Journal of Anglican Studies (2020), **18**, 201–214
doi:10.1017/S1740355320000200

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ARTICLE

John Rawlinson and Anglican Liberal Catholicism in the Early Twentieth Century

Graham Wilcox[1]

Email: g.wilcox4@ntlworld.com

(Received 26 November 2018; revised 17 March 2020; accepted 17 March 2020; first published online 05 June 2020)

Abstract
The article examines some key writings in the works of Bishop John Rawlinson with relation to the development of Anglican Liberal Catholicism in the early twentieth century. The article aims to show how he contributed to the development of Anglican Liberal Catholic thought and practice in the period, especially with regard to views on authority and ecumenical relations.

Keywords: authority; Catholic; episcopacy; ecumenical; Rawlinson

John Rawlinson (1884–1960) was an important figure in Anglican Liberal Catholicism in the first part of the twentieth century. He was for many years an Oxford don before becoming Archdeacon of Auckland in 1929 and Bishop of Derby in 1936. There has not been a great deal of interest shown in him and he has been overshadowed by notable contemporaries such as Hensley Henson, who was his bishop when he was an archdeacon. But he was a member of the inter-war Doctrine Commission which reported in 1938 as well as serving on various Anglican committees concerned with ecumenical relations in the inter-war period. The only monograph on him is by Robert S. Dell entitled *John Rawlinson: Honest Thinker*, published privately in 1998, which is useful for personal details of his life, in particular as Bishop of Derby where Dell was later to become an archdeacon after Rawlinson's time. His writings have been cited by S. Sykes especially in his influential work *The Integrity of Anglicanism* where reference is made to Rawlinson's views on the nature of Anglicanism and liberality within the Anglican Church.[2] This is in itself significant in that it is Rawlinson's views on the nature of Anglicanism and the allied issue of authority in the Church that are the focus of more recent interest. This reflects the fact that in his body of writing Rawlinson was particularly concerned with the issue of authority in Christianity and the nature

[1]Graham Wilcox is an Anglican priest living in Stratford upon Avon, UK.
[2]S.W. Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism* (Oxford: A.R. Mowbray, 1978), pp. 3, 23-24.

of Anglican ecclesiology. He was also an important New Testament scholar in his time culminating in his Bampton Lectures of 1926 on *The New Testament Doctrine of the Christ,* having already published a commentary on St Mark's Gospel in 1925. The focus in this article will be more on his contribution to Anglican thought on authority and ecclesiology from his Liberal Catholic perspective but note will be taken of his thought on biblical studies.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, when Rawlinson was coming to theological maturity, having moved from a Nonconformist Congregational background to a Catholic form of Anglicanism, the Church of England was still divided by the theological and party divisions of the nineteenth century. These are usually categorized as threefold – namely Catholic or High Church, Evangelical or Low Church and the people in the middle described variously as Liberal or Broad Church – but of course there were subtle variations within these categories, nor were they necessarily watertight divisions. The High Church party stemming from the Oxford movement and the High Church element preceding it had subdivided into conservative Anglo-Catholics loyal to what they saw as the apostolic faith and order and more Liberal Catholics ready to accept biblical criticism and the philosophical tendencies of the nineteenth century especially Hegelian Idealism. This school of thought was represented by the widely influential volume *Lux Mundi* (1889)[3] and the writings of Charles Gore. It was to this school of thought that Rawlinson was drawn in particular because of his interest in biblical study of the New Testament. At the other end, so to speak, the Evangelical wing itself was bitterly opposed to what they saw as the Roman tendencies of Anglican Catholics especially in their wish to revise the Prayer Book in a more Catholic direction. They were also very conservative about biblical criticism and largely rejected what they saw as subversive modern ideas. But they had internal divisions as well and a more Liberal Evangelical wing developed in the period after the Great War which was more ready to embrace biblical criticism and a degree of ceremony in worship.[4]

The people in the middle were a bit more difficult to define. In the late nineteenth century they were described as Broad Church especially after the controversy about *Essays and Reviews*[5] in 1860 but were more a collection of individuals than a party. By the early twentieth century their liberal views had morphed into what became known as Modernism and they became more organized with the founding of the Modern Churchmen's Union in 1898 (originally 'The Churchmen's Union') but not all liberal churchmen belonged to it. It rose to prominence in the 1920s with the infamous Girton Conference of 1921 on 'Christ and the Creeds'. The term 'Modernist' was often used quite loosely in this period to describe views which were seen as broadly and possibly dangerously liberal. So the volume *Foundations* (1912), to which Rawlinson contributed, was seen as moving 'in a modernist direction'.[6]

[3]C. Gore (ed.), *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation* (London: John Murray, 1889).

[4]On Liberal Evangelicalism see M. Wellings, *Evangelicals Embattled: Responses of Evangelicals in the Church of England to Ritualism, Darwinism and Theological Liberalism 1890–1930* (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2003), pp. 256-64.

[5]B. Jowett (ed.), *Essays and Reviews* (London: Parker, 1860).

[6]M. Chapman, 'The Evolution of Anglican Theology 1910–2000', in J. Morris (ed.), *The Oxford History of Anglicanism.* IV. *Global Western Anglicanism c. 1910–Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 25-49 (29).

