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Leonard Hodgson
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ANGLICANISM & SOUTH INDIA

I

IT is well known to all the world that the Anglican Church is a church which finds great difficulty in the way of practising intercommunion with more than a very limited number of other Christian bodies. In his sermon at the opening of the 1937 World Conference on Faith and Order at Edinburgh, the [then] Archbishop of York said:

‘I speak as a member of one of those churches which still maintain barriers against completeness of union at the Table of the Lord. I believe from my heart that we of that tradition are trustees for an element of truth concerning the nature of the Church which requires that exclusiveness as a consequence, until this element of truth be incorporated with others into a fuller and worthier conception of the Church than any of us hold to-day. But I know that our division at this point is the greatest of all scandals in the face of the world; I know that we can only consent to it or maintain it without the guilt of unfaithfulness to the unity of the Gospel and of God Himself, if it is a source to us of spiritual pain, and if we are striving to the utmost to remove the occasions which now bind us, as we think, to that perpetuation of disunion.’

I have no doubt in my own mind that this Anglican exclusiveness is due to concern in the matter of orders. The Anglican Church is not indifferent to questions of faith, but when the representatives of various churches assembled at the Lausanne Conference in 1927 agreed upon the following statement:

‘Notwithstanding the differences in doctrine among us, we are united in a common Christian Faith which is proclaimed in the Holy Scriptures and is witnessed to and

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safeguarded in the Ecumenical Creed, commonly called the Nicene, and in the Apostles' Creed, which Faith is continuously confirmed in the spiritual experience of the Church of Christ'¹

this gave what most Anglicans would regard as sufficient agreement in faith to justify intercommunion were there no other obstacles in the way. Elsewhere in Christendom there may be bodies which hold that the acceptance of doctrines defined at a later date than A.D. 381, such, for example, as the doctrine of trans- or consubstantiation, of justification by faith, or of the immaculate conception, is necessary for this purpose, but only a non-representative minority of Anglicans would make any such demand. The situation with which we are confronted is one in which there exist many Christian bodies with which the Anglican Church might be in communion so far as questions of faith are concerned, were it not that the question of orders stands in the way. And the particular question which causes the trouble is that of the apostolic succession.

It is well known that this phrase 'apostolic succession' is patient of many different meanings.² The form in which it causes the difficulty is that in which it holds that the minister of the Holy Communion must be one who has been ordained to his office by a bishop who has his place in a succession of episcopal ordinations (or consecrations) going back to apostolic times. It is believed by the Anglican Church that it has a ministry authorised to minister the sacrament by ordination in

¹ From the Report of Section VI. See Bate, *Faith and Order* (London and New York, 1928), p. 466.

² See the Report of the Edinburgh Conference, Ch. V (vii) A.

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this succession. For its own ministers such authorisation is required by its formularies, and though there may be (and are) Anglicans who set little store by this requirement and have scant respect for the theology involved by it, I have little doubt myself that the Anglican Church as a whole regards itself as committed to this requirement and is not prepared to forsake it or minimise its importance.

It is here that I feel it necessary to avoid raising false hopes by concealing this fact. It is the fashion in some quarters to disregard this fidelity to the doctrine of apostolic succession as though it were the peculiar hobby of a small group described as 'extreme anglo-catholics', whose views can be safely ignored in making plans for the reunion of Christendom. Such an attitude I believe to be profoundly mistaken. Respect for the doctrine of apostolic succession is far more widely diffused among us and deeply ingrained in us than that. It characterises our history, as shown in the lives of such men as Timothy Cutler and Samuel Seabury. I know members of the Church of Ireland who set great store by the fact that when the Vatican decided against the validity of the orders of the Church of England care was taken to say nothing about those of the Church of Ireland, knowing that that church could claim an independent succession unaffected by the accidents which were alleged to invalidate the English claim. The Lambeth Conference may have no legislative authority, or power to bind the church, but its pronouncements are undoubtedly evidence of what is commonly believed and held among us, and both in 1920 and 1930 its resolutions on inter-communion are clearly based upon this doctrine which,

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moreover, is included in the so-called Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. The actual steps taken by the Church of England in recent years towards the restoration of intercommunion with other bodies have all kept in view the satisfaction of what this doctrine requires; witness the agreements made with the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Old Catholics and the Church of Sweden, and the conditions required in the provisional agreements with the churches of Finland, Latvia and Esthonia.

