

Editorial

Lambeth 1968

THE TENTH LAMBETH CONFERENCE has come and gone, and its report, *The Lambeth Conference 1968: Resolutions and Reports* (SPCK, 13s. 6d. and 8s. 6d.) is now published. It can hardly be described as a weighty document, and, as might be expected, it amounts to little more than a rubberstamping of official lines. One of the encouraging features is that Lambeth has shown itself willing to question seriously the future of the Lambeth Conference. And that is sheer gain, for it is one of the built-in defects of ecclesiastical institutions that they tend to drift on long after they have outlived their usefulness. We have never made any secret of our conviction that since the days of British imperialism are over, the days of Anglican ecclesiastical imperialism ought to be over too, and to preserve the facade of them is to make ourselves a laughing-stock. Now that the ecumenical movement with its regional conferences is an established fact, Pan-Anglican organisation ought to decline and to decline fast. There may be some need to retain a loose and largely informal consultative network, and no doubt that will mean a small secretariat. But secretariats have a way of growing according to Parkinson's law, becoming more expensive, and acquiring to themselves powers. All of these factors must be watched with great care, and unauthorised developments excluded.

Signs are not lacking in the final report that the old Pan-Anglicanism lives on. Resolution 67 tells us that a 'developing MRI has a vital contribution to make'; one hopes that is just pious platitude, for MRI smacks of all the old Pan-Anglican exclusivism. It is true that the Bishops tried to make it more ecumenical in that resolution, but they show little sign of appreciating how wrong in principle the MRI concept was. As to the proposed new Anglican Consultative Council, its functions are vague and general (dangerously so when one bears in mind how secretariats develop), and apparently it is beyond criticism, since it can only be changed by another Lambeth Conference ! It appears that if the ACC idea is acceptable at all, churches have no right to criticise; at least they can criticise, but their criticism cannot be effective.

They just have to pay the bill for the whole development. That—privileges and money without responsibility—is exactly what needs to be avoided in any new structure. The membership of the proposed council is much too small to be representative, and if it were to get larger, it would be very costly, which in itself is a good argument for abandoning the *worldwide Anglican* idea and concentrating on *regional ecumenical* conferences. (Just imagine the three Church of England representatives plus the Archbishop advising on a controversial ecumenical scheme like the present Anglican-Methodist one!)

The Lambeth resolutions on communion fellowship (45 ff.) are important, not so much for their main contentions, for they only follow the official line, but for the two significant differences. First, on CSI, 48a follows the Bishop of Bristol's minority recommendation in the Intercommunion Commission, and seeks to remove restrictions from a bishop or episcopally ordained CSI minister moving into the Anglican Communion. Well intentioned though it may be, this resolution seems to us not only retrograde but positively damaging since it discriminates against the CSI minister who is *not* episcopally ordained, and confirms our worst fears of Anglican episcopalian exclusivism. One of the great merits of the whole CSI approach to ministry is that it avoids dividing ministers into categories in the way some western Anglicans seem determined to do, and this resolution does just that, discriminating against the minister not episcopally ordained by leaving him subject to restrictions. The second difference is the insertion in resolutions 45, 46 and 47 of the phrase 'under the general direction of the bishop', yet another piece of Anglican episcopal intrusion, for logically it makes all synodical decisions turn on the whim of the local bishop on such crucial and controverted matters as admission to communion, receiving communion in other churches, and intercommunion. Whatever its intention, this is prelacy rampant again. All the final decisions are made by the bishops. The bishops themselves, and on their own, have so decreed it.

One further feature of the Lambeth Conference calls for comment. For the first time ever English reticence gave way to American concepts of press freedom. The result was that after a very short time all debates were thrown open to the public and the press. The effects were not encouraging. Some bishops took their opportunity to speak with an eye on their press publicity. We are told that one transatlantic bishop even kept a score of how often each bishop spoke, and made sure that he topped his own poll. In the debate on the 39 Articles, one of the worst of the lot, the session was interrupted by demonstrators with banners (demonstrating about something quite different!), and the whole place dissolved into uproar and confusion. Some bishops wanted to welcome the demonstrators and some wanted to debate the Articles. The worst debate of all was on the Anglican-Methodist union plan, which few of the overseas bishops knew anything about.

