

# I ECUMENISMO DOCTRINAL

## ANGLICAN ECUMENISM SINCE 1910\*

F. P. COLEMAN (anglican)

Having been asked to give some account of the events and tendencies which characterise Anglican ecumenism since 1910, an Anglican might be inclined to question the choice of this year as a starting point. At first sight it is easier to discern a specifically Anglican commitment to the cause of Christian unity in the appeal issued by the bishops of the Anglican Communion at the Lambeth Conference 1920, a few months after the celebrated Encyclical Letter which was published by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. It is not surprising that Christians should have shared the general spirit of optimism and idealism which was generated by the cessation of hostilities in 1918; they too shared the common desire to build a new world, worthy of the heroes of the Great War, 1914-1918. It must be admitted also that Englishmen and

\* A paper read at the VIth International Session of Ecumenical Studies, Salamanca (Spain), April 1969.

Anglicans are rather fond of high-sounding appeals, without committing themselves too closely to the consequences!

Nonethe less, it was the Edinburgh Conference of 1910 that proved to be a decisive point for the recovery of Christian unity, and it is doubtful whether the Lambeth Appeal of 1920 could have been made —much less have been effective— without the wider initiative provided by the Edinburgh Conference. The World Missionary Conference held at Edinburgh in 1910 proved to be a water-shed for the ecumenical movement. It marks the convergence of earlier, separated initiatives into a true movement towards unity. In this sense it can be regarded as the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement. It is important to underline the character of this conference. It was a *missionary* conference. The delegates did not represent their churches as such, but were mainly sent by particular missions, or missionary societies. The roots of the modern ecumenical movement are, indeed to be found in the mission field. There had been a succession of earlier conferences, but hitherto Anglican representation had been drawn only from missionary societies of evangelical tradition. At Edinburgh, missions of 'high church' or anglo-catholic character took their place for the first time. In the past it had been assumed by many that such gatherings were 'undenominational', ignoring the evident distinctions and differences between the churches. In 1908, however, two Anglican bishops of the 'high church' tradition, Bishop Talbot and Bishop Gore, had become convinced that this would not be the case at Edinburgh, and through their efforts enlisted the support of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, which had previously refused an invitation to send representatives. It was now clear that Anglicans as such, and not simply those of one tradition, were prepared to discuss the problems of missionary activity with other churches, and it soon became clear that this form of cooperation could not proceed far without raising the whole issue of Christian disunity.

The development of Anglican ecumenism in succeeding decades cannot be properly understood without a backward glance beyond the water-shed of 1910. We must note two important characteristics of the Church of England. In the first place, the Church of England is itself a kind of ecumenical movement, by reason of its unusual comprehensiveness, which

derives from the events of the reformation period. The aim of those who exercised an effective influence in England during the second half of the 16th century was, in the first place, to preserve in the Church of England the essentials of Catholic tradition, but enriched by the valid insights of the reformation. These Anglican reformers wanted to retain and continue what they had received from the past, but they saw the necessity of reform and purification, with reference to scripture and to the tradition of the early fathers of the Church. But they insisted, secondly, that if the Church was to be one, it must comprehend the whole nation as such, together with its social and political life. There could be only one national Church. The unity of the English people must express itself in the acceptance of one Church: the unity of the Church must include the whole life of the English people. Within the very evident limits of this national arena it is possible to discern a certain anticipation of Vatican II, where the fathers declared that the Church is a kind of sacrament of the unity of the whole human race.

This understanding of the relationship between Church and people, as it was held in England during the 16th and 17th centuries led, however, to important consequences. There could be one Church only in England. Whoever rejected the national Church forfeited at the same time his rights as a citizen of the country. He was excluded, in part at least, from the national life of his people. If the government allowed him to go on existing, he was at best a second class citizen. From the point of view of the Church he was a 'nonconformist', if he were a Protestant; or a 'recusant' if he were Catholic. In other words, he was a man who refused to adapt himself to the universal norms of the country.

