather plead with him and those who share his views. There are not a few of us within the Church of the Province who reject the Anglo-Catholic position and try to preach the true Biblical, Evangelical Gospel. Won't the "Church of England in South Africa" come over and help us, come into the Church of the Province and help us to reform it from within? It can be done. But as long as "The Church of England in South Africa" stands aloof as *rival* Church—and almost, I fear, as a schismatic Church—its evangelical witness is muffled in controversy.

REPLY TO THE REV. F. C. SYNGE

I AM grateful to the Editor for allowing me the opportunity of replying to the animadversions of Mr. Syngé. When in 1848 Bishop Gray arrived in Cape Town it was hardly to be expected that he would discover evidences of extensive missionary activity in so new and undeveloped an outpost of the British Empire. I do not recollect having read in the two-volume Life of Bishop Gray that he was "horrified" by any lack of missionary zeal amongst the Evangelicals at the Cape. He was certainly impressed with the vast amount of work which was waiting to be done, as his own words, written shortly after his arrival, show : "I trust the Church of England will feel that it owes a heavy debt to Southern Africa. There is no one of our Colonies that we have for so long a time and so entirely neglected, as the Cape of Good Hope. It is very sad to think how little has hitherto been done for it by ourselves, while other bodies of Christians have been labouring zealously in its behalf. . . . Everything has as yet to be done—churches and schools erected—Clergy, Catechists, and teachers brought out—a college founded—perhaps also a Cathedral—Missions planted ; and this by a

Church enfeebled through the neglect of the Mother Church for half-a-century."

What apparently did "horrify" Bishop Gray in connection with the Evangelicals was the discovery that the only two clergy in Cape Town belonged, as he put it, to "a little Evangelical Alliance", and that the one held prayer-meetings in school, while the other officiated in a school turn-about with dissenters! Perhaps he had forgotten that there had been times when, in his more Evangelical days, before his conversion to Tractarianism, he had himself as a parochial clergyman in England conducted services in schoolrooms. He seems also to have been "horrified" to find on his arrival—which coincided with the time when the Gorham case was creating such a stir in the Anglican world—that the pulpit of the Cathedral had been "employed as a vehicle for proclaiming Evangelical Alliance men's pamphlets against that doctrine of the Church", *vis.*, baptismal regeneration!

In support of my remarks concerning the relative importance of Bishops and laity in Bishop Gray's scheme of things, it is sufficient to quote Gray's own statement: "We (Bishops) agree in Conference upon a line. Then the Bishops meet in Synod, and lay down principles, and agree to invite Clergy and Laity. These form the mixed Synod, and Clergy and laity assent to what Bishops have done. . . . All join us who like upon these terms. . . . It seems to me that we Bishops are the only essential parts of this voluntary association."

Since its inauguration in 1870 by Bishop Gray the Church of the Province of South Africa has been free to proceed unchecked with "revisions" of the liturgy in accordance with its tastes and inclinations. The outlook of the Church of the Province is described with commendable frankness by Father Alban Winter of the Community of the Resurrection, himself a minister of the Church of the Province, in his book entitled *The Shield of Faith*. "The Prayer Book of 1549," he writes, "provided for both the Christ and the imposition of hands, but unfortunately the former was dropped in 1552, and has never been restored, except in the Province of the Church of South Africa, where it is provided for in the revised Order of Confirmation, and to be used at the Bishop's discretion. . . . We are fortunate in that its use has been restored in the Church of the Province of South Africa." Nor is this the only matter in which the members of the Church of the Province are to consider themselves fortunate. In a chapter devoted to the subject of "The Mass," Father Winter affirms: "It is something to be profoundly thankful for that the Church of the Province of South Africa has a Liturgy in which the right balance of sacrifice and communion has been restored". He informs us in fact that certain Bishops of the Church of the Province of South Africa have taken the step of "reintroducing a modified *porrectio instrumentorum* and investing the candidate for priest's Orders in the Mass vestments." Respecting Holy Unction, he tells us that "in the Church of the Province of South Africa the rite has been restored and an Office provided for it in her revised Occasional Offices." Moreover, in commending the practice of praying "for the faithful departed", Father Winter finds that "it is a cause for great thankfulness that the Revised Liturgy of the Church of the Province of South Africa has made explicit the somewhat ambiguous prayer for the souls of the departed in the Anglican Liturgy"!

One is hardly surprised to read in Father Winter's book of "the virus of that Protestantism which is in the history of our Church and surrounds us on all sides," and the assertion to the effect that "Catholics cannot share with non-Catholics in Holy Communion," for "to communicate with members of Churches not in communion with the Catholic Church is a perversion of the proper use of the sacrament, and can only hinder, rather than help, that reunion for which we pray"! This sounds rather like a natural development of Bishop Gray's attitude towards the unhappy so-called "non-Catholics," as described by his son and biographer: "It is hardly possible to look for any real approach to union with a body who reject Episcopacy; and as to what is called 'exchanging pulpits'—Priests of the Church lowering their office by preaching in dissenting places of worship, or inviting dissenters to speak to their people—the Bishop did not consider that any advance towards real unity could ever be made by such unworthy compromises".

The present Bishop of Johannesburg declares that he is "glad to have the opportunity of writing a Foreword to this work of Father Winter," and he expresses the hope that many "will read and profit by it." He believes that "it will be particularly useful for the teaching of doctrine in Theological Colleges,

especially in missionary lands where the practice of hanging doctrinal teaching upon the Thirty-Nine Articles is particularly unsuitable, in view of the fact that the background of these articles is, *and may quite suitably remain*, wholly unfamiliar to the student." (My own italics.)

Well, there is not much that is Reformed or English about all this. It is little wonder that the congregations of the Church of England in South Africa—a despised "dozen or so," maybe, with however, let it be remembered, many dozens of missionary congregations of African Christians—are not eager to be absorbed into this organization, or to make a compromise on what they believe to be matters of conscience. Mr. Syngé would like to know what my Doctrine of Episcopacy is. Let me remind him that Bishop Gray claimed "a right to consecrate a Bishop for congregations who could not own Colenso as their Bishop": how much more may these congregations of the Church of England in South Africa claim a right to be granted a Bishop of their own! Let me also remind him that in 1933 the "Silvertrees Agreement" was drawn up as the result of the amicable consultation of delegates representing both the Church of the Province and the Church of England in South Africa, under the chairmanship of the late Dr. Phelps, who was then Archbishop of Cape Town, and with Dr. Chambers, who was then Bishop of Central Tanganyika, present in a mediatorial capacity. Terms whereby the long-standing dispute might be finally settled were carefully drawn up, and it was agreed that the Church of England in South Africa should have its own Bishop. But, alas, the "Silvertrees Agreement" has never been honoured. It is high time that it was, and I humbly urge that it is opportune for its terms to be reconsidered and that now at length the agreement should be made effective.

I earnestly wish for God's blessing upon Mr. Syngé as he endeavours to preach the true Biblical Evangelical Gospel, and I trust that what I have written in this rejoinder may help him to a better appreciation of the attitude and position of those who value and wish to safeguard the Biblical and Evangelical witness of the Church of England in South Africa.

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