The Anglican Episcopate in India

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One hundred and fifty years ago this December, Thomas Fanshaw Middleton, first Bishop of Calcutta, arrived in India. A Church which values the historic episcopate cannot be her true self when deprived of it, but the circumstances of the arrival of the first Anglican Bishop in India did not seem to give promise of a great spiritual development, not only in India itself, but in the whole of what we now know as the Anglican communion. Yet in the providence of God, that was how it was to turn out.

Middleton's arrival was the result of the East India Act of 1813, which renewed the East India Company's Charter for another twenty years. Section XLIX of this Act provided: 'Whereas no sufficient provision hath hitherto been made for the maintenance and support of a Church Establishment in the British Territories in the East Indies and other parts within the limits of the said Company's Charter, Be it therefore enacted that in case it shall please His Majesty by his Royal Letters Patent under the Great Seal of the United Kingdom to erect, found and constitute One Bishoprick for the whole of the British Territories in the East Indies and parts aforesaid . . . and from time to time to nominate a Bishop . . . to such Bishoprick . . . the Court of Directors of the said Company during such time as the said Territorial acquisitions shall remain in possession of the said Company "shall pay a salary of £5,000 a year to the Bishop".' It will be noticed that the declared object of this appointment was the spiritual welfare of the Company's English servants; and the clauses founding the bishopric were therefore less violently attacked in Parliament than the accompanying provisions which allowed the admission to the Company's territories, for the purpose of the introduction among their inhabitants of 'useful knowledge and religious and moral improvement', of 'persons desirous of going to and residing in India for the purpose of accomplishing these benevolent designs'. This was rightly understood as opening India to the work of Christian missionaries, and was

violently but unsuccessfully opposed by the large party among the Company's servants who believed that any countenance given to Christianity would so alarm the prejudices of their non-Christian subjects as to endanger their newly established rule. It was even suggested that the appearance of an Anglican Bishop in India would have a dangerously alarming effect; but Lord Teignmouth, who, as Sir John Shore, had been Governor-General, and was now the first President of the Bible Society, on being asked in his evidence before the House of Commons, 'Allowing the opinion to have existed in India of the intention of the Government to force the Christian religion on the natives, would the sending out of a Bishop tend to strengthen that opinion?' replied, 'I should think it would be received with the utmost indifference by the natives'. Wilberforce's eloquence was a main instrument in securing the passage of these clauses, as well as those establishing the bishopric; but the opposition had been powerful enough to suggest that altogether these religious clauses constituted a very dangerous experiment.

The Letters Patent founding the new bishopric were issued on 2nd May, 1814. They constituted the territories of the East India Company into the diocese of Calcutta, appointed Thomas Fanshaw Middleton to be the first Bishop, under the supervision of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and required the Archbishop to consecrate him. They then proceeded to grant 'to the said Thomas Fanshaw Middleton and his successors, Bishops of Calcutta, full power and authority to confer the orders of Deacon and of Priest, to confirm those that are baptized and come to years of discretion, and to perform all other functions peculiar and appropriate to the office of a Bishop within the limits of the said see but not elsewhere, such Bishop and his successors being first duly ordained or consecrated bishops'. This extraordinary wording, which was common form at that time in the Letters Patent constituting what were then called colonial bishoprics, certainly suggested that the spiritual as well as the temporal powers of a Bishop might be conferred by the State. That it was not so taken is clear from the words used by Bishop Heber in 1825, in rebuking a chaplain who had objected to some of his arrangements: 'A Bishop is not the creature of the civil magistrate. His authority existed before the civil power had recognized him; it existed while the civil sword was bared against him in fiercest cruelty; it is recognized as existing already and independently of the civil power in those very enactments whereby the civil power controls and regulates its exercise.' Yet nobody seems to have protested against the phrases till Selwyn, the first Bishop in New Zealand, put it on record in 1841 that 'whatever meaning the words of it (his Letters Patent) may be construed to bear, I conceive that those functions which are merely spiritual are con-

veyed to the Bishop by the act of consecration alone'. Middleton's Letters Patent proceeded to give him as Bishop of Calcutta authority to exercise jurisdiction 'spiritual and ecclesiastical' throughout his diocese 'according to the Ecclesiastical Laws of our Realm of England', to grant licences 'to all ministers and chaplains of all churches and chapels and other places where Divine Service is celebrated according to the rites of the Church of England', and to visit 'all such ministers and Chaplains and all Priests and Deacons in Holy Orders of the United Church of England and Ireland resident in the Diocese'.