Ultimately, this policy was a failure. In spite of the efforts of churchmen and politicians opposition to the national Church persisted. Under James I and Charles II some attempt was made to conciliate the Puritans who had shewn some willingness to remain in the Church of England provided there were modifications of teaching and of liturgical practice. The concessions were slight, however, and the restoration of the enforced use of the Book of Common Prayer under Charles II led to the 'Great Ejection' - the expulsion of those of the clergy who refused to accept the Book. There, of course,

other Protestant 'nonconformists' who rejected the Church of England entirely. Apart from the limited efforts at conciliation mentioned above, the tendency had been to oppress and persecute those who refused to conform. The Protestants, however, formed the, selevs into small but vigorous ecclesial groups, and there always remained a current of Roman Catholicism, which later, in the 19th century, was transformed into a formidable stream.

All this may seem to contradict what was said above about the Church of England being a kind of ecumenical movement in itself, embracing widely divergent traditions and insights. This description is perhaps true only of the Church of England in its more recent history. For long little encouragement was given to the ecumenical spirit as we know it today. The overriding aim was to attract or force the dissidents into the unity of the national Church. There was no question of recognising other Churches whose members had rejected the Church of England. The social and political disabilities imposed on nonconformists and recusants remained in force until the 19th century. Still today the sovereign must be a member of the Church of England. It is not surprising, moreover, that the independent character of Protestant nonconformity led to an association with political radicalism, whereas the political associations of the national Church tended to be conservative. The dominant forces in the Church of England tended to be linked with the upper middle classes and the aristocracy, whereas nonconformity won most of its support from the lower middle and artisan classes. These political and social characteristics helped to harden the divisions which had begun on religious grounds. On the other hand, in spite of its attitudes towards those who remained in opposition, the Church of England did still retain in its ranks Christians of widely different outlook. There were inevitably tensions, and at times fierce disputes, but it was always possible that some group would experience a strong revival, bring influence to bear on the Church, and yet remain as one element in a wider comprehensiveness. There were notable exceptions, of which the growth of Methodism was an outstanding example, and there have always been individuals to whom the strain and apparent inconsistency of comprehensiveness have proved intolerable. By and large, however, the Church of England had not lost

its capacity for holding together, within recognised limits, people of divergent tradition and outlook.

The Catholic revival which flowed from the Oxford Movement in the 19th century led to a mutual hardening of attitudes between the Church of England and the nonconformist churches. Being subject to continual attack from Rome, and sometimes weakened by conversions, the movement did not lead at once to an improvement of relations between the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic community in England was, indeed, growing in this period, and was viewed by many with great suspicion. This was heightened by the establishment of a Roman Catholic hierarchy, which provoked strong reaction not only on the part of practising Anglicans, but also from others in a wider field who were opposed to any development of papal power. It is not surprising, therefore, that grave obstacles were encountered by those who later sought to bring about a rapprochement of the Church of England and Rome.

As to relations with Christians in other countries, the Church of England had clearly rejected what were believed to be the errors of Rome, but had not in any way abandoned belief in a visible Church, nor in the necessity of visible unity for the Body of Christ. But for long there was much uncertainty about relations with the newly emerging churches of the reformation, and in the troubled circumstances of the 16th and 17th centuries the question, in so far as it arose, was largely handled pragmatically. There was regret at the Catholic relations which were broken by the reformation, but Rome remained intransigent. A prudent circumspection governed relations with the new churches. At a later stage efforts were made from time to time to open conversations which might lead to some kind of eucharistic communion, a form of approach which has been considerably developed in recent times. This is particularly true of non-Roman episcopal churches, with which Anglicans have sought to build up a kind of family relationship.

