

# The Lambeth Conference:

## ITS ORIGINS AND ITS FUTURE

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THE Lambeth Conference first met in 1867. The forthcoming 1968 Lambeth Conference, originally planned as a centenary conference, will be the tenth such gathering. A 'centenary' conference is a good opportunity to consider the origin, the subsequent development, and the future of these episcopal house-parties as Bishop Bayne called them. This is the more so when the Vice-Principal of Ripon Hall, Oxford, Dr. A. M. G. Stephenson, has written so excellent and learned a book as *The First Lambeth Conference: 1867* (SPCK, 381 pages, 63s.). Dr. Stephenson sees that first conference as primarily the brain-child of Archbishop Longley and the Moderate High Church bishops, and intimately connected with the development of the Synodical Government movement pioneered by men like Bishop Selwyn of New Zealand as an antidote to the link with the British Crown and Parliament.

Dr. Stephenson begins by sketching out the background. He enumerates four groups within the Church of England—Evangelicals, Broad Churchmen, Tractarians, and the Moderate High Churchmen. Then he describes the position of Anglicans overseas and north of the English border—the great changes in Ireland, Longley's establishment of a pan-episcopalism with Scotland, the Church-State tensions in the colonies, climaxing in the Colenso row where that turbulent Tractarian diehard Bishop Gray was determined to secure the condemnation of the staunchly Protestant modernist Bishop Colenso of Natal. The division stemming from that dispute still exists today in two Anglican churches in South Africa.

The Evangelicals who had done almost all the missionary pioneering were suspicious of Tractarian attempts to use local synods to break with the Crown, a link which Tractarians positively hated. In this suspicion which was not without foundation, Evangelicals had the support of the Broad Churchmen, while the Tractarians had the support of the moderate High Church group. The tensions were considerable and the issues often complex and intertwined, but the Church-State matter was never far absent. On the question of modernism the line up was different; the Broad Churchmen were on their own against the rest. Dr. Stephenson considers the main cause of the first Lambeth Conference was the desire from the colonies especially 'for a higher synod to control the provisional and diocesan synods which had developed in the Colonies' (p.85). Subsidiary causes were the confusion about Church-State links when transplanted overseas, the revision of the 1603 canons, and the revival of the Convocations in England. The modernist conflict was a further indirect cause.

Unlike his predecessors, Longley was an ardent Pan-Anglican. Stephenson has little difficulty in correcting the strange misapprehensions that he was an Evangelical; he was in fact a moderate High

Churchman. He went out of his way to establish links with the Scottish Episcopalians, largely regardless of the feelings of the Kirk. For this he was roundly condemned by *The Times* and by the more Protestant press, but of course supported by the Tractarians and their more moderate fellow travellers. Bishop Gray from South Africa was another Pan-Anglican driving force, though he was to be disappointed in his attempt to establish a sort of Anglican curia without the Pope. Longley received requests for a conference from across the Atlantic, but he did not have an easy time in convincing his fellow bishops. When the first agenda went out, some hesitated about attendance and some declined including the Evangelical bishop of Peterborough, Jeune. On the eve of the conference the Evangelicals were anxious to strengthen the Protestant emphasis of the proposed statement. Pusey was urging his episcopal friends to work in the opposite direction. The Tractarians wanted to see Colenso condemned. A sizeable group of overseas bishops desired to see an authoritative synod established. Liberals and Evangelicals wanted to ensure that Colenso was not condemned, though the Evangelicals were not keen on his theology, and both wanted to see nothing done that would loosen Church-State links, though there was a hint of a difference between home Evangelicals and some from overseas at this point. As the conference proceeded, Stephenson brings out other tensions. Dean Stanley, the Broad Churchman, declined the use of Westminster Abbey save on terms the bishops would not accept. The Evangelical leadership was not so much in the hands of that senior veteran Bishop Sumner but of the American McIlvaine. (Does this reflect the weakness of English Evangelical bishops at this time?—something I have long suspected. The very Protestantism of the nation has tended, I think, to obscure the actual weakness of positive Evangelical leadership at the time.) Gray and his friends did not get their authoritative Pan-Anglican synod. Tait saw to that. There was a clash between the Tractarians and the moderate High Churchmen over the Church of Sweden, the former opposing the latter's desire for unity with that body. Some readers will be surprised to learn that intercommunion *among Anglicans* was prominent on the agenda. It is all too easy to assume that Anglicans have been in full communion with each other ever since there were Anglicans. But that is not history, and the very fact that the subject was discussed in 1867 shows that Pan-Anglicanism did not exist before that.

