Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:

https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology

https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb

PayPal https://paypal.me/robbradshaw

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

THE CHURCH IN NORTH AND CENTRAL EUROPE.

By the Rev. F. Bate, M.A., B.Litt., Foreign Secretary Colonial and Continental Church Society.

THE consecration of the Rev. B. Staunton Batty as suffragan bishop to the Bishop of London, with the title of "Bishop of Fulham," marks a further and definite stage, though certainly not a final one, in the history of episcopal supervision of the chaplaincies in North and Central Europe. The next step will undoubtedly be the creation of a separate diocese, for which, incidentally, it is to be hoped some more inspiring and appropriate title may be found.

We are apt to think of English chaplaincies on the Continent of Europe as things of fairly modern foundation, whereas, it is probably true to say, that there never has been a time since the days of William the Conqueror when English clergy have not been ministering to congregations, small or large, in some part of Europe. Chaplains in fairly large numbers crossed with the armies of English kings when they went to battle for French territory. English incumbents filled many of the churches in the territory that was held or conquered. In later days English merchant communities, established in various foreign parts, requisitioned the services of an English minister. Still later, when Elizabeth threw troops into Holland and received in pawn sundry fortresses and garrisons, chaplains in large numbers were employed in the field and in the towns. So down to our own era when, as commerce, industry, education, diplomacy, etc., take our sons and daughters to Continental towns, chaplaincies are established and clergy provided.

How far in pre-Reformation days the question of episcopal supervision of such chaplaincies was raised or solved is not very clear. Not without interest is a bull of Urban VI giving the Archbishop of Canterbury jurisdiction over Calais and its neighbourhood. He was led to do this because "representations were lately made to us on behalf of our dear children the curates, and rectors, and other presbyters and priests, and indeed of the whole territory of Calais and other towns and lands adjoining . . . and in Picardy, and under the rule and protection of our very dear son in Christ, Richard II, renowned King of England . . . on account of the many schismatics that flourish, and presume publicly to support and favour that spawn of iniquity Robert, formerly cardinal and presbyter of the Basilica of the twelve apostles, now antipope." For some time at all events the jurisdiction of Canterbury in that area was effective.

Since the Reformation there are in the provision of Episcopal control five distinct stages, of which the consecration of Mr. Batty is the last. The first stage was reached through the zeal and

enthusiasm for Church order on the part of Laud, then Bishop of London, which moved him to attempt to bring into order and discipline the many chaplains ministering to regiments, garrisons, and trading communities, particularly in the Netherlands, who "having no superior to overlook them gave divers scandals (he said) by following drinking and other foul courses of life." The probability is that the root of the trouble was not dissoluteness of living but irregularity of Church government and worship. Many of the chaplains were confessedly Presbyterians; some held their Churchmanship loosely, with the result that disorders were decidedly prevalent. Many used a liturgy other than the Book of Common Prayer: they became members of the Netherlands Synod and put themselves under its discipline: in some cases they took part in the ordination of ministers. James I had engaged in negotiations with them and had proposed to appoint a moderator over these chaplains, but this "was thought by them to be a preface to bring in a bishop amongst them; which that sort likes not. So that was utterly refused." James gave up the task. Charles I also for some time suffered these irregularities without too much protest.

Laud however was determined to bring them all into submission. He was in constant communication with Dudley Carleton and Lord Conway: he persistently urged action upon the Privy Council. Finally, in 1633, he succeeded in getting passed by the Privy Council an order placing all ministers and churches in foreign parts, from Holland to far Barbadoes, under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of London as their diocesan and ordering the use of the liturgy and discipline of the Church of England in all chaplaincies. The order failed, as it was bound to fail. Use was made of the order to cause trouble and inconvenience, with possibly loss of his employment, to an individual chaplain here and there. Merchant Companies were roundly rated for lapses from grace in making appointments, but as a piece of effective legislation the measure entirely failed. Nor could it well be otherwise, for there was no means of enforcing it in the case of an unwilling congregation.

No further attempt at real oversight was made until the nineteenth century. Theoretically throughout the intervening period, successive Bishops of London had episcopal authority over the whole of the Continent; in reality little or no authority was exercised.

The second stage was reached in 1825 when Dr. Luscombe was consecrated bishop. Luscombe had been resident for some years in Normandy, where he was engaged chiefly in educational work. He knew the Continent sufficiently well to be aware that the condition of English Church congregations left much to be desired. There were said to be fifty thousand English people resident in France, for whom the supply of churches and clergy was totally inadequate. Few of the clergy held a bishop's licence; none was subject to regular supervision; confirmations were almost unknown and everywhere was laxity of practice. Luscombe consulted friends in England and secured the interest of Archdeacon Hook and his

son. They suggested to the authorities that for the continental work there should be appointed and consecrated a suffragan to the Bishop of London. After considerable discussion the Bishop of London, Peel, Canning and others decided against the proposal. Chiefly it was objected that the French Government might regard it as a "piece of unwarrantable intrusion."

