

The Lambeth Conference: Theology, History, Polity and Purpose

Edited by PAUL AVIS AND BENJAMIN M GUYER

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Those in the habit of using electronic calendars linked up to those of other people's are well used to appointments and the like simply appearing in the diary with an invitation to accept or decline the event. Sometime last year the Lambeth Conference, planned for July 2020, appeared in my diary and the diaries of other members of staff at Lambeth Palace. Planning for this large-scale event is well under way and the website (www.lambethconference.org) is up and running with such information about the conference as is currently available.

This book, edited jointly by Professor Paul Avis, the former Secretary of the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity and a distinguished contributor to this *Journal*, and Dr Benjamin Guyer of the University of Tennessee Martin, is a timely and comprehensive resource for those seeking to find out more about the history and significance of the Lambeth Conference. Reading through the text it is clear that, while each individual Lambeth Conference (and there have been 14) has its own character and is an event in itself, there is also an enduring character to the Lambeth Conference as an entity. This character has built up over time.

The Lambeth Conference was born in controversy. The teaching of Bishop John Colenso of Natal, emerging biblical criticism and other matters were seen to threaten the fabric of what was then largely, but not exclusively, the Church of England in different parts of the world. Archbishop Longley convened a conference at Lambeth Palace to take counsel with the other bishops. Essays by both the editors open up the first Conference to the reader as a novel and unprecedented event. Even the holding of such a conference was controversial and, in a portent of things to come, several bishops (including the Archbishop of York) refused to attend. There have been other controversies in the life of the Conference, most recently centring on questions of human sexuality in both 1998 and 2008. Chapters by Andrew Goddard and Gregory Cameron amply set out the debate surrounding resolution I.10 of 1998 and the Windsor Process.

Yet Lambeth Conferences have produced great fruit over the years. A particular interest of this reviewer is the role of Lambeth in defining the relationship that Anglican churches have with other churches and denominations. It is good to see substantial contributions from Charlotte Methuen on the 'Lambeth appeal to all Christian people' of 1920, which has defined the Anglican approach to reunion to this day; from Mark D Chapman on the Chicago–Lambeth Quadrilateral; a Roman Catholic perspective from Archbishop Donald

Bolen; and an analysis of the ecumenical agenda of successive conferences from Dame Mary Tanner. Not leaving out legal considerations, Norman Doe and Richard Deadman offer a typically thorough analysis of the relationship between Lambeth resolutions and the canon law of the various churches and provinces that make up the Communion.

The Anglican Communion is undoubtedly currently under pressure. The Australian theologian Mark D Thompson's chapter asks whether the Conference has succeeded and, even, whether it can survive. He is not convinced on either count. However, his fellow countryman Bishop Stephen Pickard is more hopeful, noting, correctly in this reviewer's view, that the Lambeth Conference has evolved and changed and will continue to do so in an evolving and changing church.

As Lambeth 2020 gets closer, this book is an excellent contribution to preparations for the Conference, anchoring it in the tradition of its predecessors and analysing not only where the Conference has been but where it may go in the future.

WILL ADAM
Lambeth Palace

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