Reactions to the conference and its encyclical were not altogether surprising. *The Times* was mockingly hostile, saying that even Colenso could have signed the encyclical. The *Daily Telegraph* was critical too. The Evangelical and Broad Church press followed the same line, but the High Churchmen supported. One of the shrewdest comments came from Bishop Ewing, the Broad Church bishop of Argyll. He wrote to Stanley:

The Pan-Anglican *has* sat, and seems to have done no harm. No supreme spiritual council seems to have been erected—no tribunal of heresy, no holy office; but the evil is done and established. *It has* sat. *It may* sit again. *It will virtually* (by sitting when called) be the very council which, in its resolutions, it professes not to have founded 'por to

have wished to found. The clergy, if not legally, will be virtually, subject to it. It not only glorifies the element of sacerdotal judgment, apart from lay co-operation, but it also introduces *foreign sacerdotēs*. To this I object—I object that England should be subjected to such a tribunal. Many prelates who attended meant no harm, but their very attendance did all that was required. The thing is done, and the acts are not so innocent as they appear. . . . What remedy have we? None but the distinct and repeated declaration that the Church does not consist merely of the ecclesiastic or 'professional' Christian, but of the whole body of the baptized—and in England of the clergy and laity with the Christian powers that be, as well as of the Bishops.

Was Ewing a prophet?

Dr. Stephenson's book is, as I have said, excellent, and one of the best nineteenth century studies I have met. It must be read, digested and marked up by any serious scholar in this field. Yet it is not above some minor criticisms. I found myself questioning from time to time the rather sweeping groupings. Has the author quite got the distinction between Tractarians and Old-fashioned High Churchmen, especially on subjects like episcopacy? (It comes out in their respective concepts of the desirable ecumenical line up.) Stephenson says the Evangelical press was hostile to the conference, in contrast to those who attended. He does not produce much evidence, does not allow for the fact that the bishop he cites is an American whereas the press was entirely English, that any who attend conferences are under some obligations especially if they have signed some statement. Were any of the Evangelicals reluctant signatories like Ewing? And has Stephenson really grasped what Evangelicals stood for, and the diverging trends among them, one of which led to pietistic Keswick and the other to a Reformed churchman like Ryle of Liverpool?

On value judgments opinions will differ. Stephenson's Ripon Hall tradition is strong enough for him to regret the condemnation of *Essays and Reviews*, but his real sympathies seem to be with Longley and the moderate High Church group, yet I am bound to say that I fear his enthusiasm for his subject has led him to exaggerate the Conference's importance. After all the powerful CMS stood aloof from Lambeth Conferences till 1888, and that is eloquent. Still his book remains a first class study.

#### LAMBETH 1968

Two paperbacks have been produced especially for this conference. Mowbrays have reissued an updated *The Bishops come to Lambeth* by Dewi Morgan, 150 pp., 8s.6d.; and CIO have produced *Lambeth '68* at 3s. This bright booklet is replete with cartoon drawings, episcopal touring guide of London and a gourmet's digest plus the details of the programme and a few short articles. Lambeth 1968 will contain some innovations. It is to be larger than ever before; almost 500 are expected, and suffragans and assistants are invited. A team of twenty-four consultants will be in attendance, and a formidable array of observers have been invited. The cost of all this is not given, but must be considerable, even when allowance is made for the fact that many bishops will be at Uppsala anyway. If such gatherings are valuable and serve a real purpose, the cost must be found, but the