The development of a Church closely identified with the secular community will inevitably be affected by the growth and movement of that community. Before long religion began to accompany or follow the extension of commerce and the

colonisation of overseas territories. At first it was simply a question of ministering to expatriates. Then the Church of England began to accept the responsibility of mission to the native peoples, or rather the responsibility was accepted by groups of people who formed societies for the promotion of missions. In due course this gave rise to problems of relationship with other Christian missions - rivalry at first, then co-operation, and finally ecumenism itself, as witnessed at an early stage by the Edinburgh Conference, and more recently by the plans for unity which have come to fruition in some parts of the Anglican Communion. Here we come, at last, to our point of departure! By 1910 it was becoming clear that the preaching of the gospel to the pagan and the unbeliever was a contradiction if it came from disunited and discordant voices. At Edimburgh 1910 the Anglican and Protestant delegates dedicated themselves to the quest for unity so that they might preach the Good News with the one voice of a united Church.

The foregoing sketch has been concerned with the Anglicanism of the Church of England and its relationship with the problem of unity. But we have reached the point at which Anglicanism is exported to other lands, and in time finds its expression in the foundation of new dioceses, provinces and churches. At the beginning, most of these new Anglican churches were dependent upon the See of Canterbury, and to day remain in communion with that See, with the exception of those whose relationship has been rendered uncertain by their participation in schemes of reunion. Initiatives for mission came from particular groups, often representing a particular tradition within the Church of England. Consequently, some of the newer Anglican churches have presented an Anglicanism less comprehensive than that of the Church of England. Such tendencies have been counter-balanced to some extent by the growth of the influence of the Lambeth Conferences for bishops of the Anglican Communion, which began in 1867, and now are an accepted feature of Anglican church life. Before then end of the 19th century the bishops were showing an increasing interest in the problem of unity, and the so-called 'Lambeth Quadrilateral' won its place as the basis of all Anglican discussion of unity with other churches.

By way of summary we may recall three aspects of Anglicanism which have emerged in this discussion:

1. The situation in England, often for non-theological reasons, discouraged the growth of an ecumenical mentality, so far as it concerned relations between churches in England.
2. The Church of England has from time to time sought to establish relations of eucharistic communion with churches of a similar tradition.
3. The requirements of missionary activity led the younger churches of the Anglican Communion first to seek cooperation with other churches, and then to move towards union with them.

We must note in passing that the strengthening of relations between Christians in separated churches is by no means restricted either to the formal acts of the churches as such, nor to those movements which are specifically directed to the promotion of unity. The development of scholarship during the past century has stimulated a dialogue among theologians, which, although strictly academic in character, has done much to encourage sympathetic understanding of the beliefs and traditions of other Christians.

In the 1860s Dr Pusey found it possible to discuss with French Roman Catholic theologians the contents of his celebrated *Eirenikon*, which discussed the relationship of the Church of England with the wider Catholic Church. Many Anglican students and university teachers have pursued their biblical studies at German universities, and more recently the renewal of Catholic pastoral theology and practice has found a lively response among the Anglican clergy.

During the 19th century social and economic links with European countries grew rapidly. Diplomats, business men and others who lived temporarily or permanently in a foreign city desired the ministrations of their own Church. Churches and chapels were built, as in Paris and Rome for example, and chaplains were sent to minister to members of their own Church (occasionally to members of Protestant churches who needed help), but never to proselytise the people of the country. A diocese of Gibraltar was established in 1846, in order

that the bishop might supervise Anglican chaplaincies in the Mediterranean area. There is also a Bishop of Fulham, under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of London, who has the care of establishments in the centre and north of Europe. In recent years these chaplaincies have often become valuable points of contact both with Roman Catholics and with the Protestant churches of Europe. While adhering strictly to the prohibition of proselytism, the chaplaincies make it possible for continental Christians to learn something of Anglicanism. The existence of this 'Anglican presence', which was discussed at the Lambeth Conference 1969, does however raise certain difficulties, both from the point of view of the Anglican churches and from that of churches with whom Anglicans have established some relationship, a point to which we must now turn.

