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978-1-107-45882-6 - Simeon and Church Order: A Study of the Origins of the Evangelical
Revival in Cambridge in the Eighteenth Century: The Birkbeck Lectures for 1937–8

Charles Smyth

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SIMEON & CHURCH ORDER

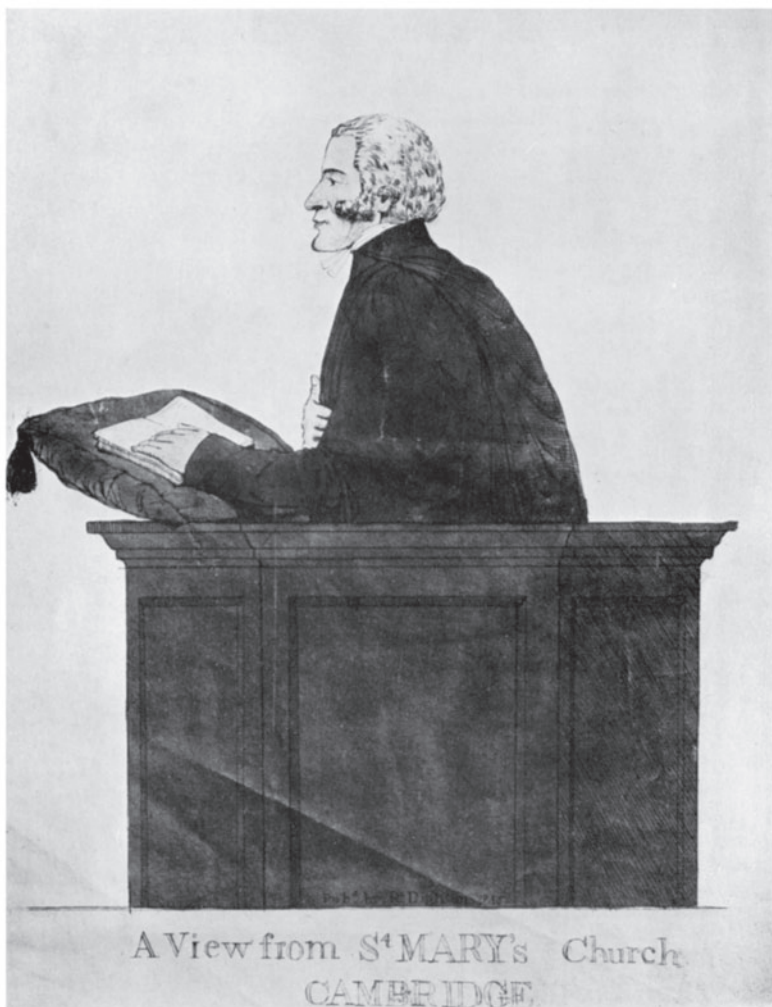
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**THE REVEREND CHARLES SIMEON PREACHING BEFORE
THE UNIVERSITY**

From a coloured print by R. Dighton at Eton College

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SIMEON & CHURCH ORDER

*A Study of the Origins of the Evangelical Revival
in Cambridge in the Eighteenth century*

THE BIRKBECK LECTURES FOR 1937–8

BY

CHARLES SMYTH

*Fellow and Dean of Chapel, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge
Honorary Canon of Derby*

His ideas were far more catholic than is usually taken for granted; and the influence which he had, and which his opinions are probably still exercising, on the Christian world was more extensive and salutary than is generally supposed.

*Recollections of the Conversation Parties
of the Rev. Charles Simeon, M.A.
Abner William Brown (1863), p. ix.*

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UXORI DILECTISSIMÆ
CUIUS SINE AUXILIO
OPUS VIX PERFECTUM ESSET

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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

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It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107458826