The essay in it by Streeter, in which he advanced liberal ideas about the Resurrection,[7] resulted in the denunciation of the volume by Charles Gore, who had embraced a conservative position on the New Testament and the creeds, and also by conservative Catholics like Frank Weston, the Bishop of Zanzibar.

The uncertainties of the modern situation were reflected in the essay in *Foundations* by Neville Talbot on 'The Modern Situation' in which he was emphatic that the Victorian age was a thing of the past and that the present generation, unlike their parents, 'were not born ... into the atmosphere of pre-"critical" and pre-Darwinian religion' and that 'the change from genuinely Victorian times to to-day is a change from a reliance upon, to the criticism of, assumptions'.[8] So Rawlinson's essay on 'The Principle of Authority' sought to address this perceived unease.[9] He comments: 'The idea of authority is out of favour, largely because it is misunderstood; more particularly because it is popularly confused with infallibility.'[10] Claims to infallibility were found in both the Protestant and Catholic wings of the Church. The former consisted of those who insisted on the infallibility and verbal inspiration of Scripture and the latter had in the Papacy an institution which claimed infallibility in its *ex cathedra* utterances on faith and morals in the Vatican decrees of 1870. He sees the problem as the confusion of authority and inspiration whereby 'there has been a persistent tendency both to take the inspiration of religious "authorities" for granted and also to assume that the effect of inspiration is such as to render their witness infallible'.[11] This is a crucial point for the operation of the Divine Spirit, in his view, does not guarantee infallibility to the human intellect even if we see it as inspiration. So even Christ 'was in no way exempted from such intellectual limitations, or even ... from such erroneous conceptions of fact, as were inseparable from the use of the mental categories of the age and generation of whom he came'.[12] There is certainly a strong note of kenoticism here![13]

So the need, he argues, is to re-examine the notion of authority and to recover the original meaning of the word 'auctoritas' as designating a person or group whose authority and competence we respect without endowing them with the notion of infallibility. This respect for 'auctoritas' does not mean that we can never question it and ultimately it is by voluntary assent that we come to accept it. He recognizes that there is a danger of concentrating on individual experience alone and so 'the corporate witness of the Church ... constitutes a weighty "auctoritas" which is at least a provisional justification of the venture of faith' and 'broadly speaking, it may be taken as an axiom that the community is wiser than the individual, and that authority attaches to the corporate witness and the common mind of the

[7]B.H. Streeter, 'The Historic Christ', in B.H. Streeter (ed.), *Foundations: A Statement of Christian Belief in Terms of Modern Thought by Seven Oxford Men* (London: Macmillan, 1912), pp. 73-145.

[8]N. Talbot, 'The Modern Situation', in Streeter (ed.), *Foundations,* pp. 3-24 (4).

[9]A.E.J. Rawlinson, 'The Principle of Authority', in Streeter (ed.), *Foundations,* pp. 365-422.

[10]Rawlinson, 'The Principle of Authority', p. 365.

[11]Rawlinson, 'The Principle of Authority', p. 367.

[12]Rawlinson, 'The Principle of Authority', p. 368.

[13]Kenotic ideas on the self-limitation of the mind of Christ in his Incarnation had been advanced by Charles Gore in his essay in *Lux Mundi* and his Bampton lectures of 1891 on *The Incarnation of the Son of God.*

spirit-bearing Church as against individual aberrations'.[14] Authority is inherited 'in the sense of the witness of the saints, individually and corporately, to the validity of the spiritual experience upon which their lives are based'.[15] This cannot be lightly dismissed even if it is expressed in the language and thought forms of another age which may need re-articulation in the modern world. His conclusion is important: 'Summing up, we may lay it down as the function of authority in religion neither to compel assent nor to override reason, but to testify to spiritual experience. Its province is not to define truth for the intellect, but to guide souls into the way of peace' but the individual is bound to take account of this guidance for 'that which has been discovered has also been revealed' and 'the way of life and peace is equally the way of truth'.[16] So Rawlinson here, while rejecting infallible sources of authority in Christian belief, strives to avoid the pitfalls of pure subjective individualism by pointing to the Christian community down the ages in its experience as a reality which will be a guide and lodestar for the individual believer.

Rawlinson's essay on Authority brought him to a wider audience including a group of Liberal Catholics at Cambridge, although Rawlinson was an Oxford man becoming a Lecturer and then Student of Christ Church in 1913 and 1914 respectively. This group included E.G. Selwyn, later the first editor of the journal *Theology,* Wilfrid Knox, a Cambridge New Testament scholar and especially Will Spens, later Master of Corpus Christi College at Cambridge. He was a layman and a scientist but was influential in Liberal Catholic circles in the period during and after the Great War. His book *Belief and Practice* (1915) was based on a series of lectures he gave the previous year and shows the influence of Rawlinson's ideas about the centrality of experience in understanding religious belief and doctrine. For him 'the fundamental significance of Catholic dogma lies in the experience which it embodies' and which it helps to communicate and thus act as a guide and mentor to the individual soul as Rawlinson had suggested.[17] An important influence on Rawlinson and the Cambridge Liberal Catholics in this period was the movement in the Roman Catholic Church known as Catholic Modernism. Although strongest on the continent, the movement had important supporters in England, especially the Jesuit George Tyrrell and the aristocratic layman Friedrich von Hügel. They clashed with the Vatican authorities and the movement was condemned by the pope in the encyclical *Pascendi* in 1907. In his book Spens quoted widely from the writings of George Tyrrell and his emphasis on the centrality of religious experience as being prior to and more important than the statements of dogmatic theology. So, for example, in his essay *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi* Tyrrell argued for the validity of devotion even if it seems crudely anthropomorphic, for the deposit of faith 'is perhaps in some sense more directly a *lex orandi* than a *lex credendi*' and again that 'devotion and religion existed before theology, in the way that art existed before art criticism'.[18]

