

Nationalism, internationalism and ecumenism at the 1920 Lambeth Conference*

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Introduction

The 1920 Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops is well known amongst historians of (Anglican) ecumenism for its “Appeal to All Christian People,” the bishops’ clarion call for unity – or Reunion, as it was then known – amongst Christians. Taking place in the summer of 1920, less than two years after the end of the First World War as the bishops noted in their encyclical letter,¹ the underlying theme of the Conference was “Fellowship”. This theme pervaded international relations, as the bishops explained:

Men never prized the universal fellowship of mankind as they did when the Great War had for the time destroyed it. For four terrible years, the loss of international fellowship emphasized its value. But the war which broke on fellowships created others, Nations became associated in alliances, which they cemented with their blood. In every national army, comradeship ovel and intense, united men of different classes and most various traditions. Thousands gained quite a new idea of what human nature might be, when they experienced the fellow ship of man with man in danger and death. Comradeship ennobled war. To-day people are asking, Can it not ennoble peace?²

However, fellowship, the bishops suggested, is not only a matter of international relations, but melded political, social, and theological aspects. It had “through trade-unions and other societies ... changed the face of international life,” had “bound together workers in science, education and social reform” and had shaped recreational activities.³ “The secret of life,” claimed the bishops “is fellowship,” understood as “the double fellowship, fellowship with God and fellowship with man.”⁴ The Lambeth Appeal’s affirmation that “God wills

* This is not the topic on which I had intended to, but lockdown and the subsequent closure of Lambeth Palace Library due to its relocation have made it impossible for me to undertake the necessary research for the paper I had originally planned.

¹ The Encyclical Letter is printed in *Conference of Bishops of the Anglican Communion holden at Lambeth Palace, July 5 to August 7, 1920, Encyclical Letter from the Bishops with the Resolutions and Reports* (2nd edition, London: SPCK, 1920), pp. 9-23 [hereafter LC 1920 Encyclical], here at p. 9.

² LC 1920 Encyclical, pp. 9-10.

³ LC 1920 Encyclical, p. 10.

⁴ LC 1920 Encyclical, p. 10.

fellowship”⁵ is therefore just one manifestation of this underlying theme. This paper explores how the theme of fellowship informed the bishops’ debates about and resolutions on the themes of international relations, industry and commerce, overseas mission, and ecumenism, and what attitudes towards nationalism and internationalism were thereby revealed.

The 1920 Lambeth Conference

The Lambeth Conference is the gathering of all Anglican bishops from across the global Anglican Communion. The first such Conference was held in 1867, with subsequent conferences in 1878, 1888, 1897, and 1908. The sixth was planned for 1918; having been postponed due to the First World War, it eventually took place between 5 July and 7 August 1920. It brought together two hundred and fifty-two Anglican bishops from across the Communion, the vast majority of whom had been born, educated and trained in either the United Kingdom or North America.⁶ It was attended by the Anglican Communion’s first Indian bishop, Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah (1874-1945), Bishop of Dornakal, and two African bishops, Isaac Oluwole (1852-1932), Bishop of West Equatorial Africa, and Adolphus Williamson Howells (1866-1938), Bishop of the Delta Pastorate Church and Assistant to the Bishop of Lagos. The first Chinese bishop, Tsai-Sheng (T. S.) Shen, assistant bishop of Chekiang (Zhejiang), chose not to attend, believing that his English was not adequate.⁷ The make up of the Lambeth Conference in 1920 reflected the colonial networks of Anglicanism, and many Anglican dioceses were at this stage not yet integrated into Provincial structures.

During the conference, the bishops worked in thematically focussed committees, each of which drafted resolutions and a report based on the work of a preparatory group. The committees, in the order that their reports appear in the Conference proceedings, were: “Christianity and International Relations”, “The Church and Industrial Problems”, “The Development of Provinces”, “Missionary Problems”, “Position of Women”, “Problems of Marriage”, “Spiritualism, Christian Science, Theosophy”; and “Reunion.”⁸ The first and the last of these – on Christianity and International Relations and Reunion – are particularly revealing of the bishops’ views of nationalism and internationalism and of how they

⁵ “Appeal to All Christian People,” Lambeth Conference (hereafter LC) 1920, Resolution 9.I. The Resolutions can be found in *Conference of Bishops of the Anglican Communion holden at Lambeth Palace, July 5 to August 7, 1920, Encyclical Letter from the Bishops with the Resolutions and Reports*, pp. 25-47; they are also available online at <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1920/lambeth-conference-archives-1920-index?year=1920> (accessed 8 March 2020).