Middleton was consecrated Bishop of Calcutta in Lambeth Palace chapel on 8th May, 1814, almost furtively, the usual practice of publishing the sermon preached on the occasion being omitted for fear of alarming public opinion; and when he arrived in Calcutta in the following December he received a somewhat grudging welcome. The clergy of the diocese at that time consisted almost entirely of the Company's chaplains, appointed and paid by the Company. They had been completely under the authority of the Company's civil and military officials, which had even extended in some cases to requiring men who were only in Deacon's orders to celebrate the Holy Communion. Many of the chaplains were quite satisfied with this state of things and no more anxious for the Bishop's superintendence than the Company was. In 1815 the Supreme Government in India gave the new Bishop the power of appointing the chaplains to their stations but, when this was reported to the Court of Directors in London, they disapproved and required the stationing of the chaplains to be made strictly by the rule of seniority. Nevertheless in practice the Bishop's advice came generally to be taken in these matters.

Besides the chaplains, there were in 1814 the missionary clergy. Although missions had been carried on in South India by the Anglican S.P.C.K. for about eighty years, with a fair degree of success, the missionaries were all Lutherans, and these missionaries from time to time conferred Lutheran orders on some of their Indian helpers, who were then known as 'country priests'. These Lutherans could not come under the strictly ecclesiastical supervision of an Anglican Bishop or receive his licence. The C.M.S. took immediate advantage of the opening of India to missionaries to send its first four missionaries here. Two of these were Germans in Lutheran orders, but the other two, Norton and Greenwood, were the first Englishmen in Anglican orders to come to India specifically as missionaries, except one who had worked for a few months in 1789 under the S.P.C.K. in Bengal, but had almost immediately accepted a chaplaincy and left the mission.

The C.M.S. were anxious that their missionaries should receive licences from the Bishop, and thus come under his authority, but Middleton found many difficulties in his way. He came

to India deeply impressed with the need for great caution and prudence in his attitude to missionaries and their work, though experience, especially that gained in his first visitation tour, which lasted a year, and took him to Madras, Kerala, Bombay and Ceylon, soon convinced him that the alarm had been exaggerated. A missionary clergyman had for centuries been an unknown figure in the Church of England, and it was difficult to fit him into any familiar category. The C.M.S., as a voluntary society connected with the Church of England, was a new phenomenon and Middleton was not sympathetic to the Evangelical party which had been responsible for founding it. He noticed that missionaries often seemed tempted to spend their time in ministering to their fellow-countrymen instead of undertaking their proper but more difficult duty of commending their faith to non-Christians; and he did not want to give the East India Company any excuse for failing to increase their inadequate establishment of chaplains. On the other hand, it was clear that the missionary clergy helped to provide the services of the Church where they would otherwise have been altogether lacking; if they were to continue to do so unrecognized by the Bishop, the result would be the strange anomaly of an Anglican Bishop presiding over a small company of Government chaplains, whilst increasing congregations, European as well as Indian, were ministered to by duly ordained Anglican clergy in complete independence of him. Such a result was obviously self-stultifying. Moreover a legal opinion was given that the Letters Patent, in placing 'all Priests and Deacons of the United Church of England and Ireland' under his authority, had included the missionary clergy. Middleton must either 'license them or silence them'. The latter he could not do in good conscience. He remained sorely perplexed about the question up to the time of his death in 1822, and the very slow pace of communication between England and India added to his difficulties; but he was moving in the direction of a more positive attitude towards the missionaries. His views were made known in England, and his successor, Reginald Heber, had the advantage of being able to discuss the matter with the authorities at home before he left for his diocese. Heber who, though not himself an Evangelical, had contacts and sympathy with the party, which were denied to Middleton, would in any case have been inclined to take a less rigid line in the matter; and on his arrival in India one of his first acts was to license all the missionary clergy in Anglican orders. The matter, however, did not quite end there. Numerous problems arose concerning the limits of the authority of the Bishop and of the Society over the ordained missionaries of the C.M.S.,—problems which had their counterpart in the questions which arose concerning the authority of the Bishop and the Government over the chaplains; and which resembled, though both parties might have

