

Lambeth: Historical Reflections

R. P. C. Hanson: "The Nature of the Anglican Episcopate," in *Lambeth Essays on Ministry*, edited by the Archbishop of Canterbury (London: SPCK, 1969)

"The justification for episcopacy as it is preserved within the Anglican Communion is, and always has been, perfectly clear, though it is not perhaps one that would satisfy the doctrinaire mind." (79)

"In fact, the Anglican episcopacy appears to have Ignatian and Cyprianic elements in its nature but not to be an exact reproduction of the model of episcopacy given by either of these two Fathers. The Ignatian traits are visible in the very strong moral, rather than legal, appeal which the Anglican bishop has always made to the loyalty of his flock, and in the emphasis upon the personal relationship which exists between the bishop and his clergy. The Cyprianic features are the concept that all bishops hold a common responsibility (*in solidum* is Cyprian's phrase) for the whole Church, manifested in the tendency of the bishops of an Anglican province to meet for common counsel, and in the meetings of the Lambeth Conference. Another is the very Cyprianic reluctance visible in the Anglican Communion of one bishop to overrule or another to interfere with his diocese. The Lambeth Conference, after all, does not legislate." (81–82)

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The Lambeth Conferences (1867–1948) (London: SPCK, 1948)

"After [worship] brotherly consultations will follow. In these we may consider together many practical questions, the settlement of which would tend to the advancement of the Kingdom of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, and to the maintenance of greater union in our missionary work, and to increased intercommunion among ourselves."

"Should you be unable to attend, and desire to commission any brother Bishop to speak for you, I shall welcome him as your representative in our united deliberations."

(from the letter of invitation to the first Lambeth Conference by Archbishop Longley, 22 February 1867)

"There were a number of Bishops who felt that such a meeting would make the then confused state of the Church "worse confounded" and therefore did not attend its deliberations." (9)

"It has never been contemplated that we should assume the functions of a general synod of all the Churches in full communion with the Church of England, and take upon ourselves to enact canons that should be binding upon those here represented. We merely propose to discuss matters of practical interest, and pronounce what we deem expedient in resolutions which may serve as safe guides to future action." (24 September 1867)

“There is no intention whatever on the part of anybody to gather together the Bishops of the Anglican Church for the sake of defining any matter of doctrine. Our doctrines are contained in our formularies, and our formularies are interpreted by the proper judicial authorities, and there is no intention whatever at any such gathering that questions of doctrine should be submitted for interpretation in any future Lambeth Conference any more than they were at the previous Lambeth Conference ... with regard to discipline, of course our discipline is exercised by ourselves and by the constituted courts of the Church at home, and the discipline of the various Colonial and more independent Churches is exercised by these Churches according to fixed rules which have been established by themselves, and we have no intention whatever of interfering with these matters of discipline. ...I think it would be a work of love in which we should be engaged—the extension of Christ’s kingdom—and that we may be able by friendly intercourse to strengthen each other’s hands.” (Archbishop Tait, 16 April 1875)

“The Convocation of the Province of York, which had held aloof in 1867, this time concurred, and a formal letter was issued by Archbishop Tait intimating his readiness to hold a Conference in 1878.” (10)

“The task assigned [Augustine of Canterbury] has surely fulfilled itself in the mainfoldness of his Church, the embracingness, the comprehensiveness, and the integrity of her spirit—the versatility with which she enters into the life of new nations, the readiness with which she receives them to herself, the simplicity of the unvarying rule of her faith, yet the steadfastness of the claims she makes for other Churches, as well as for herself, that they may have liberty in things doubtful or indifferent.” (Archbishop Benson, 28 July 1888)

“At this Conference carefully worded resolutions took the place of motions for the actual adoption of the several reports, which had previously been the practice. It was also agreed that the when desired the numbers voting for and against any resolutions or amendments which were lost were not made public, while resolutions or amendments which were lost were not made public at all.” (10)

“The fourth Lambeth Conference was ...summoned for 1897 as it marked the thirteenth centenary of the landing of St. Augustine in England.” (11)

“We realize that the links which bind us to that historic past are not fetters upon the free and enterprising spirit which is essential to progress. We belong to a Church which, in the words of one of our number who has entered into rest, is the Church of free men, educating them into a knowledge of the liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free.” (Encyclical Letter of the Fifth Conference, 1908)

The Agenda of the First Five Lambeth Conferences:

1867

1. Intercommunion between the Churches of the Anglican Communion.
2. The Colonial Churches.
3. Co-operation in Missionary action.