[14]Rawlinson, 'The Principle of Authority', p. 377.
[15]Rawlinson, 'The Principle of Authority', p. 377.
[16]Rawlinson, 'The Principle of Authority', p. 380.
[17]Will Spens, *Belief and Practice* (Memphis: General Books, modern edn, 2012), p. 17.
[18]G. Tyrrell, 'Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi', in *Through Scylla and Charybdis or the Old Theology and the New* (London: Longmans, 1907), pp. 104-105.

However, both Rawlinson and Spens were more cautious with regard to severing the link between the original apostolic experience of the historic Jesus and the ongoing faith of the Church than were some Catholic Modernists. Here in particular they disagreed with the views of Alfred Loisy who influenced Tyrrell in his later writings and who tended to see the Catholic Church as the creative force in Christianity rather than the historic Jesus with his all too apparent deficiencies and delusions about eschatology and the imminence of the End.[19] So Spens argued that 'the normativeness of the experience which the New Testament expresses, and the resulting authority of Scripture, is a point which has been specifically insisted on by the Anglican Church'.[20] Similarly, Rawlinson, in his book *Dogma, Fact and Experience* (1915), was critical of the Catholic Modernists for attempting 'to sever the link between History and Dogma by combining an affirmation of the spiritual and religious truth of the Historic Church, with the claim of freedom to deny any or all of the alleged facts of history with which the said dogmas had hitherto been implicated'.[21] He makes it clear in the context of discussing the views of Edouard Le Roy, the Catholic Modernist pragmatist, that in his view 'there is all the difference between religion advocated as a possible view of the universe and a helpful attitude to life and religion proclaimed as the truth of God Himself and the very core of what life means'.[22] So Christianity is 'the religion of God's search for man' and that search came to fruition in the historic life of Christ and the divine act we see there is 'for ever continued and perpetuated in the Church'.[23] So, like Spens, he thinks that the life of the Christ is to be seen as an act of God, the Incarnation, which, even if its spiritual aspect continues in the life of the Church, cannot simply be disregarded because of the critical problems about the historic Jesus, of which he was well aware, by shifting the focus onto the ongoing life of the Church. The life of the historic Jesus must bear a correlation to the interpretation subsequently put on it by the Christian Church and it was Rawlinson's contention that it did. This view comes over quite strongly in his writings on the New Testament, of which he was a noted scholar, and especially in his Bampton lectures of 1926 entitled *The New Testament Doctrine of the Christ.* Here he maintains that there is no radical disconnect between the person of Jesus and the later admittedly developing teaching of the Church about him and that 'the Church's later doctrine interprets truly the life of Christ'.[24]

An area where Rawlinson had common ground with the Catholic Modernists was that of the need for intellectual and academic freedom within the Church which had been stoutly defended by Catholic figures such as von Hügel against the authoritarian attitudes prevalent in the Vatican at the time. In the Anglican Church there was no such highly centralized authority acting as a disciplinary body and the liberal Broad Church tradition had been able to gather strength since the *Essays and*

[19]See especially A. Loisy, *L'Evangile et L'Eglise* (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1902), and G. Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Cross-Roads* (London: Longman, 1910).

[20]Spens, *Belief and Practice,* p. 19.

[21]A.E.J. Rawlinson, *Dogma, Fact and Experience* (London: Macmillan, 1915), pp. 22-23.

[22]Rawlinson, *Dogma, Fact and Experience,* p. 39.

[23]Rawlinson, *Dogma, Fact and Experience,* p. 41.

[24]A.E.J. Rawlinson, *The New Testament Doctrine of the Christ: The Bampton Lectures for 1926* (London: Longmans, 1926), p. 7.

Reviews affair of the 1860s, which had successfully held off various heresy trials and charges. In his essay on 'Clerical Veracity' in *Dogma, Fact and Experience*, Rawlinson defended the right of ordained clergy in the Church of England to express and publish views seemingly at odds with traditional orthodoxy. The background to this lay in the objections of Charles Gore, the Bishop of Oxford, to some of the sentiments expressed in *Foundations* to which Rawlinson had contributed as noted. Gore, despite his earlier liberalism, maintained a rigidly conservative position on the creeds and maintained that in their ordination Anglican clergy were subscribing to the creeds in their literal and apparent meaning, otherwise they were guilty of insincerity. He threatened to resign as a bishop unless the book was formally condemned. Eventually the diplomatically agile Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, found a compromise formula in the Resolution passed in Convocation in April 1914 which both upheld the creeds as the basis of faith and also recognized that there was a need to allow freedom of thought and inquiry among both clergy and laity.[25]

