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Notes on the Use of the Word Protestant

BY THE REV. C. SYDNEY CARTER, D.D., F.R.Hist.S.

PROFESSOR LEHMANN'S Article in the December *Churchman* is in its very title ("A Protestant Critique of Anglicanism") a conspicuous illustration of the misuse of the word "Protestant." Throughout his essay he asserts a false antithesis between *Anglican* and *Protestant* which is mischievously misleading and quite unhistorical. It would seem that Dr. Lehmann has forgotten that the term *protestant* was coined by the Lutherans at the Diet of Spire (1529) as a positive affirmation, a *pro-testans* or 'witnessing for' the Catholic Faith of the early Church—that the Word of God is "the only truth" and "the sure rule of doctrine and life which can never fail or deceive us." Thus the 'protestant' was one who witnessed for positive Scriptural truth.

Our Anglican Reformers fully endorsed this 'protestant' appeal and witness to the sufficiency of Holy Scripture as the apostolic rule of Faith, especially in their Article VI and in their Ordinal. Cranmer declared that "the Scripture ought to be to us the rules and judges of all Christian doctrine."¹ The learned early Caroline divine, Dean Jackson, declares: "We protestants of the Reformed Churches are the truest Christians on earth and the most conspicuous members of the Holy Catholic Church."² And all the Caroline divines regarded the Anglican Church as pre-eminently the Protestant Church. The usual division then was 'Puritans,' 'Protestants' (Anglicans), and 'Papists.' Thus Sanderson, the author of the Prayer Book 'Preface,' declares that "the episcopal (that is the true English Protestant) divines stand in the middle way distinguished from the Papist on the one hand and the Puritan on the other." "The Church of England has nourished me up to become a Christian and a Protestant." "The downright sober English Protestant makes the written Word of God the sole and perfect rule of all matters of faith; in this religion I have lived and hope to die."³

The Bishops in 1673 declared in the House of Lords that the "Protestant religion is comprehended in the 39 Articles, the liturgy and the Homilies of the Church of England."⁴ And again in 1717 they told George I that the Church of England was "the chief of the Protestant Churches," while Archbishop Tenison in admitting that the Presbyterian Church of Scotland was "as true a Protestant Church as the Church of England," added "though not so perfect."⁵ Anglican teaching and worship is still officially described in our Coronation Oath as "the true profession of the Gospel and the Protestant Reformed religion," while the strong Victorian High Churchman, Bishop Christopher Wordsworth, declared that the

¹ *Reformatio Legum*, Tit. 1, c. 15.

² *Works*, XII. 159. (1844).

³ Wordsworth, *Christian Institutes*, IV. 559. 577. 581.

⁴ Campbell, *Lives of the Chancellors*, IV. 187. (1857).

⁵ *Life*, 393. (1948).

"Church of England became Protestant at the Reformation that it might be more truly and purely Catholic."¹ The late Dean Hole, a definite High Churchman, well reminded American Episcopalians that the Anglican Church "is Protestant because it is Catholic, that it is Protestant because it is Scriptural, and as such repels innovation."² Instead therefore of the antagonism which Prof. Lehmann posits between Catholic and Protestant, and Anglicanism and Protestantism, these are mutually inclusive terms. For so long as a Church continues to bear witness to Scriptural and Catholic truth, so long will it be an essentially 'Protestant' Church in the correct historic sense of the term. As Archbishop Benson said, "Protestant is not a word to be forgotten, but to be understood."

Prof. Lehmann adopts an equally false antithesis between 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' when he equates Catholicism with Romanism. For the Protestant is the truest Catholic. Consequently our Anglican Reformers fully agreed with Bishop Latimer that "it is one thing to say Catholic Church and quite another to say Roman Church." Bishop Cosin in the next century declared that "the Churches professing the true Catholic faith and religion" were "the Protestant and best Reformed Churches."³ The Oxford Regius Professor of Divinity in my day warned us that "the opposite of Catholic was not Protestant but heterodox, and the opposite of Protestant was not Catholic but Papist." The Early Church's hallmark of Catholicity was the acceptance of the Nicene Creed, and this was fully accepted in all the Reformed Confessions of Faith. Therefore to oppose Protestant and Catholic is, in effect, to declare that Protestants deny the distinctive Catholic Faith expressed in the ancient Creeds.

Dr. Lehmann also appears to regard Tractarian medieval Catholic teaching as official Anglicanism, since he defines "Anglicanism" as "the historic form of Christianity which regards the norm of Christian Faith and life as defined by the Episcopate." "The Episcopate defines the pattern in terms of which the Christian Faith and life are to be understood and practised." But one fact is abundantly clear that official Anglicanism has never held that Episcopacy is the *esse* of the Church. Such a claim is contradicted by Anglican Reformed tradition and practice. For Presbyterians were given cures of souls in the Church of England and their ordination described by an Archbishop of Canterbury as "a laudable form and rite." Even Bishop Gore admits that the "Church of England imposes upon the clergy no obligation to hold the dogma that only episcopal ordinations are valid and only priestly consecrations of the eucharist, and that bishops are of the *esse* of the Church"⁴; and Bishop A. E. J. Rawlinson confirms this statement in his recent essay on *The Genius of the Church of England* when he says that at the Reformation "the continuity of the Episcopate was retained—though it was only *just* retained, and at the time not for any reason connected with the idea of Apostolic

¹ *Theophilus Anglicanus*, 177.

² *Little Tour in America*, 161-2. (1895).

³ *Works*, I. 32.

⁴ *Basis of Anglican Fellowship*, p. 34. (1914).

Succession.”¹ It is true that after 1662 episcopal ordination was made obligatory for ministering *in the Church of England*, but this rigid rule was not consistently enforced since after 1662 Presbyterians continued to minister in the restored Episcopal Church of Scotland, and Lutheran S.P.G. missionaries, in India, under the episcopal regime there after 1813.

Dr. Lehmann also affirms that Protestant doctrine is ‘irreconcilable’ with Anglican. But our earliest Commentator on our authorised Anglican doctrines was at pains to prove that our Articles were “agreeable to the extant Confessions of all neighbour (non-episcopal) Churches Christianly reformed,”² while forty years later Bishop Hall declared that the “Church of England and her sisters of the Reformation accord in every point of Christian doctrine without the least variation.”³ Anglican official doctrine is the same now as it was then, and to quote Bishop Rawlinson again, “Provided that Episcopacy and episcopal ordination be retained in practice the Church does not officially lay down any theological doctrine of Apostolic Succession.”⁴

To accept special ‘Anglo-Catholic’ teaching as truly expressing Anglican doctrine is seriously inaccurate and misleading since it can find no support in our authorised Anglican formularies. It would be vigorously repudiated by all Evangelical Churchmen. As Anglicans we have a Protestant-Catholic heritage which we must jealously defend and preserve.

¹ *The Genius of the Church of England*, p. 11. (1948).

² Rogers, *Catholic Doctrine of the Church of England*, p. 3 (Parker Society).

³ *Works*, V. 56.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Correction. In the article in the last issue by Canon Charles W. F. Smith there was an error of punctuation on page 206 which might have given rise to a false impression. The sentence beginning on line 13 should have read: “The Washington Cathedral is only incidentally the cathedral of the diocese. . . . It is commonly (but not at all officially) known as ‘the National Cathedral’.”