The Bishop of Peterborough prudently moved that the question be not put, not wanting a snap vote without papers. Bishop De Mel then made an impassioned speech, and the Lambeth bishops, despite Peterborough's pleas, approved the scheme. The Bishop of Peterborough wrote thus to the *Church Times* (Sept. 13). 'I notice that you [Church Times] describe the speech of Bishop De Mel on this subject as a "personal triumph". It was in fact not a speech which should be heard in any civilised assembly, let alone an assembly of Christians. It was a torrent of abuse, insult and hysteria—a rabble-rouser—rightly castigated in the Conference by Bishop Trevor Huddleston as "utterly unChristian"'. That speaks for itself, and it further underlines the folly of trying to get worldwide Anglican comment and approval on a scheme which concerns one particular area. Two decades ago the Anglicans in South India felt let down by much of the comment from England. Many, and we certainly agree, felt it wrong to consult every corner of the Anglican Communion about a particular and local scheme. Subsequently that was not done with the African schemes, after a further douche of cold water had been poured over the North India and Lanka schemes by the English Convocations. To consult theological or other experts on particular points is prudent and desirable, but that is quite different from seeking approval from synods and semi-official bodies all round the world. And it is sad that Dr. De Mel who is not an Englishman, does not know or understand the English situation, and thus cannot speak on it except out of ignorance, should have made his speech. He ought not to countenance English interference in Indian affairs, and he ought to have had the good sense not to do the same in reverse. Whatever the contents of his speech, he deserves condemnation for presuming to make one on such a subject at all. After all there is such a thing as the autonomy of a regional church.

All in all the tenth Lambeth Conference was a depressing affair. The new publicity methods had an adverse effect. The quality of the thinking and deliberation was not noteworthy. The report in consequence is thin and platitudinous. The organisation left a lot to be desired. We can only hope that the tenth Lambeth conference is the last.

This Number

WE have devoted this issue mainly to ecumenical concerns, the Anglican-Methodist scheme and *Intercommunion Today*. The decisions on both of these documents will have to be English, but the two reports raise some very far-reaching theological issues about the terms of

communion fellowship, sacramental theology, the nature of the church, and doctrines of the ministry. *The Churchman* has always stood in the tradition of Evangelical churchmanship, and has no intention of changing or compromising its basic tenets. But on a controversial subject like these ecumenical issues, it is of cardinal importance that each section of the churches involved should know what the others involved think about the issues. Accordingly we invited the Bishop of Willesden to contribute an article in our last number and to write from the 'Catholic' angle. In this number Professor Kingsley Barrett, a distinguished Methodist biblical scholar, writes from the dissentient Methodist side, and raises some fundamental questions. He asks us all whether we do not make too many ecumenical assumptions without verifying them from the Bible. To raise that question is very necessary. Dr. Packer has a special right to be heard on the union scheme as the one dissentient from the final report; here he elaborates his case for a CSI type of scheme and shows how it might apply in this country. Editorially our mind is that the critics are right and that the scheme as it stands should not be accepted. But just as we hope, and indeed have a right to expect, that supporters of the scheme will take criticisms seriously, so the critics need to appreciate why the supporters of the scheme are supporters, and how they react to criticisms of it. Accordingly we published an article by Bishop Hollis in our last number, and carry two further articles in support from the Bishop of Bristol, who is perhaps the leading ecumenical exponent among Church of England bishops, and from Bishop Lesslie Newbiggin, a CSI bishop and former Presbyterian missionary, who had earlier made some important theological criticisms of the unification of ministries approach, favouring the CSI method of accepting ministries. Bishop Neill is quite literally *sui generis* in ecumenical knowledge, experience, and expertise, as well as being a founding father of CSI. He contributes a candid and personal evaluation of *Intercommunion Today*. We are glad to carry comments from divergent viewpoints on these ecumenical issues. Each Christian has a duty to consider carefully what others have to say before deciding. If Christians are ever to rise above the level of power politics, party pressure groups, and majority voting, each person involved has a responsibility to weigh the theological issues which must be basic in any sound thinking, and then to assess their practicability.