question needs to be asked and answered, rather than the answer being assumed. It has become the practice to intersperse Lambeth conferences with Pan-Anglican Congresses. The question has to be asked also whether both gatherings should continue side by side. What do such gatherings really achieve? Is it likely that the Anglican Communion will get valuable guidance from such gatherings which meet for relatively short periods and then not again for a decade? Would it not be preferable to meet much more often to establish a real exchange of minds, or much less frequently? What is this particular Lambeth Conference going to do? *Prima facie*, it is going to study virtually the whole of theology, and presumably attempt some sort of potted *summa* as a report. If that is so, it is bound to fail, for the task is impossible. Perhaps it is only going to frame the questions, as one bishop explained to me, but if so, that is dangerous, for too hasty a framing of the questions in controversial debates may cramp the real debate later on, and in any case should such question framing be left only to bishops? It is a very open question what Lambeth is going to do and whether it is worth all the expense. Small wonder then that a senior mass medium man who is an Anglican described the conference as 'that great non-event', and said no one in his outfit was going to pay much attention to it. I pressed him, and he countered, Would anyone notice the difference if it did not take place? It would not interest the general public, and he doubted if it was of much importance in the church either. The continuation of Lambeth Conference is a real and very open question.

But at a deeper level, I want to raise two basic questions about that. The first concerns the value of what has come out of Lambeth conferences. It is always emphasised that Lambeth reports have no binding authority; that is true, but it is only half the truth. Subsequently they are taken as having some sort of other authority, usually undefined. They are cited by bishops, quoted in official documents, referred to by other churches and mentioned in ecumenical reports. The nature of their authority is rarely stated or discussed; it is just assumed that they are authoritative Anglican documents. There is here a certain characteristic Anglican doublethink. If Lambeth reports have no real authority or status, why bother with them? They are only private views of a group of bishops, and often only majority opinion anyhow (though one usually has to discover that by devious means), and if this is so, are they worth publishing? Lambeth reports are not always consistent with each other, but perhaps that is as well. They have blown hot and cold on ecumenical schemes, as A. T. Hanson has demonstrated in chapter two of his *Beyond Anglicanism*. In West Africa Lambeth more or less told the locals to switch from a CSI-type scheme to a unification of ministries one, and the non-Anglicans were not enthusiastic. Regarding Lambeth and union schemes, Hanson says: 'Neither its own detailed recommendations nor the way in which they are ignored when it comes to the point, fills one with confidence about the competence of the Lambeth Conference in this sphere' (p. 42). In weighing the future of such gatherings, Hanson cites Bishop Bayne,

It is increasingly being forced or lured into another role, trembling

on the brink of being a synod—of being treated as though it were a synod—without most of the necessities of synodical action. If we wish it to move from our tradition of responsible co-operative decision by our separate churches into some more centralized way, then the Lambeth Conference very likely must assume a synodical role, and it must have a synodical constitution, through the addition of clerical and lay participants. Without these orders of ministry, the Conference could not speak authoritatively and decisively; indeed whenever Lambeth is now forced into even a parasynodical attitude (and this is less infrequent as the years go on) the response of the churches is likely to be increasingly negative.

Hanson thinks Bayne's alternatives are either a proper synod with clergy and laity, or complete informality and no report, or the abolition of the conference. Hanson favours the last but fears he must settle for the second, preferring a body of permanent experts to take its place, though he does not want the body too closely linked with the Archbishop of Canterbury, as he detects signs of a curia at Lambeth anyhow. Is Hanson right?

The second major Lambeth question is the nature of the Anglican Communion itself, and here we are back to some of the 1867 problems. In the CIO booklet the Archbishop writes of bishops 'bound together not by any central authority, for our Communion has none, but by bonds of love and loyalty and communion with the See of Canterbury' (p.1). Love and loyalty presumably bind all Christians together, so episcopal communion seems to be the great determining factor of the Anglican Communion as of the Wider Episcopal Fellowship. When we look closely, we discover that this factor is not just episcopacy but a particular kind of historic episcopal succession. Thus episcopalian Methodists in America, Danish Lutherans who are episcopal, and for that matter the Free Church of England do not qualify, nor for some unspecified but presumably different reason does the Church of England in South Africa which has an historic episcopate! The question for us to consider is whether this particular type of episcopalianism ought to continue to be the determining factor in marking out the boundaries for Lambeth discussion and fellowship. The very fact that Lambeth 1867 found it necessary to discuss intercommunion among Anglicans shows how recent a concept Pan-Anglicanism is. It is all too easy to imagine that the Anglican Communion has always existed since the Reformation, but in fact it is a mid-nineteenth century development.