In his essay Rawlinson argued that it was 'the business of the theologian ... to *translate* Christianity, upon its intellectual side, into such terms as shall be intelligible to his contemporaries' and that 'in each succeeding generation there is apt to be a certain amount of tension between the rival claims of authority and intellectual freedom'.[26] The Church enjoins study on its clergy and it cannot prejudge the conclusions of that study. So he disagreed with the views of Gore on clergy being guilty of insincerity if they did not accept the creeds in their literal sense. For Rawlinson the creeds are not designed as tests for the clergy or laity, who also say them of course, but rather are 'symbols of the Church's common faith with which clergy and laity alike desire as worshippers to be identified' and their principal use now in worship is as an identification 'with the faith of Christendom as a whole'.[27] The difference between the younger Liberal Catholics like Spens and Rawlinson and the older ones like Gore is very apparent here, and that they were moving onto a different trajectory. The apogee of this younger school of thought was to be found in the volume *Essays Catholic and Critical* (1926), to which both Spens and Rawlinson contributed but significantly not Charles Gore.[28]

Rawlinson was to make a similar plea for intellectual freedom in the Church in his address to the Birmingham and Midland Anglo-Catholic Congress held in Birmingham in 1922 and later published.[29] The Congress movement was an important part of Anglo-Catholicism in the Church of England in the inter-war period and led to a series of Congresses beginning in 1920, which were attended by thousands of people demonstrating the strength of the Catholic wing of the Church in this period. In this particular Birmingham Congress, Rawlinson – speaking as an Anglican Catholic – warned of the dangers of reactionary sentiments among

[25]Details of the controversy can be found in G.K.A. Bell, *Randall Davidson: Archbishop of Canterbury* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3rd edn, 1952), pp. 671-89.

[26]Rawlinson, *Dogma, Fact and Experience,* p. 170.

[27]Rawlinson, *Dogma, Fact and Experience,* p. 203.

[28]E.G. Selwyn (ed.), *Essays Catholic and Critical by Members of the Anglican Communion* (London: SPCK, 1926). Rawlinson's essay on 'Authority as a Ground of Belief', pp. 84-97 and Spens' essay on 'The Eucharist', pp. 427-48.

[29]A.E.J. Rawlinson, *Catholicism with Freedom: An Appeal for a New Policy* (London: Longmans, 1922).

Anglo-Catholics towards critical scholarship and what was tarred as 'Modernism'. What was needed, he maintained, was not obscurantism but 'a real presentation of historical Christianity in modern terms for modern man; a presentation which will set it in relation to the living thought of the times in which we live'.[30] He said that he was not a party Modernist in terms of belonging to the Churchmen's Union and he saw the Anglo-Catholic tradition in the Church as having a unique opportunity to present the right type of Modernism 'for the reason that it represents a movement which has potentially available the entire devotional riches and spiritual tradition of historical Christianity upon which to draw' but 'it need not be hampered by the intellectual strait-coat of Rome'.[31] He is referring here to the contemporary anti-Modernist campaign in the Roman Church which he saw as stifling intellectual freedom. In the atmosphere of freedom 'the dream of a tight little Anglican Church, with its clergy all orthodox and laity all docile, will go to the winds'.[32] It was a plea for a more open form of Anglicanism which would not have pleased all his listeners and also a plea warning of the dangers of tribalism between the parties in the Church of England which prevented them from constructively engaging with each other. This was to be echoed in his later writings on the Church.

Doctrinal controversy continued with Modernists in the 1920s especially with the Churchmen's Union conference at Girton College, Cambridge in 1921 on 'Christ and the Creeds', at which what appeared to be unorthodox statements about the divinity of Christ were made and which found their way into the secular press and thus to ordinary Anglicans. This was one of the factors behind the setting up by the Archbishops of the Commission on Doctrine in the Church of England in 1922 of which Rawlinson was invited to be a member. The Commission took 15 years to conduct its business and its report was only published in 1938, by which time the theological issues had rather changed. Rawlinson introduced the Report to Convocation in 1938. He made the point, which was also made by Temple in his Introduction to the Report as chairman, that it was not aimed at deciding which doctrines were permissible in the Church of England and in fact the Report is a survey of existing variety of opinions on doctrinal matters in the Church and its members were chosen to represent various schools of thought. Temple made the point in the Introduction that 'the Commission was appointed because the tensions between different schools of thought in the Church of England were imperilling its unity and impairing its effectiveness'.[33] This reflected the position put forward by Rawlinson in his address to the Birmingham Congress on the limitations of tribalism in the Church. The outbreak of war in 1939 rather put discussion of the Report on the back-burner as far as the Church was concerned but it has continued as a reference point for Anglican theology in this period.

Tribal party strife was more to the fore in the 1920s over the issue of revision of the *Book of Common Prayer*. This process had begun before the Great War and

[30]Rawlinson, *Catholicism with Freedom,* p. 3.

[31]Rawlinson, *Catholicism with Freedom,* p. 8.

[32]Rawlinson, *Catholicism with Freedom,* p. 11.