Finding this avenue blocked, W. F. Hook turned his thoughts in another direction. Recalling the consecration by Scotch bishops, in 1784, of Dr. Seabury, the first American bishop, he suggested similar procedure in this case. After prolonged correspondence it was agreed to consecrate Luscombe as missionary bishop to the British residents in Europe, he pledging himself to renounce all offers of preferment in England. With the tacit consent of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Peel and Canning, Luscombe was consecrated by Scotch bishops on March 20, 1825. The Letters of Collation delivered to him contained this commission: "He is sent by us, representing the Scotch Episcopal Church, to the Continent of Europe, not as a diocesan bishop in the modern or limited sense of the word, but for a purpose similar to that for which Titus was left by St. Paul in Crete, that he may 'set in order the things that are wanting' among such of the natives of Great Britain and Ireland and the Episcopal Church in Scotland, and to these may be added any members of the Episcopal Church of America who may choose to be resident in Europe."

Let it be said at once that the scheme was not a success. It is to be doubted whether Luscombe had the qualities necessary for so difficult a mission: it is equally doubtful whether any man could have succeeded. At the very outset there was heated controversy concerning his mission; many Churchmen regarded it with deep disapproval. Among the chaplains few showed any desire to avail themselves of his services. Some openly refused to acknowledge his authority: one went so far as to defy him openly and to submit a case to Dr. Stephen Lushington of Doctors' Commons. Lushington replied: "I am of opinion that neither the Bishop of London, nor any other prelate, has any jurisdiction, power, or authority . . . nor ever exercised or claimed any."

Luscombe had become in 1825 chaplain at Paris, and embassy chaplain in 1828. There he built at his own expense the present Embassy Church, which he sold to Mr. Chamier when he left Paris in 1846 for Switzerland, where he died that same year.

He lived to see achieved the third stage. In 1842 there was created by Letters Patent the Bishopric of Gibraltar with a jurisdiction including all the shores of the Mediterranean with the exception of parts of the north coast of Africa. By this means the Bishop of London was relieved of a large measure of theoretical responsibility and fairly adequate provision was thus made for a number of the European chaplaincies.

This new creation revived in full measure discussion with regard to provision for North and Central Europe. Scheme after scheme was proposed and then assailed. In turn Heligoland, the

Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and other places were proposed as best situated to give a seat and title. Many objected to any and all proposals, but were willing to further the appointment of archdeacons under the Bishop of London, and the provision of special arrangements for confirmations. Meanwhile there could be no doubt about the need for some provision. Congregations were being badly served: scandals were rife: many of the chaplains were treating the services as a mere means of livelihood. Dr. Burgess, Rector of Chelsea, formerly chaplain at Rome, after full and careful inquiry, went so far as to say that a large proportion of the chaplains were men who for various offences could not venture to live in England. Yet it was not until 1884 that the fourth step was taken.

By that time the two societies which so largely assist the Continental work of the Church were becoming increasingly concerned at the very low standard prevailing in English church life on the Continent. Anxious to remedy if possible this reproach to the Church, the Committee of the Colonial and Continental Church Society in 1884, offered to be responsible for a reasonable stipend and for all travelling expenses if the Bishop of London would commission a retired colonial bishop as his suffragan for this particular work. Eventually this offer was accepted, and Dr. Titcomb, formerly Bishop of Rangoon, was so commissioned.

The precedent thus created has been followed until the present time. In succession Dr. Titcomb (1884–1888), Dr. Wilkinson (1888–1911), formerly Bishop of Zululand, and Dr. Bury (1911–1926), formerly Bishop of British Honduras, have rendered excellent service under difficult conditions. The results have been uniformly good, though the arrangement was by no means ideal. A jurisdiction so immense (800,000 square miles) necessitates a vast amount of travel for which a bishop who has already retired from some other work is not best suited.

One of the chief difficulties has been that of finance. Dr. Titcomb was content to receive a nominal sum of £150 a year over and above the cost of travel, but for even so small a sum it was hardly right that he should be dependent upon a grant from one society. This objection was met by the appointment of a special committee consisting of representatives of the Bishop of London, the C.C.C.S. and the S.P.G., to consider ways and means of creating an endowment fund. Unfortunately this scheme ultimately failed. Bishop Wilkinson and Bishop Bury were provided with an income by appointment to a city living, but to such an arrangement there are still greater objections.

Now, for the first time in the history of the English Church, we have the consecration by English bishops of one for this particular work. The next step will no doubt be the creation of a diocese quite independent of London. Whether that would be altogether desirable is open to question. Meanwhile we confidently look for the expansion and deepening of spiritual life under the enthusiastic leadership of the new bishop.