been surprised to be told so, those which occurred in the medieval Church and the modern Roman Catholic Church between episcopal authority and the great religious orders.

Another difficulty arose about the Bishop's power to ordain Indians. The C.M.S. had hoped that Middleton would ordain two of their catechists, Abdul Masih, Martyn's only convert, and William Bowley, the son of an English soldier by an Indian mother; but Middleton doubted his legal power to do so. Were they included among the 'King's loving subjects', and if not could they, as the law stood at that time, take the oaths of abjuration and allegiance as required by the canons of the Church of England? Eventually the C.M.S., at Middleton's own private suggestion, had Lutheran orders conferred on them by Lutheran missionaries in their service. But here again was a stultifying restriction; and before Heber came to India it had been removed by a further Act of Parliament which made it plain that the Bishop of Calcutta might modify the ecclesiastical laws of England in cases where it appeared to him to be necessary. Heber found Abdul Masih and Bowley both very eager for Anglican orders, and in fact neither of them had ever been in any real sense of the word Lutherans; and he ordained both of them in Calcutta towards the end of 1825, as well as one of the German Lutheran missionaries of the C.M.S. This re-ordination drew a remonstrance from one of the Lutheran missionaries who had taken part in the former ordination of Bowley, and in his reply Heber explained his position, which was that common among high church Anglicans at the time: 'You suppose that I generally admit ordination by Presbyters without a Bishop to be valid. I do not admit this. All I said was that when a Christian nation has, by unfortunate circumstances, lost its apostolical succession of Bishops, the continuance of Ministers being a thing absolutely needful and essential, those good men are not to be condemned who perpetuated it by the best means in their power. And were I to return to Germany, I would again, as before, humbly and thankfully avail myself of the preaching and Sacramental ordinances of the Lutheran Evangelical Church, not doubting that they are a true Church of Christ, and that the Spirit of God is with them, as I trust He is with us also'.[1] Yet 'it does not follow that, where this supposed deficiency may be supplied, it may not be advisable for a Minister of the Gospel either to seek for fresh orders himself or to counsel others to do so. And this may be more especially advisable where his or their ministerial utility is likely to be much augmented by a closer union with a Church under (what I conceive to be) the ancient discipline.'

[1] This would not extend to English Dissenters or Scottish Presbyterians, who might have had episcopal orders, but deliberately refused them on principle.

Heber saw no weight in the argument that orders cannot be repeated without profanation. 'Ordination', he said, 'stands on a different ground from baptism. It is not a new creation, but a solemn devotion of a man to a particular office accompanied by prayer, and, as we believe, an accession of the Holy Spirit. But, though a man can be only once *regenerate*, he may be often *renewed* and *quickened* by the Holy Spirit; and there is no reason *a priori* why he should not receive an *outward ordination* (as he certainly may receive an *inward call*) to a new sphere of action in the Church, as well as to a new office in it.'

Similar questions arose in connection with the S.P.C.K. missions to South India, which in 1826 were transferred to the S.P.G. So long as the S.P.C.K. exercised only a distant control over its missions, and there was no Anglican Bishop in India, no great difficulties had arisen over co-operation, but these conditions were now changed. Episcopal ordination was now available for the Indian clergy, and it was natural that Anglican societies, anxious to build a Church in India on what they considered the best model, should no longer accept Lutheran ordination for them. About this time the India Committee of S.P.G. decreed that 'all the missionaries should henceforth be episcopally ordained, and that the Society would be precluded from exercising the same latitude in respect of orders as had formerly been practised'. This, however, did not involve the re-ordination either of missionaries or 'country priests'. The first Indian in this part of the world to receive Anglican orders was John Devsagayam, who was in the service of the C.M.S. He was ordained Deacon by Bishop Turner in 1830, and Priest by Corrie, the first Bishop of Madras, in 1836.