The Anglican who looks to the continent for evidence of a tradition similar to his own will soon find his attention drawn to the churches of the Old Catholic Union. After the crisis precipitated by the First Vatican Council the Anglican Convocation of Canterbury sent a message of sympathy to the Old Catholic Archbishop Loos of Utrecht, and the following year the Anglican Bishop Christopher Wordsworth attended the second Old Catholic Congress at Cologne. There was little progress towards formal relations, however, until the opening of formal negotiations between the Church of England and the Old Catholic Churches in 1930. In 1925 the Old Catholics accepted the validity of Anglican orders, and finally, in 1931, the negotiating churches drew up the Bonn Concordat, which then became the basis of the relationship of Full Communion established in 1932. The Church of England and the Old Catholic Churches recognised the other's catholicity and independence, and each agreed to admit members of the other to the sacraments. Each recognised the essentials of Catholic faith and practice in the other, but neither side was bound to accept the opinions or devotions to be found in the other.

This relationship was soon extended to all the churches of the Anglican Communion. The Anglican Church in the United States of America also drew into it the Polish National Catholic Church, which has a good many adherents in America. The Church of England has always hesitated to take any steps which might involve it in the domestic controversies of other



countries, and this explains the slow and somewhat curious development of relations with the non-Roman episcopal churches of Spain and Portugal. For some time overtures from the reformed Christians of Spain and Portugal met with little response from the bishops of the Anglican Communion, though financial aid and informal encouragement were given by particular groups of Anglicans. Finally the Anglican bishops of the Church of Ireland consecrated a bishop for the Spanish Episcopal Reformed Church, and later the Anglican episcopate was extended to the Lusitanian Church. The Bonn Concordat has now been accepted as a basis of Full Communion between these two churches and those of the Anglican Communion. A similar relationship has also been established with the Independent Church of the Philippines.

Within the Lutheran tradition there are churches of episcopal constitution which have attracted the attention of the Church of England, particularly those of the Baltic countries. In many ways, for example, the tradition and constitution of the Church of Sweden seemed to resemble closely those of the Church of England. Towards the end of the 19th century the Lambeth Conferences began to occupy themselves with the possibility of communion relations with the Church of Sweden; but it was not until 1920 that the Lambeth Conference recommended the recognition of the orders of the Church of Sweden and proposed that members of the Church of Sweden should be admitted to Holy Communion in Anglican Churches. No further action was taken in the Church of England until 1954, when it was agreed to invite members of the Church of Sweden to Holy Communion. In spite of a commonly held opinion to the contrary this is the only formal decision governing the relations of the Church of England with the Church of Sweden. The two churches are not at present in Full Communion. For some time Anglican bishops took part in the consecration of Swedish bishops, but the practice was discontinued when the Church of Sweden began to ordain women to the priesthood. It seems probable, however, that the question of relations between the two churches will soon be re-opened.

The Church of England is a Church of Western tradition, and is therefore separated *ipso facto* from the Eastern Orthodox Churches. As long ago as the 17th century there was

an attempt to open conversations with the Orthodox, and these efforts have been renewed from time to time. In the 19th century, for example, the work of W. J. Birkbeck strengthened contacts with the Russian Church, and these have been renewed in recent years by an exchange of visits. In 1921 the Archbishop of Canterbury set up his Committee for the Eastern Churches, which gave place in 1932 to the Council on Foreign Relations. The Holy Synod of Constantinople decided in 1922 that Anglican ordinations were of the same genre as those of Rome, the Old Catholics and the Armenians. This was a local decision, accepted in due course by Alexandria, Jerusalem and Cyprus, but lacking the universal authority of the Orthodox Churches. In any case, it would be wrong to interpret this a recognition of validity as this is understood in the Western tradition. The present Archbishop of Canterbury has long been interested in orthodox theology and spirituality. It is to be hoped that the conversations which are shortly to be inaugurated will be more fruitful those which took place in 1930, in spite of the efforts of the Church of England to achieve unity with the Methodist Church and the Presbyterian churches of Great Britain.