[33]W. Temple, 'Chairman's Introduction', in *Doctrine in the Church of England: The Report of the Commission on Christian Doctrine appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in 1922* (London: SPCK, 1938), pp. 1-18 (4).

arose in particular from pressure from the Catholic wing of the Church to revise the existing Prayer Book to incorporate more Catholic elements of liturgy and worship. This was strongly opposed by Evangelicals and also Nonconformists who had a voice in the final debates in Parliament in 1927 and 1928.[34] The proposed revised Prayer Book was passed by the Church Assembly which had been set up by the Enabling Act of 1919 to give a greater measure of self-government to the Church. But when the proposed book came before Parliament in 1927 it was rejected by a majority in the Commons and again the next year when a slightly amended version was brought before it. The defeat was seen as a major setback for the Church as illustrating the danger of its being subject to the state as the established Church. Davidson resigned as Archbishop of Canterbury soon afterwards, although he was of an advanced age. The Church did not want to try Parliament again so effectively bypassed it with the declaration of the bishops in Convocation in 1929 to the effect that the Revised Book could be used in dioceses with the permission of the bishop concerned and after consultation with the Parochial Church Council of the parish.

This period was in fact a period of personal change for Rawlinson since in 1929 he decided to leave the academic world of Oxford and accepted the post of Archdeacon of Auckland in the diocese of Durham with the associated post of Canon Residentiary of Durham Cathedral. His bishop there was the idiosyncratic and controversial figure of Hensley Henson, who in his book *Disestablishment* (1929) showed that he had completely changed his mind on the established nature of the Church of England that he had hitherto stoutly defended as far as being opposed to the Enabling Act of 1919, which he saw as undermining Parliament's role in the establishment. But now he saw the rejection of the Prayer Book as a 'catastrophe ... effected by an alliance of dissentient factions in the Church with non-Anglicans without' and that it raised the issue of disestablishment 'in the clearest possible form'.[35] Despite the logic of Henson's argument, not many were prepared to follow him and the bishops preferred the way of compromise. Rawlinson himself, in his book *The Church of England and the Church of Christ* (1930), which he dedicated to Henson, showed sympathy for the views expressed in *Disestablishment* and agreed that the Enabling Act had failed in its purpose of 'securing at least relative and practical freedom for the Church' and that the defeat in the House of Commons was 'an assertion of the most naked and unabashed form of Erastianism'.[36] However, despite his sympathy he was unwilling to follow him completely, fearing that the effect of giving complete self-government to the Church would be that 'it might, in effect, turn itself into a defined and rigidly disciplined sect',[37] which would be the antithesis of a Church open to free debate and the interchange of ideas that he had shown he already favoured. Indeed, he pointed out that sometimes the state had been the guardian of freedom in the Church, as in

[34]Details of the controversy can be found in J. Maiden, *National Religion and the Prayer Book Controversy 1927–1928* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2009).

[35]H. Henson, *Disestablishment: The Charge Delivered at the Second Quinquennial Visitation of his diocese together with an Introduction* (London: Macmillan, 1929), pp. 46 and 48.

[36]A.E.J. Rawlinson, *The Church of England and the Church of Christ* (London: Longmans, 1930), pp. 79-80.

[37]Rawlinson, *The Church of England and the Church of Christ,* p. 82.

the *Essays and Reviews* case, where the state connection through a secular court had overturned the decision of an ecclesiastical court and had given greater freedom to liberal beliefs within the Church.[38] So in his view the situation was a paradoxical one in that on the one hand the Church needed to be free of state control in order to pursue its own life and liturgy but on the other hand the interference of the state had sometimes preserved freedom within the Church for diversity of views to flourish.

If Rawlinson stressed his liberalism in the book he also emphasized his Catholicism and his views on ecclesiology.[39] This was important for his later involvement in ecumenism. For him, being a Christian is being a member of the Christian Church and he disliked what he calls the Lutheran distinction between the visible and invisible Church whereby the members of the latter are the true Christians known to God and are in effect the true Church. This view he saw as leading to a disparagement of the visible Church in favour of Protestant individualism. For him, the Church is not an abstract idea but 'a visible and concrete Society, outwardly manifested in this actual world in which we live and move'.[40] There is only one People of God which is holy and catholic in the sense of being universal and apostolic. So it follows from this that 'the whole Church of Christ upon earth is at present in a state of schism for schism is a division within the Christian body'.[41] 'The Church visible and militant, which *ought* to be one, in actual fact is divided' and so no one Christian denomination is the true Church but the visible Church is '*Christendom taken in a broad sense as a whole*' (his italics).[42] He admits that 'there is a theory, of course, of the Church which would reckon as belonging to the true Body of Christ those great orthodox communions, and those only, which have preserved a technically valid episcopate, the Catholic creeds, and Catholic sacraments'.[43] However, he sees real problems with this viewpoint, which was that of the more conservative Anglo-Catholic wing, because these bodies are in schism with one another and do not necessarily recognize one another as part of the true Body of Christ. This was true of the Roman Catholic Church in this period which did not recognize the Anglican and Orthodox Churches as equal and legitimate branches of the Church. It also excluded the Free Churches who must be regarded as part of Christendom: 'The true inheritor of the Christendom of the past is not anything less than the whole complex and confused body of modern Christendom, as we know it today; and the problem of Church Unity is as wide as the problem of Christendom.'[44] One implication of this is that the Anglican Church is in a sense like all Christian bodies an interim Church and he looks forward to the day when in the possibly distant future the Anglican Church will 'become simply Christian –

[38]In the *Essays and Reviews* case, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in June 1863 reversed the earlier condemnation of Williams and Wilson for their views in the volume imposed by the Ecclesiastical Court of Arches. The details are in O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church: Part Two 1860–1901* (London: SCM Press, 1987), pp. 79-83.