1878

1. The best mode of maintaining union among the various Churches of the Anglican Communion.
2. Voluntary Boards of Arbitration for Churches to which such an arrangement may be applicable.
3. The relation to each other of Missionary Bishops and of Missionaries in various Branches of the Anglican Communion, acting in the same country.
4. The position of Anglican Chaplains and Chaplaincies on the Continent of Europe and elsewhere.

1888

1. The Church's practical work in relation to: (a) Intemperance; (b) Purity; (c) Care of Emigrants; (d) Socialism.
2. Definite teaching of the Faith to various classes and the means thereto.
3. The Anglican Communion in relation to the Eastern Churches, to the Scandinavian and other Reformed Churches, to the Old Catholics and others.
4. (a) Polygamy of heathen converts; (b) Divorce.

1897

1. The organization of the Anglican Communion.
2. Religious Communities.
3. The Critical Study of Holy Scripture.
4. Foreign Missions.
5. Reformation Movements on the Continent of Europe and elsewhere.
6. Church unity in its relation: (a) To the Churches of the East; (b) To the Latin Communion; (c) To other Christian Bodies.
7. International Arbitration.
8. Industrial Problems.
9. The Book of Common Prayer: (a) Additional Services; (b) Local Adaptation.
10. The duties of the Church to the Colonies.
11. Degrees in Divinity.
12. To consider questions of difficulty which may be submitted to it by Bishops attending the Conference.

1908

1. The Faith and modern thought.
2. Supply and training of clergy.
3. Religious Education.
4. Foreign Missions.

5. The Book of Common Prayer.
6. Administration of Holy Communion.
7. Ministries of Healing.
8. Marriage Problems.
9. Moral Witness of the Church.
10. Organization in the Anglican Communion.
11. Reunion and Intercommunion.

“To a world that craves for fellowship we present our message. The secret of life is fellowship. So men feel, and it is true. But fellowship with God is the indispensable condition of human fellowship. The secret of life is the double fellowship, fellowship with God and with men. ... It is only by shewing the value and power of fellowship in itself that [the Church] can win the world to fellowship. The weakness of the Church in the world of today is not surprising when we consider how the bands of its own fellowship are loosened and broken. ... Thus our appeal is in idea and in method a new appeal. If it be prospered, it will change the spirit and direction of our efforts. Terms of reunion must no longer be judged by the success with which they meet the claims and preserve the positions of two or more uniting Communion, but by their correspondence to the common ideal of the Church as God would have it to be. Again, in the past negotiations for reunion have often started with the attempts to define the measure of uniformity which is essential. The impression has been given that nothing else matters. Now we see that those elements of truth about which differences have arisen are essential to the fullness of the witness of the whole Church. We have no need to belittle what is distinctive in our own interpretation of Christian life: we believe that it is something precious which we hold in trust for the common good. We desire that others should share in our heritage and our blessings, as we wish to share in theirs. It is not by reducing the different groups of Christians to uniformity, but by rightly using their diversity, that the Church can become all things to all men. So long as there is a vital connection with the Head, there is positive value in the differentiation of its members.” (Encyclical Letter of the Lambeth Conference of 1920)

“The Church must frankly acknowledge that it has under-valued and neglected the gifts of women and has too thanklessly used their work. We have thought well to give in a series of Resolutions what we think to be the general mind of our branch of the Catholic Church at this time about this subject. We feel bound to respect the customs of the Church, not as an iron law, but as results and records of the Spirit's guidance. In such customs there is much which obviously was dictated by reasonable regard to contemporary social conventions. As these differ from age to age and country to country, the use which the Church makes of the service of women will also differ. ... The arrangements which we have suggested are not applicable to all countries alike. Yet everywhere the attempt must be made to make room for the Spirit to work, according to the wisdom which He will give, so that the fellowship of the Ministry may be strengthened by the co-operation of women and the fellowship of the Church be enriched by their spiritual gifts.”