In considering the terms of fellowship Anglicans have been accustomed to turn to the Lambeth Quadrilateral. The first three points would present little problem to a great many other churches. The difficulties centre round point four, the historic episcopate. It is this fourth point which supplies the basis of so much Pan-episcopalianism. If some of us believe that the historic episcopate should not be the determining factor, what are we to put in its place? It is of course easy to see how in practice this Anglican Communion network has grown up, but in our ecumenical age all these denominational structures have to be rethought. What are our terms for eucharistic fellowship? Whilst there is no reason for limiting discussion with anyone, it will be apparent that more intimate church consultation will be conducted

with those with whom one is in full eucharistic fellowship. This is a large subject, and one I have tried to discuss in my chapter in *Fellowship in the Gospel*, Marcham Manor Press, 1968. Here I can only state the conclusion and refer the interested reader to that chapter for the arguments supporting. The principle is that every church should only be bound to the Christian essentials, and that in all other matters a church should be left free to determine its own affairs. The essentials are those matters clearly demonstrable from Scripture, and in the present state of scholarly discussion we must conclude that episcopacy cannot be proved from the Bible. It was the strength of Bishop Kirk's *Apostolic Ministry* symposium that he tried to prove episcopacy from the Bible, but virtually the whole scholarly world now recognises that that particular attempt has failed. The case is not proved, and until it is, the historic episcopate cannot be regarded as an essential. The Church of England is by Article VI committed to the principle that what is not demonstrable from Scripture is not an article of faith, and so we may go further and say that however vigorously certain views of episcopacy are held within Anglicanism, they are only the private views of certain persons and ought not to be held to be binding on all Anglicans, nor made determinative of church policy within Anglicanism. This is not to decry episcopacy, as some rather too easily assume; it is rather to plead for a willingness to rethink episcopacy and the fourth point of the Quadrilateral in terms of a corporate church *episcopo*, not in terms of *esse, bene esse, plene esse*, all of which are misleading. It is a plea to rethink episcopacy in terms of pastoral and practical value rather than an unalterable theological principle. The plea is for dialogue about an old and very well worn subject but approached from a new angle.

The historic episcopate is not the test of fellowship; solidarity in the fundamentals of the Gospel is. That is why Uppsala is really more important than Lambeth. It would be pointless to turn Lambeth into another Uppsala, but if the Lambeth Conference is to continue, perhaps it could be widened not along the lines of the historic episcopate but along the lines of those churches sharing in the same Gospel, and especially those which, like the Church of England, have some reasonable claim to be the catholic church of the locality. If this reasoning is sound, there will be consequences. Pan-denominational schemes and projects will be given up. In the CIO booklet Bishop Dean, Anglican Communion executive officer, has an article in which he outlines the development of inter-Anglican co-operation, and with obvious approval. He repeats what the Archbishop of Canterbury says about communion with the See of Canterbury; he speaks of the Archbishop as a representative Anglican Communion figure, a first among equals. He lists the Anglican Congresses, the new Advisory Council on Missionary Strategy, and 'yet another step forward' MRI. Whether one detects any curial growth such as Hanson fears is a matter of opinion, but MRI is 'a bold plan, deeply theological and missionary, rather than financial as is sometimes supposed'. The financial point is fair, but Bishop Dean admits that criticism came at once from inside and outside the Anglican Communion. MRI was said to be a Pan-Anglican hardening, to have set the ecumenical movement back

twenty years, and the phrase 'the Body of Christ' was capable of being regarded in Anglican circles as elsewhere as identifying the Anglican Communion with 'the Body of Christ'. But, he continues, 'patient and continuous explanation has for the most part now cleared away such misunderstandings'.

