

LAMBETH AND THE PAPACY

ONE of the totally new features at the Lambeth Conference of 1968 was, of course, the presence of observers from other Churches. Furthermore, whereas the subject of Christian unity has concerned every Lambeth meeting since 1867, and the developing relationships between the Anglican Communion on the one side, and the Orthodox and Old Catholic Churches and the various Protestant confessions on the other, have been frequently reviewed, 1968 was the first occasion on which a positive and friendly meeting with the Roman Catholic Church at the official level could be envisaged and discussed. We are so used to the new developments which have become possible since Vatican II, that it is only when one places them in the perspective of a hundred years that one sees quite how startling they are.

We shall not here be concerned to comment on the section of the Report concerned specifically with 'Relations with the Roman Catholic Church'.¹ This for the most part takes up and endorses the main proposals of the Report following the meetings of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission at Gazzada, Huntercombe and Malta. Rather we are interested in an attempt to see what influence the new atmosphere of confidence existing between Anglicans and Roman Catholics has had on the Anglican approach to unity as a whole, and in particular to see what the bishops were able to say in the section of the report headed 'Episcopacy, Collegiality, Papacy'.

The first thing to notice is that the new situation of openness towards Rome has not had the effect of harming or impeding the development of Anglican relationships with other Christian bodies with which there is a longer history of friendly contact. The resolutions passed on the subject of intercommunion, for instance, show a distinctly more liberal attitude to this question than that of previous Lambeth Conferences, and although the possibilities of sacramental intercommunion with Roman Catholics and Orthodox were clearly in the minds of the bishops, it is in Anglican relationships with non-episcopal Churches that the effects of these resolutions will be most immediately felt. Similarly in the section 'Principles of the Anglican Quest for Union' there is a paragraph on

1. *The Lambeth Conference 1968: Resolutions and Reports* (S.P.C.K., 1968), pp. 134-6. Also see documentary section below.

the ministry which shows, in an interesting way, greater readiness to acknowledge the positive value both of non-episcopal ministries and of the papacy than has been common in the past: 'We have known the grace which God gives through a threefold ministry in which bishops are called to exercise pastoral care and safeguard historic continuity and authority within the Church. We offer this experience in fellowship with those who have experienced the grace of the continuity of apostolic doctrine through the service of other forms of ministry, and with those who have experienced God's grace through papal authority in the episcopal college, in the faith that God will restore the fullness of ministry in ways which we cannot yet discern' (p. 124).

When we come to the section devoted directly to 'Episcopacy and Collegiality' (pp. 137-8) we find throughout a desire to correct the sometimes one-sided emphasis in Anglican thinking on the episcopate as representing the historic continuity of the Church in time, and of the rather mechanical views of the nature of apostolic succession which have sometimes gone with it: 'The Anglican tradition has always regarded episcopacy as an essential part of its Catholic inheritance. We would regard it as an extension of the apostolic office and function both in time and space, and, moreover, we regard the transmission of apostolic power and responsibility as an activity of the college of bishops and never as a result of isolated action by an individual bishop.' It would be possible to see in the last sentence a criticism of some views of the papacy acting in isolation from the episcopal college, but it seems more probable that it was intended to refer to the kind of views which have led to the extravagances of the *episcopi vagantes*. What is quite clear is the desire to underline the function of the episcopate as the sign of the Church's present unity in space.

This thought is developed further in the paragraphs on collegiality. In general it would be fair to say that the Anglican Churches have during the past hundred years had a growing experience of collegiality without having a very articulate theory of it. Now under the impact of Vatican II, the bishops have sought to make a first attempt at a statement on the subject: 'The principle underlying *collegiality* is that the apostolic calling, responsibility and authority are an inheritance given to the whole body or college of bishops. Every individual bishop has therefore a responsibility both as a member of this college and as chief pastor in his own diocese. In the latter capacity he exercises direct oversight

over the people committed to his charge. In the former he shares with his brother bishops throughout the world a concern for the well-being of the whole Church.' It would be interesting to compare this statement with the corresponding passages in *Lumen Gentium*.

The report goes on at once to speak of the nature of primacy within the college, as it is known within the Anglican Communion, not in relation to the position held by a metropolitan or presiding bishop within his particular church province, a matter which is well defined in Anglican practice and canon law, but in the more general sense of the primacy which exists within the whole college of bishops: 'Within the college of bishops it is evident that there must be a president. In the Anglican Communion this position is at present held by the occupant of the historic see of Canterbury, who enjoys a primacy of honour, not of jurisdiction. This primacy is found to involve, in a particular way, that care for all the Churches which is shared by all the bishops.'