British and Foreign Bible Society

BRITISH and Foreign was founded as long ago as 1804. The Society was an Evangelical foundation but a non-sectarian one. It has an

honourable and indeed a great history in the expansion of biblical Christianity. Recently the Society has been going through a period of change. First it amended its constitution to allow itself to print the Apocrypha in its Bibles, something which had been ruled out from the start as likely to give rise to controversy among its supporters. Now it proposes to revise the clause in the constitution which states that BFBS Bibles are to be 'without note or comment'. This does raise serious and far reaching issues, and in view of the importance of the impending change, we have deliberately held over a large part of our review section to get Mr. Cranfield's article into this number, and so provide a basis for widespread and informed discussion of the proposed change.

It is one of the great achievements of BFBS over the years that it has obtained support from a very wide range of Christians, a range stretching across denominational barriers and spanning a variety of differing ecclesiastical and theological viewpoints. That is no mean achievement, and in part at least a tribute to the vision of BFBS founding fathers in their concern to avoid anything controversial. What of the recent and proposed changes? For ourselves we can see little objection to the Apocrypha alteration, though there is the possible danger that simple folk might not appreciate the secondary category of the Apocrypha. Annotated Bibles raise very different issues, for inevitably the question of an imposed human interpretation arises, and this is an issue of Scripture and tradition. No one doubts the integrity of BFBS, their desire to meet the requests from overseas for help in understanding the Bible; no one familiar with the distribution problems in publishing can be unaware of the advantages of streamlining the distribution channels of literature; there is a good case for working with the Roman Catholics where a Bible version can be agreed honourably and without compromise. But having said that, there are aspects of the proposed change which call for very careful consideration and very great certainty before a decision is finally made. First, BFBS must weigh the question of uneasiness and doubts among some of their most faithful supporters. There are those who would view with concern any drift by BFBS into a broader and inevitably controversial juxtaposition with other Christian literature agencies which are not above controversy and which certainly do not command anything like the wide support of BFBS. There is a danger of drifting along with ecumenical literature fashions, and it is at least an open question whether BFBS participation in the *Feed the Minds* Campaign was prudent from this angle.

Second, there is a theological issue involved in annotated Bibles, and there is no escaping it. As we have said, no one doubts the integrity of BFBS, but anyone contemplating so far reaching a step as a change in constitution must think not just of the immediate intentions of those involved at the moment, but possible developments at a much later

date. The history of annotated Bibles is not a happy one. The Reformers and the Romans used marginal notes for theological polemics. Some of the much more sober chapter headings of the AV are now plainly misleading. More recently such annotated versions as the Scofield reference Bible have imposed particular views on the Bible. We are not suggesting BFBS will follow any of these examples; they are plainly anxious not to do so, but the question presses, Does not any annotation, once it goes beyond textual variants and indisputable facts, involve *inevitably* valued judgment and theological interpretation? To command general confidence BFBS must give a completely convincing theological answer to that question. It is not enough to say that the notes in question must be acceptable to the committee involved. That is to evade the question.

Third, and this was our main reason for altering our normal *Churchman* make-up to include Mr. Cranfield's article, there is a danger that the change will be made without the vast majority of BFBS supporters knowing exactly what the issues really are. BFBS have absolutely nothing to fear if they make their case out convincingly, for the goodwill of the Christian public towards them is evident on all sides. But they must make that case out, and answer the sort of doubts that Mr. Cranfield raises. The problems are in the realm of theology, not public relations exercises.

G.E.D.

[Since the above editorial and Mr. Cranfield's article were written, the Privy Council have sanctioned the change in BFBS's constitution. The theological principles are not affected though certain practical suggestions are now inappropriate. In the March number of their broadsheet BFBS stated that the change was in response to requests from overseas and from missionaries. However in June an official Vatican Press release contained comment from a very different angle on the desirability of annotated Bibles produced together by Roman Catholics and Protestants. The relationship between these two statements has caused some considerable concern, and ought to be clarified. The editor, who has been subject to a considerable correspondence on this matter, wants to make quite clear that nothing printed in this number is in any way intended as an attack on BFBS, but rather as an attempt to discuss a matter of theological importance. Equally the editor wants to make clear that he entirely repudiates the attempts of certain individual members of some BFBS committees to suppress discussion of the issues involved.]