⁶ For the biographies of the bishops involved in the Committee on Reunion, see the footnotes in Charlotte Methuen (ed.), “Lambeth 1920: The Appeal to All Christian People – An account by G. K. A. Bell and the redactions of the Appeal,” in Melanie Barber, Gabriel Sewell and Stephen Taylor, eds., *From the Reformation to the Permissive Society: A Miscellany in Celebration of the 400th Anniversary of Lambeth Palace Library* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), 521-564.

⁷ See Frank Theodore Woods, Frank Weston and Martin Linton Smith, *Lambeth and Reunion: an interpretation of the mind of the Lambeth Conference of 1920* (London: SPCK 1921), pp. 23-24.

⁸ The Reports are printed in *Conference of Bishops of the Anglican Communion holden at Lambeth Palace, July 5 to August 7, 1920, Encyclical Letter from the Bishops with the Resolutions and Reports*, pp. 49-161 [hereafter LC 1920 Reports].

believed that the church should both respond to and seek to influence these trends, but the committee on also industrial problems offers some evidence of how the bishops understood nationalism and internationalism to play out in the secular, political, social and economic spheres, whilst the debates on the structures of the Anglican communion and overseas mission to some extent applied these principles related to the life of the church. This paper will therefore focus first on the positions taken on nationalism and internationalism by the Committee on Christianity and International Relations and relate those findings to the bishops' approach to Reunion as expressed in the Appeal to All Christian. The bishops' discussions of "The Church and Industrial Problems", "The Development of Provinces", and "Missionary Problems" will then be briefly considered. There are at times tensions between the approaches taken by different committees, or even with committees which worked in sub-committees, as did the Committee on Reunion. This reflects the fact that committees worked in parallel, with reports and resolutions being presented in plenary at the end of the conference, so that the work of one committee was not directly informed by that of another. I have shown elsewhere that the different committees, and indeed the two subcommittees of the Reunion Committee, exhibited manifestly different understandings of church unity,⁹ and to some extent the same observation can be made of the bishops' attitudes to nationalism and internationalism.

The Church and International Relations

The work of this Committee provides the most direct evidence as to the views of the Anglican bishops on nationalism and internationalism. The Committee's resolutions focused on the international situation, including support for the League of Nations. The first affirmed that "in these times of peril God is giving to his Church a fresh vision of his purpose to establish a Kingdom in which all the nations of the earth shall be united as one family in righteousness and peace." This would require "the acceptance of the sovereignty of our Lord Jesus Christ and of his teaching, and ... the application of the principles of brotherhood, justice, and unselfishness, to individuals and nations alike."¹⁰ The second resolution called on "the citizens of all nations to promote in every way the resumption of the efforts, interrupted by the war, to increase international comity and goodwill, and to secure expression for these by an increased recognition of international law and custom."¹¹ These two resolutions, clearly responding to the aftermath of the First World War, were followed by four resolutions relating to the League of Nations and its work.¹² Finally, the bishops expressed their disquiet about "colour prejudice among the different races of the world, which not only hinders intercourse, but gravely imperils the peace of the future,"¹³

⁹ Charlotte Methuen, "Mission, Reunion and the Anglican Communion: The 'Appeal to All Christian People' and approaches to ecclesial unity at the 1920 Lambeth Conference," *Ecclesiology* 16 (2020), 175-205.

¹⁰ LC 1920, Resolution 1.

¹¹ LC 1920, Resolution 2.

¹² LC 1920, Resolutions 3-6.

¹³ LC 1920, Resolution 7.

and called for the alleviation of “the disease and distress from which the populations in large tracts of Europe and Asia are suffering.”¹⁴

That these resolutions were founded on an affirmation of the particular characteristics of individual nations can be seen both from the summary of the Committee’s work in the Encyclical Letter and from the Committee’s report. The relevant section of the Encyclical Letter opened with a commendation of the God-given nature of nations:

We cannot believe that the effect of the coming of the Kingdom of God upon earth will be to abolish nations. Holy Scripture emphasises the value of national life and indicates its permanence. The sense of nationality seems to be a natural instinct. ... Within redeemed humanity nations will not cease to exist, but nationality itself will be redeemed.¹⁵