This carefully balanced statement represents one of the first attempts made in the Anglican Communion to define the primacy of the see of Canterbury. On the one side no Anglican would suggest that this position is held by divine right. On the other some might suppose that it was held by divine providence. While again no-one would speak of a primacy of jurisdiction, there was a feeling among the bishops that the traditional term 'primacy of honour' was hardly sufficient to describe a position which is found to involve service and responsibility. Evidently new formulations need to be worked out. What is clear, from the Anglican point of view, is that the primate is not placed above his fellow bishops, but holds a position which demands that he accept, *in a particular way*, the solicitude for all the Churches which is shared by all of them.

The fact that Canterbury is said to occupy this position 'at present' indicates that the situation is not seen as static. Possible changes are glanced at in the subsequent paragraph: 'The renewed sense of the collegiality of the episcopate is especially important at a time when most schemes for unity are being developed at a national level, because the collegiality of the episcopate helps to stress the world-wide and universal character of the Church. This collegiality must be a guiding principle in the growth of the relationships between the provinces of the Anglican Communion and those Churches with which we are, or shall be, in full communion.'

Within this larger College of Bishops, the primacy would take on a new character which would need to be worked out in consultation with the Churches involved.'

In the development of united Episcopal Churches in South India, North India and Ceylon, and in various parts of Africa, the Anglican Communion as at present constituted will disappear in many parts of the world. Anglicans are very reluctant to engage in anything which would seem like ecclesiastical imperialism, by simply trying to absorb these newly united Churches into the existing Anglican structure. But on the other hand they would be untrue to what they believe about the nature of episcopacy if they allowed such Churches to fall into a nationalist isolation. What the principle of collegiality implies here, needs to be further worked out in practice. As things are at present it was a strange anomaly that the Old Catholic bishops should have been present at Lambeth as observers rather than as full participants. It may be that Canterbury still has a role to play in a larger association of Churches, and it is interesting to note that the Report speaks in the section on 'The Role of the Anglican Communion' of its belief 'that the concept of "communion with the see of Canterbury" affords a sacramental link of positive value' (p. 142).

But evidently our thoughts about unity must go further than this, and the next paragraph brings us to a consideration of the position of the see of Rome: 'As a result of the emphasis placed on collegiality at the Second Vatican Council, the status of Bishops in the Roman Catholic Church was in great measure enhanced, though the teaching of the First Vatican Council on the infallibility and immediate and universal jurisdiction of the Pope was unaffected. We are unable to accept this teaching as it is commonly understood today. The relationships between the Pope and the episcopal college, of which he is a member, are, however, still being clarified, and are subject to development. We recall the statement made in the Lambeth Conference of 1908, and repeated in 1920 and 1930, "that there can be no fulfilment of the Divine purpose in any scheme of reunion which does not ultimately include the great Latin Church of the West, with which our history has been so closely associated in the past, and to which we are still bound by many ties of common faith and tradition". We recognize the Papacy as a historic reality whose developing role requires deep reflection and joint study by all concerned for the unity of the whole Body of Christ.'

This is, so far as I know, the first statement to be made about the papacy by a Lambeth Conference since the extremely negative reactions to the definitions of Vatican I of the Conference of 1878. It was not easy for the bishops to know exactly what they could say on this subject. In the first series of plenary sessions in the second week of the Conference a more positive statement on the subject was put forward, which received a certain publicity in the press. It said among other things: 'Within the whole college of bishops and in ecumenical councils it is evident that there must be a president whose office involves a personal concern for the affairs of the whole Church. This president might most fittingly be the occupant of the historic see of Rome. Although as we understand them at present we are unable to accept the claims of the Papacy to infallibility and immediate and universal jurisdiction, we believe that a considerable majority of Anglicans would be prepared to accept the Pope as having a primacy of love, implying both honour and service, in a renewed and re-united Church.' It is important to record that this statement, like its successor, was prepared with the active participation of both Catholic and Orthodox observers. The phrase 'primacy of love' with its echo of St Ignatius of Antioch, originated in fact in the suggestion of one of the Orthodox observers made in a section meeting, while the present Metropolitan of Carthage in plenary session, in a memorable intervention, recalled to the bishops the teaching of his predecessor St Cyprian.