[39]He had earlier developed his ecclesiological thinking in his *Studies in Historical Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1922), based on a course of lectures he gave at Cambridge in 1922.

[40]Rawlinson, *The Church of England and the Church of Christ,* p. 12.

[41]Rawlinson, *The Church of England and the Church of Christ,* pp. 21-22.

[42]Rawlinson, *The Church of England and the Church of Christ,* p. 23.

[43]Rawlinson, *The Church of England and the Church of Christ,* p. 23.

[44]Rawlinson, *The Church of England and the Church of Christ,* p. 25.

merged in the wider unity of a larger Christendom that shall one day be'.[45] This is Catholic ecclesiology but of a distinctly liberal hue.

In 1936 Rawlinson was appointed as the second Bishop of Derby following the death of the first bishop, Edmund Courtenay Pearce, who had been there since the foundation of the diocese in 1927. Pearce has been described as 'a conservative high churchman'[46] and the diocese endured party tensions between Catholic and Evangelical clergy, both of whom hoped that the next bishop would be from their school of thought. Rawlinson was appointed as being on the Catholic wing of the Church, although he had no connections with the area, largely because Cosmo Lang, the Archbishop of Canterbury, thought it was the turn of a Catholic to have a seat on the episcopal bench and Rawlinson was well known as a New Testament scholar.[47] Some Evangelicals in the diocese were not happy about the choice and, according to Dell, he was described as 'a Modernist Liberal Anglo-Catholic' by some![48] He was enthroned in Derby Cathedral in April 1936 and in his sermon on that occasion denied that he wished to be associated with any ecclesiastical party. Significantly, four non-Anglican churches in Derby were represented at the service, which was a sign of his ecumenical interest.[49] In retrospect, it is difficult to see Rawlinson as an outstanding diocesan bishop; for many of his clergy he seemed a remote and academic figure with little small talk and he could be quite blunt with people.[50] Dell points out the weakness of his policy of conducting institutions in the chapel of his house in Derby and leaving the archdeacons to carry out the inductions in the parishes as meaning that many people in churches in the diocese never saw him.[51] His significance lies more in the work he did outside the diocese on the central bodies of the Church, on the Doctrine Commission already mentioned and also his important ecumenical role after 1945. No doubt for this reason he was not translated to another more prestigious see for that way his talents did not lie.

In 1945 Geoffrey Fisher succeeded William Temple at Canterbury and he was determined to make ecumenicity a high point of his primacy as things returned to more normal after the war. In 1946 he preached what was to become his most famous sermon at Cambridge when he proposed an advance in ecumenical relations with the Free Churches (relations with Rome were still in the deep freeze although Fisher was to visit Pope John XXIII in Rome in 1960 at the end of his primacy). He said he was not asking for full or organic unity at this stage but a gradual process of assimilation in which the Free Churches would 'take episcopacy into their system'. This would overcome the objections on the Catholic wing of the Anglican Church

[45]Rawlinson, *The Church of England and the Church of Christ,* p. 118.

[46]R.S. Dell, *John Rawlinson: Honest Thinker* (private publication, 1998), p. 135.

[47]Dell, *John Rawlinson,* p. 138. Dell says Lang described Rawlinson as a 'Liberal Catholic' in his letter to Baldwin about the appointment. See also R. Beaken, *Cosmo Lang: Archbishop in War and Crisis* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), pp. 172-73 for a description of Lang's policy of having a balanced bench of bishops.

[48]Dell, *John Rawlinson,* p. 140.

[49]Details of the service are in Dell, *John Rawlinson,* pp. 141-42.

[50]Dell, *John Rawlinson,* pp. 135-67, has details of his time at Derby including personal testimonies of those who knew him and his wife.

[51]Dell, *John Rawlinson,* p. 142.

about intercommunion with non-episcopal Churches, although Fisher himself took a completely functional view of episcopacy.[52] The Free Churches responded warmly to Fisher's approach and two major initiatives came from it. One was conversations with the Church of Scotland in the 1950s, which proved abortive, and the second was on Anglican-Methodist unity with conversations stretching over the 1950s and 60s leading eventually to a two-stage unity scheme that was endorsed by the Methodist Conference but rejected by the General Synod of the Church of England in 1972.[53]

Rawlinson, with his liberal views on ecclesiology, was very suitable for being drawn into ecumenical work. Before the war he had been involved in discussions with the Church of Scotland and the Scandinavian Churches so it was not surprising that Fisher asked him to be the Anglican chair of the Joint Committee of Anglican and Free Churches set up following the Cambridge sermon and reported in 1950. He was also involved in formulating the Anglican response to the formation of the united Church of South India in 1947. Later he was involved with the committee implementing conversations with the Church of Scotland that began in 1949 and lasted until 1952 and were later resumed, under his chairmanship, reporting in 1957. He chaired a committee at the Lambeth Conference of 1958 on Anglican-Presbyterian relations and in 1956 he took part in inter-church conversations with the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow in a delegation led by Michael Ramsey, then Archbishop of York. So ecumenism and its allied challenges was central to his work in the post-war world and in the years up to his death in 1960 he produced several books or other shorter writings on ecumenical issues and the allied topic of defining Anglican identity.

