

The Lambeth Conference, 1958*

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THE report of the Lambeth Conference is now before us, and it is apparent that it is quite impossible to summarize it, or even to pick out "highlights" which would do justice to its great diversity; especially for those who passed through its life of worship, fellowship, discussion and decision. The "Report" is a record of the facts studied, the problems faced, the insights obtained, and the decisions made; but it gives no idea of the Conference itself; and possibly an article like this may serve a useful purpose by saying something about the nature of the Conference.

The holding of periodical conferences by bishops of the whole Anglican Communion was suggested in 1861 by the Ecclesiastical Province of Canada, at the first meeting of its Synod. It has served, since that day, to gather together, at intervals, the increasing number of Anglican bishops from various parts of the world, in Lambeth Palace, as guests of the Archbishop of Canterbury, to meet together and to pray together, and to face common problems. It is primarily a family reunion. It is not like a conference of scholars or specialists from whom some novel or sensational message may be expected to issue. The members are diocesan bishops, accustomed to the administrative and pastoral responsibility, which they exercise in fellowship with their clergy and designated laity; they are at once the holders of the episcopal commission, and the representatives of the people whom they serve. They exercise a paternal ministry within a conciliar church order. They have presided over their own synods or conventions. What is common to this body of men is a massive sense of responsibility. Their resolutions are not in the nature of laws or directives for the component churches; they have no legislative force; they are simply an expression of some opinions on which the Conference is largely in agreement; their expressions of opinion are likely to be marked by realism and broad commonsense and (one hopes) a Christian faith and understanding. We place them before our people for their study and consideration.

For the Conference is primarily concerned with the needs and progress of the churches which make up the Anglican Communion; but it thinks of itself as set in the midst of the modern world, and it stretches out its sympathies to include the study of "Conflicts between and within Nations," and the "Family in Contemporary Society." It also thinks of itself as part of the universal church of Christ, and devotes time and space to the subject of "Church Unity and the Church Universal." This aspect of its life was illuminated and strengthened by the presence on the first days of representa-

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tives from various churches who gave friendly greetings; from the Scandinavian Churches, the German Evangelical Church, the Church of Scotland, the Free Churches in England, the Old Catholics, the Orthodox Church (including the Oecumenical Patriarch, the Church of Russia, the Church of Rumania, the Church of Bulgaria, and the Russian Orthodox Church in London) and the Armenian Church. These visitors were also with us for the opening services, the great service in Canterbury Cathedral at which the Archbishop addressed us from the chair of St. Augustine, and the service of Holy Communion at St. Paul's Cathedral, London, at which all the bishops received communion together, and we heard a sermon from Bishop Mukerjee of Calcutta, the Metropolitan of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon.

The sessions took place in the great hall of Lambeth Palace with the Archbishop of Canterbury in the Chair, and we all learned to love and respect him for his personal interest in every member of the Conference, and for the masterly and sympathetic manner in which he presided and managed the business of the Conference. Among the visiting bishops, Henry Sherrill, the Presiding Bishop of our Church in the U.S.A., had an equal place of honour in our midst. But who could list the eminent names in such an assembly? Names like G. K. A. Bell, Michael Yashiro, Angus Dun, and Lakdasa de Mel, come to our minds, but the list could be extended indefinitely.

While we were not a meeting of scholars and intellectuals, that does not mean that we had no scholars or intellectuals to guide us; and the subject given to the first committee was a theological one, "The Bible, its Authority and Message," its Chairman being the Archbishop of York, Michael Ramsay. This Report will probably interest the readers of the *Canadian Journal of Theology*; but it might be well to explain that none of the Reports receive the imprimatur of the Conference; they are received as the work of the Committee, and printed in the Report for study.

This Report begins by contrasting the world in which the Bible appeared, and the language in which it is written, with the modern world and the language of a scientific age; it asserts, however, that the Bible has a message for the modern world. It then proceeds to place the Bible in its relation to the church, within which its canon took form; it concludes that this process of canonization was part of the development of the primitive church itself, along with the development of the creeds and the apostolic ministry; it is a part of the same historic tradition. This historic view does not place the church "over" the Bible, however, but "under" it, in the sense that the process of canonization did not confer authority on the books, but recognized that they possessed authority. Then follows an examination of the work of modern criticism the value of which is gratefully acknowledged; it refers to what might be called the older school of "evolutionary liberalism," and then to the more positive modern movement known as "biblical theology;" after

which it takes up the difficult subjects of the Bible as the Word of God, the truth of God in the Bible and the inspiration of the revelation which it contains; these paragraphs should be carefully studied by those who are interested.

The next section relates the Bible to what might be described as its own inner historical background; it presents the drama of God's revelation of himself in Israel and in the church through the ages; after which it relates that Biblical record to the formulation of doctrine in the church. "The creeds summarize it; the church expounds it; but it is from the Bible that every right exposition of it derives." The final section is called "The Church Living by the Bible," and relates it to the present situation. It deals with the position of the Bible in the worship of the church, where it has always held a dominant position in Anglicanism; and it pays a tribute to the "liturgical movement." From that point it proceeds to the thought of the reading of the Bible as a "means of grace" in the life of the individual and the family, and in groups who read it together sharing their understanding of its message. It then considers the task of confronting the world with the Bible message of the righteous God, and with the teaching and person of Jesus Christ, laying considerable stress on the moral law, the moral teaching of Christ, and the personal knowledge of Christ through the Holy Spirit. A final section deals with the presentation of the Biblical message today. This ranges from the power of a full witness to the whole Biblical faith in preaching and in liturgy, to the power of a church in the community, living its life in this world in accordance with the full Biblical faith; it concludes by recommending various ways in which the Biblical faith can be translated into terms which will make it easier for the modern world to understand it.