Expanding on this theme, the Report drew on “the Vision of the Apocalypse” to explicate the “ideal for human life”:

a perfect city through whose ever-open gates the nations and their rulers bring their several distinctive contributions of strength or beauty. ... In the City of God there is not merging of individuality in a common impersonal existence. Not only the individual, but the nations will there realise themselves and achieve maturity.¹⁶

Nations as well as individuals must embody the principle of “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matt 22:39).¹⁷ Nations have a responsibility “for the service of each other and of the whole”, so that “not in domination, but in service, not in will-to-power, but in will-to-help, not in exploitation but in trusteeship, lies the true objective of a great nation.”¹⁸ Nations must also recognise that “Ye are members one of another” (Eph 4:25),¹⁹ recognising that “all the nations, advanced or backward, child races or ancient civilizations, are each of the children in the great family of God” and that “no national policy can be Christian which ignores the needs and rightful claims of other nations.” National policy should therefore be dictated neither by “markets nor territory nor cheap labour” but by “the principles of justice and the rights of all.”²⁰ International relations must also embody the principle “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones” (Matt 18:10), which “bears with unmistakable clearness upon the relations of the stronger races to those that are weaker and more backward.” These relationships should include “the sympathetic encouragement of those instincts of nationhood which appear as soon as young nations emerge from infancy.”²¹ For the bishops, then, “the road to internationalism ... ‘lies though nationalism’,” and “true

¹⁴ LC 1920, Resolution 8.

¹⁵ LC 1920 Encyclical Letter, p. 19.

¹⁶ LC 1920 Reports, p. 52.

¹⁷ LC 1920 Reports, p. 52.

¹⁸ LC 1920 Reports, p. 52.

¹⁹ In the AV, Eph 4:25 actually reads “we are members one of another.”

²⁰ LC 1920 Reports, pp. 52-53.

²¹ LC 1920 Reports, p. 53.

nationalism and a keen sense of international responsibility are in truth indispensable correlatives."²²

These convictions formed the foundation for their arguments against war and their support of attitudes and measures which they hoped would foster a lasting peace. Key amongst these was the League of Nations, which the bishops saw as "an instrument in the application of these great principles" – that is the principles of Christian love – through its promotion of "international peace and security" and "international co-operation."²³ In language that is telling of their colonial self-understanding, the bishops hoped that the League of Nations might be in a position to resolve "the conflicting interests of native races and white settlers" and to apply "an absolutely equal claim to justice for the natives and ourselves."²⁴ This hope for the League of Nations is reflected in Resolution 6:

It is the duty of all supporters of the League of Nations to set their face against injustice to the indigenous or native races, and particularly in regard to such matters as the tenure of land, forced labour, and the trade in intoxicating liquors, and also the morphia traffic in China and other abuses.²⁵

In the spirit of seeking to excise "the wickedness of hatred,"²⁶ the bishops recommended "the admission of Germany and other nations into the League of Nations at the earliest moment which the conditions render possible."²⁷ The bishops also commended in their report the League of Nations Union, the International Labour Conference, the International Chamber of Commerce, and the Institute for International Affairs.²⁸ Alongside these political and economic instruments they highlighted "two definitely spiritual movements", the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches, which they thought had the potential to "grow into a potent ally of the League of Nations on the spiritual side,"²⁹ and the Student Christian Movement, "that world-wide organisation of young men and women, the impressive significance of which is not yet ... sufficiently understood," which "may become a mighty instrument for propagating the spirit of peace."³⁰ Internationalism, in the bishops' eyes, was not just a matter for politics and economics.

Although the bishops did not use the term, both the World Alliance and SCM were strongly ecumenical movements, drawing their membership from across the churches. There seems to be an implicit acknowledgement of the need for Christians to work together in the report's exhortation that "We must seek in ourselves and in our fellow Christian a re-adjustment of our ideas of the extension of Christ's Kingdom, and learn to preach the cause of a worldwide good-will as we preach the cause of a worldwide gospel."³¹ However, in their

²² LC 1920 Reports, p. 53.

²³ LC 1920 Reports, p. 54.

²⁴ LC 1920 Reports, p. 56.

²⁵ LC 1920 Resolution 6.

²⁶ LC 1920 Reports, pp. 54-55, quote on p. 54.

²⁷ LC 1920 Reports, p. 55; LC 1920 Resolution 4.