If we can assume that Bishop Dean was writing a careful statement, and not just loose PRO blurb, his comments are disturbing, and sadly typical of the way Anglican officialdom reacts to criticism. He does not concede that the critics have any point; they have merely misunderstood. Nothing is said about the senior positions some of the critics hold, nor that other churches have very carefully explained why they do not go in for pan-denominational projects. One could dismiss all this as just further examples of Anglican imperialism, and it would, as such, make excellent ammunition for a second edition of Ian Henderson's *Power Without Glory*. But I know the people concerned too well to accept this explanation. Bishop Dean knows MRI is under pressure or he would not have admitted the criticism so openly. The real trouble, I believe, is that Anglicans are so used to assuming Pan-Anglicanism that they simply do not realise how these things strike others, even other Anglicans.

Bishop Dean's arguments will not stand up. He says this phrase was capable of being regarded in that way, but was it really capable of any other meaning? Of course no aspersions were intended, but the phraseology and thinking of MRI reveal a certain substructure of Anglican thinking, and it is rather worrying. Bishop Dean seeks to show the wider dimension of MRI, but the context of the MRI quote he gives, and indeed the whole document, shows that any ecumenical dimension was very much an afterthought. He then cites the Archbishop 'The Church that lives to itself will die by itself', but was not that too in the context of inter-Anglican affairs? The Archbishop's thought is excellent, but it is no rebuttal of MRI Pan-Anglicanism. The disturbing thing is not the intentions of the original MRI visionaries, which I am sure are wholly honourable, but the underlying assumptions of their thinking, and their unwillingness to question these assumptions at a time when Anglicans are frequently being urged to adventurous and exciting rethinking. MRI was a failure financially, demonstrating incidentally that many Anglicans do not want to depart from their traditional practice of supporting private societies and missions for some central Anglican fund. But MRI was a much greater failure theologically and ecumenically, and Bishop Dean shows no sign in his article of recognising that yet.

Consider the local implications of MRI overseas. If it had been a great financial success, you might have had, say, a Methodist and Anglican mission station side by side, and suddenly a lot of extra money reaches the Anglican one through an Anglican scheme, but none goes to the Methodists. Those with missionfield experience already know the problems which wealthy but well meaning American mission teams can cause alongside established but poorer stations, and the resulting temptations for the locals in terms of financial betterment and material progress. To channel funds denominationally is to encourage such things, whereas the right principle is surely to help

*all* Christians in need *in a particular place* rather than make some denominational discrimination which the locals will not in all probability, understand.

To conclude, the future of the Lambeth Conference is uncertain and badly needs to be rethought. Behind this lies the greater problem of the Anglican Communion, and what holds it together. It has grown up unplanned and largely through historical accident, but ought it to continue? One of the strange ironies of the ecumenical movement is that it has inadvertently encouraged world denominational (or confessional as they are rather misleadingly called) blocs. If we are to recover the biblical concept of all in each place, we shall want to do our utmost to discourage denominationalism in all its forms, local, national and international. One only has to reflect on the name of the Church of England to realise its intention to embrace all Christians in England, something enshrined in our parish system of ministering to all within a given area. We Anglicans in England are the Church of England, not the episcopalian denomination in England. Denominationalism is the foe of real ecumenism, and is to be resisted in all its forms.

What about Anglicans outside England? Space precludes any detailed answer, but the principle is firm adherence to the essentials of the Gospel and complete liberty in all else with strong encouragement not to copy western and European ways of doing things unless the local culture is western and European, but to indigenise and adapt as far as possible to local cultures. In some parts of the world this will mean little change; in others such as Asia, Africa and South America indigenising the church may mean wholesale reconsideration. It is not within my competence to suggest any detailed application, but those interested in guidelines might care to consider chapter eight of Professor Hanson's book, for the Professor can write out of experience as a missionary in India, and he clearly perceives the great gain of CSI as a territorial church in which Anglicans became emancipated from the pan-denominational principle, despite the folly of Anglicans elsewhere in the world trying to prevent this.