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First published 1940

First paperback edition 2014

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-45882-6 Paperback

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IN November 1936, I was invited by the Editor of the *Church Times* to contribute a full-page article on Charles Simeon to mark the centenary of his death. In some degree, this book has grown out of that article.¹ But the invitation, as coming from the Editor of a distinctively Anglo-Catholic religious periodical, was also suggestive and significant in itself. I suppose that never within my life-time have the traditional party divisions in the Church of England been less harmful or more beneficial than in the years immediately preceding the present War. It is true that to Simeon himself the existence of ecclesiastical parties appeared regrettable; ‘nor’, he declared, in the Preface to his *magnum opus*, the *Horae Homileticae* (standard ed., 21 vols. 1832–3), ‘would any thing under heaven be more grateful to him than to see names and parties buried in eternal oblivion, and primitive simplicity restored to the Church.’² Yet such a statement reveals a startling misconception of the history of the Primitive Church. For, as Disraeli once pointed out, ‘Parties in the Church have always existed. They existed in the Church at Jerusalem. They existed in the Church at Ephesus. They existed always in the Church at Rome. And it would be most wonderful indeed if in a country like England, where party has always been recognized as the most efficient and satisfactory means of conducting public affairs, party should not be found in the Church alone. My Lord, what is Party? Party is organized opinion. And so long as the nature of man is of that various and varying character which we all know it is, so long will there be various and varying modes by which it will express itself, or by which it may be counselled, upon religious matters.’³ Harmony—harmony, even at the risk

¹ ‘Charles Simeon: 1759–1836.’ *Church Times*, Nov. 13, 1936 (vol. cxvi, pp. 567–8).

² *Horae Homileticae*, vol. i (1832), Preface, p. xxin.

³ Speech on ‘Church Policy’ at a meeting in aid of the Oxford Diocesan Society for the Augmentation of Small Benefices, held at Oxford, Nov. 25, 1864, the Bishop [Samuel Wilberforce] of Oxford presiding. *Vide* ‘*Church and Queen*’: *Five Speeches delivered by the Rt. Hon. B. Disraeli, M.P.*, 1860–4, edited, with a preface, by a Member of the University of Oxford (1865), pp. 68–9.

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of intermittent and momentary discords, since that risk is inevitable where any measure of speculative independence is to be conceded in the pursuit of truth—but harmony, and not unison, is the distinctive character of the piety of the English Church. ‘Englishmen have always preferred the recognition of all the facts of any case, however irreconcilable they may seem, to the sacrifices which a perfect logical system invariably demands, before it can square to its required limits the complex variety of human nature and human life.’¹ Of this attitude in theology, Charles Simeon was himself a notable exemplar.

The Author is no friend to systematizers in Theology. . . . He has no doubt but that there is a system in the Holy Scriptures (for truth cannot be inconsistent with itself); but he is persuaded that neither Calvinists nor Arminians are in *exclusive* possession of that system. He is disposed to think that the Scripture system, be it what it may, is of a broader and more comprehensive character than some very exact and dogmatical Theologians are inclined to allow: and that, as wheels in a complicated machine may move in opposite directions and yet subserve one common end, so may truths *apparently opposite* be perfectly reconcilable with each other, and equally subserve the purposes of God in the accomplishment of man’s salvation. . . . He bitterly regrets that men will range themselves under human banners and leaders, and employ themselves in converting the Inspired Writers into friends and partisans of their peculiar principles. Into this fault he trusts that he has never fallen. One thing he knows, namely, that pious men, both of the Calvinistic and Arminian persuasion, approximate very nearly when they are upon their knees before God in prayer. . . . And what both these individuals are upon their knees, it is the wish of the Author to become in his writings. . . .²

Or, as he expressed himself more jocularly on the same subject in a private letter to a clerical acquaintance (9 July 1825): ‘The truth is *not in the middle*, and *not in one extreme*; but *in both extremes*. . . . So that if extremes please you, I am your man; only remember that it is not *one* extreme that we are to go to, but *both*

¹ *Masters in English Theology* (1877), Historical Preface by the editor, Canon Alfred Barry, D.D., p. xvi.

² *Horae Homileticae*, vol. i (1832), Preface, pp. xxiii–xxiv.

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extremes.’¹ Plainly, it would be hazardous to erect this particular observation into an universal rule. Yet they are as grievously in error who mistake for compromise what is really comprehension, as are those who use the principle of toleration as a license for broadmindedness.