²⁸ LC 1920 Reports, p. 57.

²⁹ LC 1920 Reports, p. 57.

³⁰ LC 1920 Reports, p. 58.

³¹ LC 1920 Reports, p. 58.

discussions of the Church and International Relations, the bishops did not develop the theme of cooperation between the churches, but focussed rather on the need in “our Church Assemblies and Councils, whether National, Provincial, Diocesan or Parochial” to ensure that “internationalism must take its place as an integral part of the Kingdom of God.”³² This seems directed specifically at the Anglican bishops and their dioceses rather than at the wider church.

International Relations and Ecumenism

Although ecumenism is not an explicit theme of its report, the vision articulated by the Committee for Christianity and International Relations is nonetheless strikingly similar to the vision of the reunited church expressed in the Appeal to All Christian People.³³ The premise of the Appeal was a vision of unity within which “Christian Communion now separated from one another would retain much that has long been distinctive in their methods of worship and service. It is through a rich diversity of life and devotion that the unity of the whole fellowship will be fulfilled.”³⁴ Similarly, in its presentation of the Appeal the Encyclical affirmed: “It is not by reducing the different groups of Christians to uniformity, but by rightly using their diversity, that the Church can become all things to all men.”³⁵ Both churches and nations, then, were viewed by the Anglican bishops as contributing to an important and rich diversity which when taken as a whole was able to transcend and transform the individual.

Moreover, the emphasis on the continued and valued existence of nations in the work of the Committee for Christianity and International Relations highlights a challenge which had been identified in the debates of the Reunion Committee and which merits a brief mention in the Encyclical Letter, but which is not named in the Appeal: the question of the relationship between national churches and the reunited church. The Encyclical notes that the Appeal was responding to “definite proposals ... from the Mission Field, where the urgency of the work of evangelisation and the birth of national Churches alike demand a new fellowship.”³⁶ From George Bell’s notes of the discussions of the Reunion Committee, it is apparent that the relationship between national identity and ecclesiastical identity was of

³² LC 1920 Reports, p. 58.

³³ For the Appeal and the process of its drafting, see Charlotte Methuen, “‘An adventure of goodwill and still more of faith’: The ‘Appeal to all Christian People’ (1920) in its ecumenical context,” in: Christopher Wells and Jeremy Worthen (eds), *“God Wills Fellowship”: Lambeth Conference 1920 and the Ecumenical Vocation of Anglicanism* (Wipf & Stock, forthcoming 2020); eadem, “The Making of ‘An Appeal to All Christian People’ at the 1920 Lambeth Conference,” in: Paul Avis and Benjamin Guyer (eds), *The Lambeth Conference: History, Theology and Purpose – The First 150 Years* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark 2018), 107-131; eadem, “Mission, Reunion and the Anglican Communion”; eadem (ed.), “Lambeth 1920: The Appeal to All Christian People – An account by G. K. A. Bell and the redactions of the Appeal,”; David van Krieken Vannerley, “The Church’s One Foundation: The Anglican Origins and Ecclesiological Significance of the 1920 Lambeth Appeal to All Christian People” (unpublished PhD Thesis, Canterbury Christ Church University, 2015).

³⁴ “Appeal to All Christian People,” LC 1920, Resolution 9.IV.

³⁵ LC 1920 Encyclical, p. 12.

³⁶ LC 1920 Encyclical, p. 11.

concern to several of the bishops. Winfrid Burrows, Bishop of Chichester, commented that people had a “wrong conception of church: nobody changes nation; many change church”;³⁷ the Bishop of Manchester, Edmund Knox, suggested that many ecclesiastical divisions were “due to nationality” and believed that the Appeal needed to consider the relationship between nationality and the Catholic (or universal) Church.³⁸ James [Jimmy] Palmer, Bishop of Bombay, where the discussions that ultimately led to the formation of the Church of South India were already in train, argued that “Federal unity is type favoured by churches in great areas. But in small areas organic unity.”³⁹ The Lambeth Conference 1920 was already pointing to a question which became urgent on the formation of the Church of South: how the world communions, organised transnationally on confessional lines, should relate to united churches, which sought to transcend confessional boundaries in a particular geographical area.⁴⁰

