

Thoughts on the Lambeth Conference

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THOUGHTS ON THE LAMBETH CONFERENCE.

As the great object of the *Revue internationale* is to make the various branches of God's Church throughout the world better acquainted with each other I have thought that some comments on the Lambeth Conference which has just terminated might be neither undesirable nor unprofitable. Occurring as it did just when we were celebrating the longest and most prosperous reign in our history, it has served as a striking illustration of the expansion of the Anglican Church during that period. At Queen Victoria's accession it would have been impossible to muster 194 Bishops to a Conference, for the simple reason that there were not 194, or anything like 194, Bishoprics in existence in our communion. In 1837 there were 26 Bishops in England and Wales, 13 in Ireland, 7 in Scotland and 5 in the Colonies and dependencies of the British Empire. Now there are 52 Bishops and Assistant Bishops in England and Wales, beside several retired Colonial Bishops acting as Suffragans in this country, and instead of 5, there are 86 Bishops at work in our Colonies and dependencies. The number of Archbishops and Bishops in Ireland and Scotland remains the same. I have not the past statistics of the American Church at hand, and therefore cannot say how many Bishops there were in America in 1837. But the expansion there has kept pace with our own. The first Anglican Bishop was consecrated in 1784. There are now 81.¹⁾ I may repeat once more what I have said in a former communication, that God has signally blessed the work of our Church, and that whatever our sins and shortcomings, we need not fear

¹⁾ There were 58 Bishops in 1877.

to challenge the verdict of Christendom as to our Catholic position, and to bid the Church that is without sin among our neighbours cast the first stone at us. I may further point out, not for the first time, that in England and Wales and British India alone does our Church derive any support from the State. Elsewhere we are a purely voluntary association, held together by a common attachment to the Catholic Creeds and to the formularies of the Anglican Church. And I may be allowed to add that the marvellous expansion and extension of which we are privileged to boast, seems in no way likely to come to an end, but bids fair, in the next sixty years, to surpass the last in the rate of its progress and in the authority and influence we are likely to possess in the Councils of Christendom. I say this the more frankly, because one legacy the Tractarian movement has left to us is perhaps in some respects an inconvenient one. I well remember when the tone of humiliation and self-reproach adopted by the Tractarian leaders was justified alike by the condition of our Church at the time and by the heavy chastisements with which God had visited her. But I must believe that this tone of deep humiliation has been kept up too long, and that while we avoid all undue boastfulness and self-assertion; while we disclaim the arrogance which would lead us to say of our Church that she “sits as a queen, and is no widow”; it would nevertheless be unfaithful to the truth and ungrateful to Him Who has poured such benefits upon us, did we not thankfully confess the mercies which, in spite of our unworthiness, He has been pleased to shower upon us during the present century.

The Encyclical Letter of our Bishops, signed unanimously by the members of the Conference, discloses no token of the discords and divisions which, if we are to believe our enemies, exist among us, and are likely soon to rend us asunder. No body of Bishops throughout the world could shew a firmer and more united front in dealing with the numerous and difficult questions submitted to the Conference. The Councils of mediæval times, and even some of the Œcumenical Councils themselves, displayed far less unanimity in their discussions and resolutions. It will be thought, I believe, that a wise moderation characterizes the utterances of our Bishops on the subjects of Temperance, Purity, the Sanctity of the Marriage tie, Industrial

Problems, International Arbitration, the organization of our Communion, Religious Communities, the Critical Study of the Bible, and the rest. There are, of course, points on which the individuals composing so large a body of men must agree to differ. But the points on which the Conference is unanimous and definite withal are by no means few. It cannot be said that the document is a weak and colourless compromise. Most especially will many among ourselves be thankful for the distinct assertion of the competency of each Bishop to sanction in his own diocese the use of services additional to those contained in the Book of Common Prayer, as well as for the warning against deferring baptism, even where the prospect that the child will be properly brought up seems more or less uncertain.

To the Encyclical Letter sixty three resolutions of considerable importance are appended. Among these resolution 9 evidences the readiness of the Primate to dispense with what he might very fairly have continued to insist upon as a right, the oath of canonical obedience to him which Colonial Bishops consecrated in England have been in the habit of taking. The spirit of this resolution contrasts very strongly with the course frequently pursued by Bishops in other countries and even amongst ourselves in other ages of the Church. The resolutions in relation to the Mission Field are also well deserving of notice. The course adopted by some Churches of appointing Bishops over different nationalities in the same territorial area is rejected by the Conference as tending to obscure the perception, by those so dealt with, of the fact that they are all members of one Church. The appointment of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, and the Bishop of London, as a standing committee to promote a "clearer understanding", and "closer relations between the Churches of the East and the Anglican communion" is a practical way of manifesting the brotherly feeling we entertain toward our brethren of the Orthodox Churches which cannot fail to bring forth fruit at no very distant date. The spirit at once cautious and cordial in which the Swedish Church and the Moravian body are dealt with in these resolutions evidences a desire at the same time for Catholic order and Christian unity. The proposal for a new translation of the *Quicumque vult* indicates our attachment to our traditional formularies as well as a desire to meet diffi-

culties which were unrecognized in days gone by. And the resolutions which relate to the Old Catholic communities in Europe and elsewhere, will, it is to be hoped, henceforth render impossible the further dissemination of the calumnies against them which have unfortunately met with too ready a reception in some quarters among ourselves, and will define the relations between the Anglican and Old Catholic Churches in such a way as to make all future misconception impossible. Above all, the distinct expression by the conference of its sense of the necessity that the Anglican Churches should be represented in the International Congresses which the wisdom of the Old Catholic leaders has inaugurated will be a great source of satisfaction to their promoters, and will serve to demonstrate the truth of what I have steadily maintained, that whatever may be the attitude of particular parties among us, and of their organs in the public press, toward the movements in favour of Catholic Reform on the Continent, the Anglican communion as a whole cannot possibly regard them in any other spirit but that of cordial admiration and sympathy. The part taken by the Christ-Catholic Bishop in Switzerland in the concluding ceremonies of the Conference will, I trust, have been as agreeable to himself as it was gratifying to his friends and admirers here. If these few words lead to a more detailed examination of the utterances and resolutions of the Conference, and of the valuable reports of its various Committees, they will not have been written in vain. The more closely our Church is studied, whether in reference to her past history or her present condition, the more clearly it will be seen that she is not what her adversaries have studiously represented her to be, but that, as the late Dr von Döllinger himself said on a memorable occasion, she is a "great bulwark of the faith", a trustworthy repository of Catholic doctrine and tradition, irradiated and illustrated by the Spirit of freedom and holiness, and attested to be such by the blameless and saintly lives of millions of her priests and children.

J. J. LIAS.