It is indeed one of the historic glories of the Church of England that she is able to comprehend within her body divergent—yet not essentially conflicting—schools of thought, and that her formularies are tolerant, within certain necessary limits, of more than one variety of theological approach to sacred truth. Of course it is true that when schools of thought develop into Church Parties, and when any single Party claims that *it is* the Church of England and that its standards of belief and practice must be accepted as the norm from which no deviations are permissible, party divisions inevitably become embittered, and the life of the Church is disturbed, distorted and distressed by noisy internecine feuds. But that, for the time being, is past history. The real issue is no longer between the High Church, Low Church, Broad Church parties, between Anglo-Catholics, Evangelicals and Modernists. Fanaticism, indeed, in all its varying modes and phases—Communist,² Fundamentalist, Pacifist, Millenarian, and British Israelite, as well as Papalist or Protestant—is a perennial problem, but it is peripheral, and in any case it is a matter rather for the psychopathologist than for the ecclesiastical historian: admittedly there is an issue here, but it is not the real issue, and its significance is easily exaggerated. The real issue at the present time lies not between orthodoxy and fanaticism, nor does it lie between the three traditional

¹ W. Carus, *Memoirs of the Rev. Charles Simeon* (2nd ed. 1847), p. 600.

² ‘The Church of England has suffered much . . . from those “political” incumbents who seek a psychological compensation for their failure in pastoral love and duty towards the individual members of their flocks, in an embittered passion for Humanity at large’—and for the U.S.S.R. in particular (*The Priest as Student*, ed. H. S. Box, 1939, p. 274.)—It is indeed remarkable that those Anglican clergymen who talk most passionately about the ideals of universal brotherhood and ‘the Christian Revolution’ are generally those who show themselves conspicuously unable to get on with their colleagues or, what is much less pardonable, with their own parishioners. Their love for suffering humanity seems to stop short of the actual human beings they draw a salary to look after.

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parties, but between those in all three parties who are essentially Anglican in their loyalties, and those who are not.¹

It is for this reason that a historical study of the origins of the Evangelical Party and of its initial problems may be of service. For, as the Editor of *Theology* (the Rev. A. R. Vidler) has rightly pointed out, ‘what the Church is to-day can be understood only in the light of its history. It is notorious that foreigners find the Church of England an enigmatic institution. It is scarcely less enigmatic to Englishmen who try to make sense of it without regard to its history. Those outside the Church, if they know its history and feel its spell, often show a keener appreciation of its character and even a warmer attachment to it as an institution than some of its members who judge and despise it for its failure to conform to some upstart ecclesiastical fashion imported from another tradition, or improvised without any traditional reference at all’.² If certain of the Anglo-Catholic clergy err in the former sense, it is no less true that certain of the Evangelical clergy err quite as cheerfully in the latter. In either case, the pretext is usually that of ‘a higher loyalty’, whether, in the one case, to an entirely irrelevant authority (euphemistically described as ‘Catholic Tradition’), or, in the other, to their own peculiar insight into, or psychological sensitiveness regarding, the Mind of Christ. It is not of course intended to deny that such men frequently ‘do very good work’. But that is not the point. The real issue in our own day, as in Charles Simeon’s, is not con-

¹ It should be unnecessary to add that, for a loyal member of the Church of England, this presentation of the issue presupposes the position stated by the Archbishops and Bishops of the Anglican Communion at the Lambeth Conference of 1930:

‘... The time has come for us to make some explicit statement of the ideal before us and of the future to which we look forward.

‘Our ideal is nothing less than the Catholic Church in its entirety. Viewed in its widest relations, the Anglican Communion is seen as in some sense an incident in the history of the Church Universal. It has arisen out of the situation caused by the divisions of Christendom. It has indeed been clearly blessed of God, as we thankfully acknowledge; but in its present character we believe that it is transitional, and we forecast the day when the racial and historical connections which at present characterise it will be transcended, and the life of our Communion will be merged in a larger fellowship in the Catholic Church.’ *Lambeth Conference Report, 1930*, p. 153 (*The Anglican Communion: its Ideal and Future*).

² *Theology*, Jan. 1940 (vol. xl), Editorial, p. 2.