Among workers for unity there seems to exist in some quarters an optimism which is based upon the assumption that the Anglican Church can easily be persuaded to abandon the doctrine of orders which I have just shown to be implied in the utterances of its responsible leaders and the policy embodied in its official acts. When we try to discover the grounds for this assumption, we find ourselves face to face with a problem the seriousness of which often seems to me to be insufficiently grasped. It is the fundamental problem presented by different conceptions not only of the church, but of the nature of Christianity itself. This difference finds expression both in the fields of history and of theology proper. On one side it is held that recent researches into the history of Christian origins have invalidated whatever historical basis may hitherto have been claimed for the doctrine of apostolic succession. It is also commonly held that theologically the doctrine implies a magical conception of the operation of divine grace which is inconsistent with the principles of true Christianity. From this it is concluded that, since no one in his senses, when once his eyes are opened, will wish to maintain a doctrine which is historically unjustified and theologically super-

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stitious, it cannot be long before it is abandoned by all except that small group of anglo-catholic Anglicans whose eyes are blinded by prejudice. The majority of Anglicans must already be coming to regard it as a *damnosa haereditas*, an encumbrance in their efforts for unity from which they have not yet managed to free themselves and for which they have to apologise.

My own experience of anglicanism from within convinces me that any such estimate of the temper of my fellow-churchmen as a whole is completely mistaken. They do not believe that the holding of this doctrine requires any apology, whether it be considered historically or theologically. The late Canon Streeter, or Dr Newton Flew, may have advanced arguments against its historical foundation convincing to themselves; but there are other scholars, such as C. H. Turner and Canon Broomfield, who read the evidence differently, and among Anglicans the arguments of these other scholars are more widely accepted. Theologically it is denied that the doctrine, rightly understood, is either magical or superstitious—and ‘rightly understood’ does not mean understood in such a manner as to dissolve away the belief that God wills to give His grace through the appointed means of rightly ordained ministers.

I must emphasise this last point because of its importance for the whole reunion movement. From many of the writings of continental protestants which I have read I have gained the impression that in their eyes fidelity to the principles of the Reformation (which are held to be the principles of true Christianity) requires the rejection of the whole catholic conception of

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Christianity, lock, stock, and barrel. Now the Oxford Movement meant for the Anglican Church the recovery of its catholic heritage, and a growing conviction, verified in the experience of the last hundred years, that this antithesis is falsely drawn. I say 'in the experience' because it is clear that the intellectual problems involved have by no means yet been solved. We have proved that it is possible to live and worship together as sons both of the Reformation and of the historic catholic church. But this is regarded by many of our continental fellow-Christians as merely another instance of English indifference to logic, and we must confess that we have not yet solved the intellectual problems provided by the coexistence of protestantism and catholicism in one church. If we had, we should be able to show our continental brethren how the breach could be healed to their satisfaction as well as to ours. As it is, they suspect that we are only able to maintain our own *façade* of unity either through sheer intellectual laziness or because neither our protestantism nor our catholicism is the genuine article.

But we are realists. When we contemplate Christendom, we find it impossible to believe that either catholicism or protestantism taken alone expresses the full truth of Christianity. We find it impossible to believe that the unity of Christendom will be achieved through either, so to speak, 'swallowing' the other. We therefore conclude that the alternative to the reconciliation of the two in one church is an arrangement in which, when Christians are sorted out of their present muddle and have crystallised around one or other of these two poles, the two camps will continue until the day of judgment

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separated by a gulf which only men as individuals can cross, crossing it as converts or perverts according to the point of view. This seems to us an unsatisfactory picture to contemplate as the goal of the reunion movement, and so we cherish the hope that our apparently illogical makeshift of a church may turn out to provide more valuable food for thought than appears on the surface.

But if this be our hope, then it is clear that we shall not be likely to respond to any appeals to take steps towards unity which involve abandoning either our protestant or our catholic pretensions. We do not regard the Oxford Movement as a regrettable relapse into a discredited catholicism. We regard it as the recovery of a catholic heritage which is of value to ourselves at present, and which we hold in trust to share with the rest of Christendom if and when our fellow-Christians come to perceive its value and to desire it for themselves. In this connection I may here repeat some words I wrote more than ten years ago, which still seem to me to express a typically Anglican outlook.