On the whole, therefore, the transition from Lutheran to Anglican orders in the Anglican missions occasioned little difficulty. A temporary schism was caused by Rhenius, a German Lutheran missionary in the service of C.M.S., who had been remarkably successful in building up the Church in Tinnevelly, but who was disconnected from the Society in 1835 for attacking Anglican Church order; but, though he was himself in Lutheran orders, he did not do so on Lutheran principles, but on those of the newly formed Plymouth Brethren, whose views he had come to accept; and the schism ended with his death in 1838. After 1820, even the German missionaries who came to India in the service of C.M.S. were usually in Anglican orders. It will be noticed that the method by which Anglican orders gradually took the place of Lutheran in the Churches founded by the Anglican missionary societies bears some analogy to that which has been adopted for uniting episcopal and non-episcopal ministries in the Church of South India.

It was obvious that a single Bishop was inadequate to the proper shepherding of the Anglican Church in India, especially as Ceylon had been added to the diocese in 1817 and New

South Wales and Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) and their dependencies in 1823. Particularly exhausting were the long visitation tours, sometimes under conditions of real hardship. By 1832 four Bishops of Calcutta had already died at their posts; and each death entailed a vacancy of many months, till the news could reach England, and a new Bishop could be appointed, consecrated and sent out to India. So, when the East India Company's Charter was again due for renewal in 1833, the new Act contained a clause that, 'whereas the present Diocese of Calcutta is of too great an extent for the incumbent thereof to perform efficiently all the duties of the office without endangering his health and life', it should be divided and separate dioceses of Madras and Bombay created, subject to the Bishop of Calcutta as Metropolitan. In 1836 Australia received a Bishop of her own; and in 1845 the see of Colombo was created for Ceylon by Letters Patent, and made subject to the metropolitical see of Calcutta. No further Indian bishoprics were ever created under the authority of an Act of Parliament, and the three huge sees were obviously insufficient to provide episcopal supervision for the growing Indian Church, as well as for the greatly increased establishment of chaplains. Various attempts were made to get over the legal difficulties involved. In Tinnevelly, where the Indian Church was especially numerous and well developed, the expedient was tried of consecrating two outstanding missionaries as assistants to the Bishop of Madras, one for the S.P.G. and one for the C.M.S. congregations. In theory this experiment was open to the greatest possible objections, for it divided the Church both on racial and on party lines. It worked better than might have been expected, mainly because of the quality of Bishops Caldwell and Sargent and their cordial relations with one another; but it was happily not continued. It presently came to be realized that it was possible to found new Indian dioceses provided the Government was not asked to supply the salaries of the Bishops, and provided that their authority was to be exercised over the members of their Church who accepted it, like the bye-laws of any voluntary society, and no claim was made to have it enforced by the power of the state. By the 1920's there were eleven Anglican dioceses in India, besides the dioceses of Colombo and Rangoon.

To twentieth-century minds, the idea of dioceses founded and regulated by Acts of Parliament and Letters Patent is sufficiently startling, but the Church of England in the early nineteenth century was in a peculiarly helpless position in relation to the state. Between 1717 and 1852 the Convocations of Canterbury and York, the ancient representative assemblies of the Church, were not allowed to meet for business. There was therefore no other way in which anything could be done at all. But the extension of the Anglican episcopate into new countries where conditions were utterly unlike those in England brought

its remedy with it, and the Episcopal Church in Scotland and the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America were already proving that an Anglican Church could exist independently of the state. The first synod, in the sense of an officially summoned meeting of the clergy, to be held anywhere in the Anglican Church since 1717, except in Scotland and America, was held by Bishop Selwyn of New Zealand in 1844. In 1852 the Convocation of Canterbury again began to meet as an active body, and in 1867 the first Lambeth Conference met. Conditions in what were still called the colonial Churches favoured the growth of synodal government, with the laity as well as the clergy represented in the councils of the Church. A legal opinion given in 1866, that, after representative government had been granted to a colony, the Crown no longer had the power of founding bishoprics and appointing Bishops within it by Letters Patent, made it necessary for the Anglican Churches in the colonies to devise other methods of appointing Bishops, and furthered the growth of synodal government.