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cerned merely with 'good work', but with Church Order as the precondition of 'good work'. In the words of a great Evangelical bishop, Handley Moule, 'It was Simeon, more than even the greatest of his predecessors, who taught and exemplified the fact that the warmest Evangelical, without any real sacrifice of inter-denominational fraternity in Christ, can and should be watchfully loyal to the order and the organization of the English Church in the normal exercise of his energies'.¹ And, if Simeon's experience is any precedent, it may be premised that it is in the theological seminaries that the issue between Church Order and Enthusiasm must be decided.

In the period covered by these lectures, the two trends in contemporary Evangelicalism in the Church of England—the Anglican and the un-Anglican—have their representatives in Charles Simeon on the one hand, and John Berridge on the other: and this brief account of the respective ministries of those two good men may in some degree illuminate our present problems. Emphatically, it was not written for that purpose. But it may serve it.

The first four lectures represent an attempt to sketch the historic background of Simeon's ministry in the Church of England. Of these, the third (*Religion in the University*) may partially supply the place of what was intended to be the third volume of the late Canon Christopher Wordsworth's trilogy on University Life and Studies in England during the Eighteenth Century:² and here I have gratefully to acknowledge the kindness of the Rev. W. A. Wordsworth and Miss Wordsworth in allowing me to make use of their father's MS. notebooks (2) and also of the MS. Diary (October 1793–March 1801) of their great-grandfather, Dr Christopher Wordsworth, Master of Trinity from 1820 to 1841, very full extracts from which are printed in Canon Wordsworth's *Social Life at the English*

¹ H. C. G. Moule, *The Evangelical School in the Church of England: its men and its work in the nineteenth century* (1901), p. 12.

² *Social Life at the English Universities in the Eighteenth Century* (Le Bas Prize Essay), 1874; *Scholae Academicæ: some account of the Studies of the English Universities in the Eighteenth Century*, 1877: the concluding volume was to have dealt with 'The RELIGIOUS LIFE in its personal and social aspects' (*Social Life*, p. 4).

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Universities, App. G, pp. 584–98. (The Diary has since been presented to the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge.) I am also greatly indebted to my cousin, the Rev. Dr F. W. B. Bullock, late Vice-Principal of Ridley Hall, for allowing me to consult the MS. of his *History of Ridley Hall*, which is now in the press.

The two concluding lectures deal more directly with the two major problems by which Simeon found himself confronted: the problem of Continuity, and the problem of Church Order.

My thanks are due to the Master and Council of Trinity College, Cambridge, for the privilege of delivering the Birkbeck Lectures for 1937–8: and to all who have been kind enough to supply me with many useful details of information, among whom I may mention particularly Mr D. A. Winstanley, Vice-Master of Trinity College; Dr J. A. Venn, President of Queens' College; the Rev. Canon C. Tremayne, Secretary of the Elland Society; Mr R. A. Austen Leigh, the Editor of *Etoniana*; the Rev. F. M. Yglesias; the Rev. F. N. Davey; and the Rev. Dr. Newton Flew, Principal of Wesley House. Nor can I omit to record my gratitude to the Staff of the University Library, and in particular to Mr Pink of the Anderson Room.

This book does not pretend to be a new Life of Simeon, nor is it designed to supersede the standard lives by Carus (1847) and Moule (1892). It will, however, be found to contain a good deal of supplementary material.¹ I have been at pains to supply very full references, chiefly in the hope of saving time and trouble to any future church historians who may be attracted to a field in which there is still plenty of work to be done. There is room, for instance, for a far more extensive treatment of the history of the reform of theological studies in this University. There is room for a new edition of Berridge's letters, many of which are scattered through the files of defunct religious periodicals. There is room for a series of biographical sketches of the Cambridge Evangelicals of the period, Simeon's con-

¹ I may also be allowed to mention that a discussion of Simeon's influence on the development of Anglican homiletics will be found in my *Art of Preaching: A Practical Survey of Preaching in the Church of England, 747–1939* (S.P.C.K., 1940).

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temporaries and disciples. When these, and similar undertakings, have been accomplished, the time will be ripe for a new biography of Simeon himself. For the meanwhile, it is hoped that these pages may be a not unworthy tribute to his memory.

‘My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.’ (Malachi, ii, 5, 6.)

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January 30, 1940

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