‘For the Anglican, unity means unity vertically down the ages as well as horizontally across the face of the earth, unity with that little company in the Upper Room at Jerusalem as well as with fellow-Christians now alive in America, India and Japan. When an Anglican sets out to baptise a convert, he sets out to baptise him into that fellowship; when the Anglican priest stands before the altar to celebrate the Holy Communion, or a lay-reader holds a mission service for half a dozen souls in some isolated region of Montana or Wyoming, that which is being done is an official act of the whole society functioning in that place. The members of a little gathering of twentieth-century Christians in an out-of-the-way corner of the world are to be assured that they are worshipping in communion with Peter and Andrew, James

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and John, the rest of that company, and the whole company of “just men made perfect” from that day to this.

‘This being his aim, the Anglican asks how that unity can be secured. He notices that in any earthly society unity and continuity from generation to generation seem to depend on two factors interwoven like two strands of a single rope: the outward continuity of organisation and the inward continuity of spirit, faith and practice. He notices, for example, that if a body of trustees are challenged as to their right to continue administering some endowment, they have to make good their position by showing both that they have been appointed constitutionally in accordance with the accepted custom of the trust, and that in their administration they are carrying out the intentions of the founder as he would like them to be carried out were he alive at the time. He concludes that he cannot rightly exercise less care in matters spiritual than is required in matters temporal, that he cannot offer to baptise into the fellowship of the Apostles if he is careless about either strand of the rope which links the Church of to-day to the Church of the Upper Room.’¹

The action taken by the Church of England in its negotiations with the churches of Finland, Latvia and Esthonia illustrates this attitude, and shows, moreover, that on the side of outward organisation the apostolic succession is regarded as one of those valuable elements in the catholic tradition which we treasure for ourselves and wish to share with others. It therefore seems clear that the Anglican Church is not at all likely to respond favourably to any suggestions which would require it to treat its apostolic succession as a thing of little value. Any hopes of a united Christendom which is to include Anglicanism must include the hope that the rest of

¹ From *Essays in Christian Philosophy* (London and New York, 1930), p. 144.

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Christendom will welcome the opportunity of sharing in this treasure which has been given to the Anglican Church to be its contribution to the riches of the whole united body.

But see what this means. Our hope must include the hope that a way will have been found to reconcile this belief that the apostolic succession is a treasure with the belief that to regard it as such is apostasy from true Christianity! To refuse to face this fact is to behave like the proverbial ostrich. The reunion movement as a whole, in its world-wide aspect, will not have faced realities until it has opened its eyes to contemplate steadily the problem of reconciling the sons of the Reformation with the heirs of Trent. And it is no good treating the problem of the Anglican position about orders as anything less than a subdivision of this problem, or thinking that it can be disposed of by itself without raising these wider and deeper issues.

If this be so, it is idle to look for any speedy solution of the problem. The issues involved are so deep and far-reaching that to solve their difficulties will require a resolute and determined intellectual effort. At present it has hardly been begun, and we cannot expect to bring it to a successful conclusion unless we are prepared to persevere in it for no short period of time.

Are we then led to the pessimistic conclusion that for this indefinitely lengthy period the Anglican Church must continue to acquiesce in 'the greatest of all scandals in the face of the world' by maintaining the present barriers against union at the Table of the Lord? And must it reject all proposals for union with other churches which do not provide for the immediate

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extension of episcopal ordination to all the ministers of the Holy Communion in the united body? These are the questions which have now to be faced.

II

For anyone who has had borne in upon him the reality of the present situation—not merely the scandal in the face of the world, but also the inner wounding of the Body of Christ—it is impossible to rest content with things as they are. But when an Anglican advocates the raising of the existing barriers to intercommunion, or the approval of such a scheme as that of the proposals for union in South India, he is inevitably met by the argument that he is allowing his heart to run away with his head. The maintenance of the barriers, it is urged, is demanded by theological principle, and to think that unity in accordance with the will of God can be built upon neglect of or indifference to theological principle is sentimentality at its worst. Theological principle forbids us to equate episcopal and non-episcopal ministries; theological principle requires us to observe ‘the general rule of the Anglican Churches that members of the Anglican Churches should receive the Holy Communion only from ministers of their own Church’; at Lambeth in 1930 the Anglican bishops came dangerously near to compromising with theological principle, as indeed they recognised when they appended to their recommendations the words ‘we would point out that the very special circumstances and the very strict regulations specified in this Regulation of them-