India was not a self-governing colony, but the Anglican Church here shared to some extent in the movement. The Bishops began to meet from time to time to take counsel together. One of the most notable of these occasions was their meeting in 1876, at the time of the consecration of Bishops Caldwell and Sargent, when it was resolved 'That the time has come to provide a system of synodal action both Diocesan and Provincial, and that we undertake to ascertain the feelings of the Clergy and Laity of our several Dioceses in regard to the constitution of Diocesan Synods'. Legal hesitations, however, prevented anything very noteworthy coming from this at the time. In 1883 the Government of Ceylon withdrew the salaries which had hitherto been paid to the Bishop and clergy there, and this necessitated not only providing endowments to make good the financial loss, but also the development of synodal government, now that the Anglican Church in Ceylon was no longer a state Church. This was done with great ability under the lead of Bishop R. S. Copleston, who in 1902 was translated to Calcutta as Metropolitan.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, change was in the air. The truly Indian part of the Anglican Church in India was now far more numerous than the chaplains with their English congregations. There was a vigorous nationalist movement, and even at the time of the Morley-Minto reforms in 1910 it was clear that self-government was on the way, however distant the prospect then seemed. Soon after 1920 Church union had reached the stage of being a practical proposition. An Anglican Church still bound by the old ties to the British Government would be in no position to play its part in the new day. But times had changed in England, too. In 1919, by the Enabling Act, the Church Assembly had been set up, a body

which could discuss and pass measures concerning the Church of England and, though they still required the assent of Parliament, this seemed unlikely to be refused to a measure which came with the full approval of the Church behind it. It was decided to bring forward a measure in the Church Assembly which would free the Anglican Church in India from the legal bonds which bound her to the Church of England, whilst leaving intact her spiritual union with the rest of the Anglican communion. As it turned out, an Act of Parliament was required to do this, as well as the Church Assembly measure, but both were passed in 1927. Henceforward the Anglican Church in India was free to appoint its own Bishops by methods devised by itself, and to govern itself by its own Episcopal Synod, General Council and Diocesan Councils, which had in fact existed for some time as voluntary bodies without legal status. Independence came for the Anglican Church in India seventeen years before it came for the state.

The Anglican episcopate in India underwent strange and unexpected developments, which would have amazed those who first planted it here. The story might well be described as that of the Church which found itself. The early Bishops were constantly forced to face the question of the essential nature of episcopacy, and to separate it from the accidents with which the particular history and conditions of English Church life had confused it. The Bishops in India were without exception active fathers-in-God in a manner which few English Bishops at the beginning of the nineteenth century attempted. Moreover, even from the first, they found their connection with the state almost intolerably hampering. The relations between Church and state have undergone many changes in their long history, and have never been without their problems. It cannot be taken for granted that a secular state and a voluntary Church are always and everywhere the right solution. In England, where the state grew up from the beginning of its history in an inextricable union with the Church, there is still much to be said for a close connection between them. But in India the connection was almost entirely harmful. In the early days it almost prevented the development of an episcopal Church in India at all, outside the exotic chaplaincy establishment; and it hampered the development of an adequate and suitable episcopate for the growing Indian Church, even when the state-appointed Bishops had become the friends and helpers of the missionaries in the work of evangelism. Yet with all these difficulties, the Anglican episcopate in India eventually developed into, and helped to give to the Church of South India, an institution far more evangelical and primitive than the contemporary episcopate of the Church of England from which it stemmed. In India, the Church came to know what episcopacy is really for, and the whole Church is surely the better for that discovery.