“The tendency to say ‘the old is good’ is particularly strong in the Church. Religious people are apt to feel the goodness of the old so much that they are slow to prove whether there are yet powers of God on which they have never drawn.”

“No community of Christians has a right to attempt to produce a replica of itself in a foreign country which it evangelizes. Neither forms of worship, nor methods of thought, nor social institutions belonging to one race ought to be imposed on another.”

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Lambeth Conference 1968: Preparatory Materials (London: SPCK, 1968)

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“We cannot suppose, indeed, that we have found a way to solve all difficulties in a moment. The vision [of reunion] must become clear to the general body of Christian men and women, and this will take time. We must direct our gaze upon it. We must help one another to see what steps lead towards its fulfillment, and what steps lead the other way.

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The First Lambeth Conference 1867 Alan M. G. Stephenson (London: SPCK, 1967)

Responses to the publication of the encyclical of the first Lambeth Conference:

The Daily Telegraph “It is what the epistle fails to contain, that is to say, the utter absence of any positive significance, any practical guidance, any intelligible religious help for the age, which makes the Episcopal circular so melancholy.” (1 October 1867)

The Christian Observer “Will it be credited in future times that Pan-Anglican Synod, as it proudly styles itself, net and parted without having ventured to make the slightest allusion to this canker worm now feeding on the bowels of the Church. All that it has done is to issue a conciliatory address; which, so far as it has meaning, means that both parties are to sheath their swords and live in peace.” (November 1867)

The Record “The secrecy attempted by the Pan-Anglican Conference might have been submitted to in the days of the Star Chambers, of secret inquisitorial tribunals, and of the

dark and irresponsible doings of such ecclesiastical despots as a Hildebrand and an Innocent IV..." (14 October 1867)

One evangelical bishop who attended the conference, the Rt. Rev. C. P. McIlvaine, said: "The feelings of the whole meeting, the bearing of all towards one another, the decidedly high tone of manners and spirit, were truly delightful. I could heartily unite in the last resolution of thanks to God for such a meeting, as all did. How little did I expect at one time to be able to do so." (cited on p. 301)

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Owen Chadwick, "The Lambeth Conference: An Historical Perspective," in Guy Lytle, ed., *Lambeth Conferences Past and Present (Anglican and Episcopal History 58.3, 1989)*

"Bishops are lovely Christian people as individuals and in their dioceses; put them together in a heap and you cannot tell what will happen." (261)

"It has from the first been a characteristic of the Lambeth Conference that the non-English bishops took the initiative." (260)

"It is a general rule of history, almost, though not quite, universal, that councils are not summoned unless there is among the agenda danger of schism or heresy and on such a subject, most vital of all to the churches, there needs to be a true meeting of minds with prayer. ... There is never any time anywhere, in all churches of any size, where there is not likely to be something like heresy and schism and therefore there needs, in any age or almost any age, to be discussion by Christian leaders about what it is right to do." (262)

"Those issues do not matter to us now. But they mattered very much then; for the peace of the churches, the absence of schism, rested on some wise answer which yet did not sacrifice principle and therefore would be acceptable." (265)

"If there is not any tension it means the thing must be trivial or could be settled, as Michael Ramsey once said, by sending each other picture postcards." (265)

"The Lambeth Conference of 1930 ruled out such an appellate tribunal, when it was proposed, as unAnglican." (269)

"Some conferences have been criticized for unreality. They passed resolutions which were impracticable from the start. For example, a conference of 1906 passed a resolution that all persons to be ordained by bishops should be graduates of a university; and they assumed that this was possible because of the coming vast extension of university education." (270)

Archbishop Clark of Rupertsland said in 1968, "A Lambeth Conference has given the impression of men who, having nothing to say, still felt that they had to say something." (270)