The thorny issue in all unity schemes was that of uniting episcopal and non-episcopal Churches given the strength of the Catholic wing in the Anglican Church and their insistence on the maintenance of what they saw as apostolic order. So successful acts of union had been between Churches where this was not an issue, such as the re-union of various branches of Methodism in Britain in 1932. It is therefore important to examine Rawlinson's views on church order and these can be found in his essay in *Foundations* on authority and in the Appendix he added to it entitled 'The Historical Origins of the Christian Ministry'.[54] Here, he makes it apparent that he thinks there is no convincing argument for a normative form of ministry in the earliest Christian period and that 'it follows that the attempt to reach precise agreement upon grounds of history alone is a fundamentally mistaken one'.[55] Christ did not anticipate the long course of Christian history and indeed his 'vision of the future was preoccupied ... by the single dominant thought of the manifestation of the Kingdom in ultimate triumph'.[56] He in no way sought to legislate with regard to the future Church. When he wrote this, he was reflecting the influence of Schweitzer and the contemporary eschatological school on

[52]Details of the sermon and its reception can be found in E. Carpenter, *Archbishop Fisher: His Life and Times* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1991), pp. 310-12.

[53]Fisher, in his retirement, was strongly opposed to the scheme, which he did not see as expressing his ideas in his Cambridge sermon. Carpenter, *Archbishop Fisher,* pp. 757-58.

[54]Rawlinson, 'The Historical Origins of the Christian Ministry', *Foundations,* pp. 408-22.

[55]Rawlinson, 'The Principle of Authority', p. 384.

[56]Rawlinson, 'The Principle of Authority', p. 385.

theology.[57] Despite his Anglo-Catholic background Rawlinson is equally doubtful about the historical basis for the doctrine of the Apostolic Succession beloved of High Churchmen: 'With regard, however, to the form and manner of ministerial appointment and the sense, if any, in which the Apostolical Succession may legitimately be asserted as a literal fact of history, the evidence is almost, if not quite non-existent.'[58] So here he is putting a distance between himself and more conservative Catholics like Gore who saw the Anglican ministry as in direct succession to that of the apostolic college commissioned by Christ and that succession as the basis of that authority. For Rawlinson, the authority for a form of church order must lie with the Church itself and not directly with the historic Jesus or the early community.

Despite all these reservations, he still sees the historic episcopate, as it has developed from the period of the early Church, as the best form of church order and he continued to defend this in his subsequent writings. It represents '*in idea and principle* an authority which is wider than that of the merely local church, an authority which *in claim and potency* is that of the Church Universal' (his italics).[59] It also 'represents and sacramentally embodies the principle of continuity with the past'[60] and forms a concrete link with earlier forms of Christendom. So episcopacy, whatever its historical origins, is by far the best form of church order for embodying the vital principle of continuity. However, and this was to be an important point in his later ecumenical discussions with the Free Churches, church order was always imperfect in a divided Church and indeed the form of church order could be altered by a united Church for 'what the Church has determined the Church might conceivably alter'.[61]

There was, however, one Church in which by 1947 there was full organic union between episcopal and non-episcopal Churches and that was the Church of South India, with which Rawlinson was involved and on which he gave a series of lectures in 1950.[62] The whole scheme had encountered a lot of opposition from Anglo-Catholics in England and elsewhere who objected to the whole notion of a union between episcopal and non-episcopal ministries who lacked episcopal ordination in a united Church, although all future ministers were to be episcopally ordained. The problem was that the Free Churches would not accept anything that amounted to re-ordination of existing ministers, implying that they were in some way defective but would accept it for the future in the united Church. Rawlinson pointed out that critics in England failed to understand the context of the Church of South India, where Protestant Christianity had emerged out of the missionary movements of the nineteenth century and converts saw themselves 'less as members of the

[57]A. Schweitzer's book, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, was published in England in 1910 with its emphasis on Jesus as a prophetic figure dominated by the expectation of an imminent eschaton. See Mark D. Chapman, *The Coming Crisis: The Impact of Eschatology on Theology in Edwardian England* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 67-80 for material on Schweitzer and his impact which was considerable.

[58]Rawlinson, 'The Historical Origins of the Christian Ministry', p. 418.

[59]Rawlinson, 'The Principle of Authority', p. 393.

[60]Rawlinson, 'The Principle of Authority', p. 395.

[61]Rawlinson, 'The Principle of Authority', p. 385.

[62]A.E.J. Rawlinson, *The Church of South India: The Lichfield Cathedral Divinity Lectures 1950* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951).