The Anglican Communion, overseas mission and national identity

The establishment of churches on a national basis was a fundamental theme also in the section of the Encyclical Letter dedicated to Missionary Problems. This claimed that “all the most prominent problems in the Mission Field today are in some way connected with nationality;” these problems arose because missionaries had been “content to make disciples out of all the nations,” forgetting that “their Master in fact commanded them to make all the nations His disciples.”⁴¹ That is, missions had “not taken due account of nationality” and had failed to recognise that “the aim of missions is not only to make Christians, but to make Christian nations.”⁴² In this understanding, missionaries

do not go out to obliterate other men’s nationality, but to bring it near to Christ Who can exalt and complete it. They do not go out to propagate their national Church, but to add another national Church to the Church Catholic.⁴³

At the same time missionaries must be aware of the “warnings and lessons from the history of national Churches” and are “on their guard against that sectarian spirit which is the danger of national isolation.”⁴⁴ The converts, not the missionaries, must find “their national response to the revelation of God in Christ, and their national way of walking in the fellowship of the Saints by the help of the One Spirit.”⁴⁵ Leadership should not “for longer than necessary be retained in foreign hands,” but should where possible pass to local

³⁷ Lambeth Palace Library [hereafter LPL], Bell Papers 353, p. 21.

³⁸ LPL Bell Papers 255, fol. 46v.

³⁹ LPL Bell Papers 255, fol. 14r.

⁴⁰ See Harding Meyer, “Christian World Communions: Identity and Ecumenical Calling,” *Ecumenical Review* 46 (1994), pp. 383-393; Brigham, *Sustaining the Hope for Unity*, pp. 99-100.

⁴¹ LC 1920 Encyclical, p. 20.

⁴² LC 1920 Encyclical, p. 20.

⁴³ LC 1920 Encyclical, p. 21. The Encyclical Letter here seems to go beyond the report of the Committee itself, which shows much less focus on national identity.

⁴⁴ LC 1920 Encyclical, p. 21.

⁴⁵ LC 1920 Encyclical, p. 21.

congregations.⁴⁶ This suggests a vision of one church in one geographical area, united from several denominations, as in the proposed Church of South India.

At the same time, however, the Committee considering the development of Anglican Provinces was recommending the establishment of Anglican provinces, bringing together dioceses into with their own constitutions. Similar structures seem also to have been in the minds of some in the Mission Committee who saw challenges in “the settlement of a Diocese in which Europeans and indigenous congregations exist side by side in one area,” recommending that provisions should be made “in the one Synod of Province for the utmost freedom of development of the races side by side ... while never losing sight of the ideal of the one Catholic Church.”⁴⁷ These structures were to be national, or supra-national regions structures, rather than “sub-divisions of National Churches.”⁴⁸ In the discussion of mission and of Anglican identity, therefore, the national level seems to have been viewed as the most significant.

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that the bishops who met for the 1920 Lambeth Conference were grappling with questions of nationalism and internationalism and with how these connected with the identity and the unity of the church. In setting their focus on national identity, the bishops recognised that, “National loyalty has often led men into exclusiveness, jealousy and hatred. No selfishness in the world has been so persistent or so ruthless as national selfishness.”⁴⁹ As a counter to this, they affirmed a sense of Christian belonging that transcended the national: “Each of us belongs by his birth to some one of the many nations of the world. But every Christian belongs by his second birth to one holy nation, which is God’s own possession.”⁵⁰ It is in this higher unity, they suggested, that “nationality finds its redemption: while national characteristics are preserved for noble use and mutual benefit.”⁵¹ Here, “the love of God encompasses all and reconciles men and nations in the brotherhood of redeemed humanity.”⁵² The bishops’ affirmation of the importance of the nations and nationalism was thus expressed in the context of an understanding of a larger Christian identity as transcending and completing the national. Nonetheless, as the discussion of missionary problems shows, for the Anglican bishops, the united Church tended to be conceived of first and foremost as a national Church, albeit on which could only find its essence – and thus is internationality – in recognising its relationship to other national Churches.

⁴⁶ LC 1920 Encyclical, p. 21 and compare LC 1920 Reports, pp. 85-86.

⁴⁷ LC 1920 Reports, p. 86.

⁴⁸ LC 1920 Reports, p. 80.

⁴⁹ LC 1920 Encyclical, p. 22.

⁵⁰ LC 1920 Encyclical, p. 22.

⁵¹ LC 1920 Encyclical, p. 22.

⁵² LC 1920 Encyclical, p. 22.