Anglicans have never given up hope of a rapprochement with the Church of Rome, though events have often done little to encourage this hope. Thanks to the enthusiasm of Lord Halifax, a group of Roman Catholics and Anglicans took part in the celebrated Malines Conversations between 1921 and 1925. There were misunderstandings, and indiscretions on the part of Lord Halifax; and the opposition of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England (which at least one can understand) made it certain that these conversations would come to nothing. Their importance lies in the fact that they did take place. At least, a start had been made. In 1966, the Anglican Church Union, assisted by a number of religious communities, provided a plaque to commemorate the conversations, and this was installed jointly in the Cathedral at Malines, by Cardinal Suenens and the Anglican Bishop of Winchester.\* It is significant that the report of the ceremony at Malines appeared in the Anglican press at the same time as the announcement of names of Anglican participants in the new conversations between the Church of Rome and the An-

glican Communion. Lord Halifax would have been well satisfied with the result of his efforts!

In England the ecumenical climate has improved markedly since the last war. The question of unity between the Church of England and the Methodist Church is the subject of another paper and need not be discussed here.

Conversations between the Anglican and Presbyterian churches of Great Britain have been taking place since 1932, and the last major report appeared in 1966. Since then conversations have been continued locally in the two countries of England and Scotland, there being a great difference in the circumstances of these countries. In Scotland the national church is Presbyterian and has many more adherents than the Anglican Church, a position which is reversed in England. The presbyterians in England are in an advanced stage of negotiation with the congregationalists, with a view to forming a Reformed Church in England. It seems probable that this new united church will be drawn into future conversations. The problem of the ministry gives rise to one of the greatest obstacles to union with the presbyterian churches.

Relations with the Roman Catholic Church in England are improving slowly, although the Roman Catholic hierarchy seems at times to be obsessed with an exaggerated caution. The Archbishop of Canterbury has preached in the Roman Catholic Westminster Cathedral, and Cardinal Heenan has preached in both Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches. The Roman Catholic Church has also entered into conversations with the British Council of Churches, of which the Church of England is a member.

One must also emphasise the importance of the Orthodox in England today. Archbishops Anthony and Athenagoras—representing the Russian and Greek communities—take an active part in the ecumenical movement, and in some areas Orthodox services are held in Anglican churches.

In the space of a very short paper it is unfortunately not possible to do more than refer to the third aspect of Anglican ecumenism, namely the movement towards unity which has its roots in the mission field. In South India informal discussions had already begun before 1910. They were resumed on

a more formal basis after the war of 1914-1918. Four Anglican dioceses were involved, and the negotiating committee decided to press forward towards organic union. The plan they ultimately produced gave rise to fierce and bitter controversy in the Church of England, almost to the point of splitting the Church. In the end, without waiting for the approval of other Anglican churches, the four dioceses decided to enter (with the good will of their own Church) into union with a number of Protestant churches in the area, and the Church of South India was inaugurated in 1947. The relationship between this new Church and the churches of the Anglican Communion is still restricted largely because the Church of South India, though episcopal in constitution, admitted the ministers of non-episcopal churches as presbyters without further ordination or any other rite of admission. This relationship will also be re-considered in the near future.

Similar schemes of union are now nearing fulfilment in Ceylon and North India, though they provide for a 'unification' of ministries which, it is claimed, assures the validity of the orders of all who are admitted to the ministry. An advanced stage has also been reached in negotiations pursued by the Anglican churches in Africa, with churches which are mainly of Anglo-Saxon origin. Indeed, there is hardly a church of the Anglican communion which is not engaged in some form of discussion leading towards unity. An analysis of the schemes under discussion would be long and tedious. It is sufficient to say that all take as a basis the 'Lambeth Quadrilateral' - acceptance of the scriptures as the standard of faith, the historic creeds as witnessing to that faith, the two Bible sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, and an episcopal ministry in the historic succession.