Church Catholic than as adherents of the particular missionary agency to which their Christianity was due'.[63] It therefore made little sense to reproduce the denominational differences from Europe into the Indian situation and so the impulse to unity. The Lambeth Conference of 1930 had welcomed the venture with the proviso that all ministers of the united Church would be episcopally ordained after a period of 30 years. In the meantime it ruled that the new united Church when it came into being would not be part of the Anglican Communion but would be 'a distinct province of the Universal Church'.[64] This was substantially the position taken by the Lambeth Conference in 1948 which met with the Church of South India, now a *fait accompli* and which had to decide on its future relations with the wider Church. Rawlinson's views on the Church of South India project reflect his general position seen in his essay in *Foundations* that in a divided Church, of which individual Churches are a part, then anomalies of church order have to be accepted in order to achieve the goal of unity. So he did not share the objections which the stricter Anglo-Catholics had to it. Later he was to remark: 'The Church of South India, born of a whole generation of labour and prayer, is an accomplished fact and a living and growing spiritual entity .... It is a Church which holds within itself, as does no other part of Christendom in the same degree at this time, the supreme hope of the future.'[65]

If seeking to unite episcopal and non-episcopal Churches in South India was difficult, the situation was much more difficult in Britain itself where the individual Churches had long established histories behind them to overcome. As already noted, Rawlinson was directly involved in the conversations between the Church of England and the Presbyterian Church of Scotland in the post-war period, which he described in some detail in his book *The Anglican Communion in Christendom.*[66] Briefly, these discussions foundered on the issue of episcopacy, to which strong objections were raised from the Presbyterian side and any acceptance of bishops into their polity. The Anglican side could not of course compromise on the issue of episcopacy or deny its necessity against the opposition of a strong element in the Church. He was much less directly involved in the initial conversations between Anglicans and Methodists except in the early stages but he did remark that 'Methodism would not be willing to acquiesce in the casting of any slur upon its existing ministry, which it regards as both authentic and valid.'[67] This could be the problem, as with the Church of South India, of re-ordaining existing Methodist minister by Anglican bishops and preference was expressed for the proposed North India scheme of 'a solemn unification of both ministries at the start'.[68] In his ecumenical discussions and writing Rawlinson maintained that episcopacy was of the *bene esse* but not of the *esse* of the Church and maintained that there is no one interpretation of episcopacy to which the Church is committed, provided

[63]Rawlinson, *The Church of South India,* p. 17.

[64]Lambeth Conference Report of 1930 quoted by Rawlinson, *The Church of South India,* p. 32.

[65]A.E.J. Rawlinson, *Current Problems of the Church* (London: SPCK, 1956), p. 29.

[66]A.E.J. Rawlinson, *The Anglican Church in Christendom* (London: SPCK, 1960).

[67]Rawlinson, *The Anglican Communion in Christendom,* p. 117.

[68]Rawlinson, *The Anglican Communion in Christendom,* p. 118. The Church of North India was inaugurated in 1970 but this time the Church of South India problem was avoided by having a ministry that was episcopally ordained from the start.

the need for episcopal order is granted and no Anglican priest can be required to subscribe to any view of the Apostolic Succession.[69] Here he was in contrast to the leading Anglo-Catholics who contributed to the volume *The Apostolic Ministry*[70] in 1946, which held that episcopacy was indeed of apostolic origin and was of the *esse*, the essential being, of the Church. This is in line with his general approach which was towards a more open form of Catholicism than many Anglican Catholics of his time and this form of open Catholicism was to have a real future in the Church of England up to the present day.

Rawlinson's career covered a wide period of Anglican history from the early twentieth century, which was dominated by the legacies of the Victorian period, through to the ecumenism of the post-war world. Always on the Catholic wing of the Church, he nevertheless came to disagree with the increasingly rigid form of Catholicism of Charles Gore and those who sympathized with him. In his essays in *Foundations* and early works like *Dogma, Fact and Experience*, he put forward a more open and experiential view of authority in the Church linked to academic freedom and a willingness to be open to contemporary biblical scholarship especially with regard to the New Testament. His more flexible views on church order enabled discussion with Free Churchmen on a basis which Gore and more conservative Anglo-Catholics would not have been happy about. Although not a frontline figure, he was nevertheless quietly influential in the counsels of the Church of England and he represents a definite strand in Anglican Liberal or open Catholicism, as it now tends to be called. He died before the radical upheavals of the 1960s hit the Church and have tended to overshadow the previous period and make it appear rather dull and conservative. So, for example, Paul A. Welsby: 'By 1959 the Church of England had changed comparatively little since the end of the war ... in many ways it was a Church sailing on an even keel, content with old tried ways and the conventional orthodoxies ... Services in most parish churches were much as they had been for a century.'[71] The wonder is where the liberalism of the 1960s came from. In fact Rawlinson's career shows that liberalism was by no means moribund in this period and in its way bequeathed an important legacy to the Anglican Church.

[69]A.E.J. Rawlinson, *Problems of Reunion* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1950), p. 53.

[70]K.E. Kirk (ed.), *The Apostolic Ministry: Essays on the History and Doctrine of Episcopacy* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1946).

[71]Paul A. Welsby, *A History of the Church of England 1945–1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 94. See also Clive D. Field, *Britain's Last Religious Revival? Quantifying Belonging, Behaving and Believing in the Long 1950s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), where he casts doubt on the notion of the decade as a conservative age of faith in Britain.

Cite this article: Wilcox, G. (2020). John Rawlinson and Anglican Liberal Catholicism in the Early Twentieth Century. *Journal of Anglican Studies* **18**, 201–214. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355320000200