This draft did not get beyond the first round of plenary sessions. No vote was taken on it, but it was clear that it encountered serious opposition. This came as much, if not perhaps more, from psychological and pastoral considerations than from theological. It is interesting to speculate whether the result would have been different if the publication of the Pope's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* on the opening day of the Conference had not come to cast a slight shadow over the proceedings. It is possible, though I think not more than possible, that it might have been different, but the fact has to be faced that in certain parts of the world, such as Northern Ireland or South America, any Anglican statement about the papacy could easily be misinterpreted or used for polemical purposes. Many of the bishops felt that it was a matter on which they had not had time sufficiently to reflect. It is not one very extensively treated in Anglican theology. The Archbishop of Canterbury in suggesting that the matter be referred back to the sub-committee which was charged with this subject, remarked that the

majority of Anglicans had probably never considered the question seriously at all.

The paragraph which was eventually accepted by the Conference, even if at first sight it seems disappointing, is noteworthy in a number of ways. First it recognizes clearly that the questions of primacy and collegiality are common to the two Churches. Then, though it rejects the teaching of Vatican I, it does so in terms which leave the door wide open to future discussion, by speaking of this teaching 'as it is commonly understood today'. One only has to recall that in most parts of the English-speaking world the decrees of Vatican I have received a distinctly maximalizing interpretation to see the possibilities of discussion left open here. It recognizes that in practice the relationships between pope and bishops are changing, and that the interpretation of the teaching of 1870 is still liable to development. The bishops at Lambeth recalled with a certain pride the statement of their predecessors of 1908, not wishing to suggest that this was all there was to be said on the subject, but rather to imply that if in those circumstances it had been possible to speak of the necessary place of the Roman Catholic Church in the whole movement towards Christian unity, so now it was necessary for all concerned in the question to give new and more serious attention to the place of the papacy within the re-integrated Christian family. The words 'developing role' were carefully chosen in preference to more static terms such as 'claims' or 'status of the Papacy'. They may perhaps suggest a reflection on the experience of recent years, in which two things have seemed to become evident to many who are not Roman Catholics: first that the papacy has potentially a most positive and irreplaceable role as a centre of reconciliation and unity within the whole Christian family, and secondly that its moral authority increases almost in direct proportion as it exercises restraint in the direct employment of its powers of government and jurisdiction.

The rediscovery both of the idea and of the practice of collegiality within the Roman Catholic Church has made it possible for the bishops of the Anglican Communion to approach the 'historic reality' of the papacy in a wholly new way. It is certainly the conviction of many of them, as it has been of many Anglican theologians since the beginning of the seventeenth century, that Rome is at least by divine permission, if not by divine right, indicated as the centre of unity within the Christian family, and that in a re-united Church it should enjoy a primacy whose nature and

implications would need to be discovered by joint prayer and study. An Anglican would think that such a primacy could not involve less, and might reasonably be expected to involve considerably more, than the primacy at present enjoyed by Canterbury within the Churches of the Anglican Communion.

The section on 'Episcopacy, Collegiality and Papacy' ends with a sentence which recalls that 'the collegiality of the episcopate must always be seen in the context of the conciliar character of the Church'. It is this final note which places the whole discussion in the one context in which it can fruitfully be carried on, not only as between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, but between all Christians who are concerned for the *sobornost*, the *togetherness* of the Church.

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Our Task

People should be able to see the Gospel of Christ expressed in the life of the Church. They should be able to see in the Church an inclusive fellowship and a freedom of association in the Christian brotherhood. They should be able to see the power of God at work in the Church changing hostility into love of the brethren. We are indeed thankful for these signs of God's grace where they are to be seen in the life of the Church but, even in the life of the Church, there is conformity to the practices of racial separation; and the measure of this conformity is the measure of the Church's deviation from the purpose of Christ.

Our task is to work for the expression of God's reconciliation here and now. We are not required to wait for a distant 'heaven' where all problems will have been solved. What Christ has done, he has done already. We can accept his work or reject it: we can hide from it or seek to live by it. But we cannot postpone it, it is already achieved. And we cannot destroy it, for it is the work of the eternal God.

—From the *Message to the People of South Africa* published on 22 September 1968 by the South African Council of Churches on which the Roman Catholic Church is an observer. The Message was prepared by the Council's Theological Commission, and its next commitment is to develop in greater detail the significance of this paragraph, 'Our Task', working out the practical implications for both Church and Society.