If this summary is inadequate, how much more will be an attempt to deal, even more briefly, with the remaining subjects. The second Report, on "Church Unity and the Church Universal," surveys a large field. Its Chairman was the Bishop of Chelmsford, Allison. It repeats and interprets the Anglican approach to the subject, in connection with which it takes up the somewhat technical point of degrees of intercommunion. It suggests that in the case of churches in which no impediment exists, the term "full communion" should be used, rather than "full intercommunion," the word "intercommunion" being reserved for those cases in which there are limitations. It also envisages the idea of a conference for episcopal churches with which there is "full communion" or "intercommunion," which should be a very fruitful development. It then takes the question of the Church of South India, with which there has been progress in the matter of "intercommunion" in the case of several provinces of the Anglican Communion. There is a very full study of the plans for church union in North India and Pakistan, and in Ceylon; in the latter case it looks as if there would be "full communion" from the beginning; in the former, there are a number of uncertainties in which connection suggestions are made. I think we may say

that we were hopeful about this plan, and it was a great pleasure and privilege to listen to our Indian bishops on the subject; we pray that God's blessing may rest upon all who are working towards these ends. There are also sections on the conversations with the Presbyterians in Scotland, and the Methodists in the U.S.A., and with certain approaches in West Africa and in the Jerusalem Archbishopric.

The Report then surveys our relations with the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, the other Eastern Churches, the Old Catholic Churches, the Lutheran Churches, the Reformed Churches, the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church, the Lusitanian Church, and the Philippine Church, concluding with a section on the Ecumenical Movement and the World Council of Churches. It will be seen that this Report will be a valuable one for reference.

The Third Report is on "Progress in the Anglican Communion." The Committee was divided into three, the first of which dealt with Missionary Appeal and Strategy (Chairman the Bishop of Connecticut, Gray); its report is mostly concerned with interrelations and coordination within the Communion throughout the world. The second dealt with the Book of Common Prayer (Chairman the Archbishop of Dublin, Simms). The Prayer Book is in the process of revision in many parts of the world (including Canada). It is obviously advisable that there should be some coordination on this subject, and the committee addressed itself to this subject, and attempted to analyze the position and authority of the Prayer Book as a standard of doctrine and worship, and a bond of unity. The Report deals with a number of features of the liturgy in their relation to the Anglican tradition, and in the light of modern liturgical knowledge; it ends with a consideration of the proposals made in many places (including Canada) to enrich the calendar by extending the number of commemorations and continuing them down to modern times.

A third section in this report (Chairman the Bishop of Bath and Wells, Bradford) deals with "Ministries and Manpower" in view of the shortage of clergy and the new kinds of needs in the world today. It faces such questions as the place of the deacon in the Anglican ministry, and the ordination of men who do not give their whole time to the church's work.

The Fourth Report on "Conflicts between and within Nations" was under the Chairmanship of the Archbishop of Capetown (deBlank), and deals fully with the case of conflict between two races living side by side, and also the problem of war and its causes. In this connection, it takes up the question of nuclear weapons, and confesses to a division of opinion on the question whether their use is "morally indefensible;" it falls back on the phrase "repugnant to the Christian conscience;" it urges that their manufacture should be abolished. The Report also points out that conflict between nations is often due to great differences in standards of wealth and living; and this can only be remedied by a greater degree of sharing.

The fifth and last Report (Chairman the Bishop of Olympia, Bayne) deals with the "Family in Contemporary Society." It begins by putting forward a Biblical theology of marriage, according to which it is indeed ordained for the procreation of children, but that is not its sole purpose; while this is, as it were, the sacrament of the union, the union itself has two other purposes, the right relation between husband and wife, and the creation of a home as a stable environment in which the highest human values can be realized. This union is, by God's ordinance, life-long.

The Report goes on to consider the question of family-planning, in which it is legitimate to include such measures of control as may be agreed by husband and wife in Christian conscience. This is followed by discussions on the family in the modern world from many points of view, ranging from Central Africa at one end of the scale to the highly industrialized community at the other. It deals with a number of problems which may affect the family, and builds up a picture of a Christian home which lives according to the faith and teaching of Christ and his church.

At the beginning of the Report is a list of 311 Bishops attending; an "Encyclical Letter to the Faithful in Jesus Christ," which picks out some of the main points of the Reports and Resolutions; and a "Message" which was to be read in Anglican Churches throughout the world in October.

Our Conference concluded with a service of Holy Communion in Westminster Abbey, at which we gave thanks for our fellowship in the Lord, and prayed for his blessing on our labours. The sermon was preached by Bishop Sherrill, Presiding Bishop in the U.S.A., who told us to remember that our work was personal and pastoral, and that what we had to do was to preach the gospel and look after the people committed to our care. We then said good-bye to one another in the cloisters of the Abbey. What no one can express or describe is the feeling we had for the friends we had made from all parts of the world, and the quiet confidence which possessed every heart that the Lord was with us.