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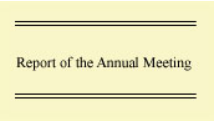

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BISHOP'S UNIVERSITY AND THE ECCLESIASTICAL CONTROVERSIES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY (1845—1878)

D. C. MASTERS

Bishop's University

THE MIDDLE nineteenth century was a period of sharp controversy over religion throughout the Anglo-Saxon world. The Wesleyan revival had run its course first in Britain and later in the United States and Canada; but the Church of England was still attempting to resist the inroads of Methodism on both sides of the Atlantic and not least in Canada. While the Methodists had left the church, the Evangelical party, whose views were similar, remained within it. The adherents of Venn, Simeon, Wilberforce and Shaftesbury continued to expound their views with telling effect and gloried in the name of Protestant. At the other extreme came the Tractarians (Newman, Keble, Pusey, *et al*) who claimed with equal fervour that they were Catholics.

At the same time the Liberals or "broad churchmen" were beginning to be heard. This movement, which was headed by F. D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley, had no clear doctrinal basis. Its followers were interested in what would now be called the social gospel. They were anxious to revive a sense of corporate responsibility for the welfare of their fellow countrymen. They were much less exacting than either the Tractarians or the Evangelicals in the requirements which they considered necessary for admission to the church. This "Broad Church" group, Maurice in particular, favoured a critical approach to the Bible. However, despite these gestures in the direction of higher criticism, the Church of England was comparatively undisturbed by their ideas until the publication in 1860 of *Essays and Reviews* in which the findings of the higher critics were described with approval. The authors of this volume, including Frederick Temple, later Archbishop of Canterbury and Benjamin Jowett, the famous Oxford scholar, were promptly and vigorously attacked. An even greater sensation was created by the publication in 1861 of the first part of Bishop Colenso's volume, *The Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Critically Examined*. At the same time, the appearance of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 set going the still more bitter controversy between the clergy and some of Darwin's disciples, particularly T. H. Huxley. In a dramatic appearance in the Sheldonian Theatre at Oxford, Disraeli castigated both higher critics and scientists, declaring himself to be "on the side of the angels".

It was in this atmosphere of vigorous controversy that Bishop's College was established in the 1840's. Incorporated in 1843 as an Anglican college to teach divinity and the liberal arts, Bishop's became an important exponent of Anglican theology. The college was a frontier outpost against the forces of Methodism, Evangelicalism and Liberalism.

The most important exponents of the ideas for which Bishop's stood were the third Bishop of Quebec, G. J. Mountain, founder of the college, Jasper Nicolls, its Principal from 1845 to 1877, and Archdeacon Henry Roe, one of its first students and later the Dean of Divinity. Mountain, a man of aristocratic and rather delicate countenance, essentially a pioneer bishop who undertook visitations throughout his diocese under rigorous conditions, was the dominant influence in the counsels of the college from 1843 to 1863. Principal Nicolls was a fine teacher, beloved by his students; and during a long tenure of office he impressed his ideas on a whole generation. Roe, a man of great determination, was greatly influenced by Nicolls and became a faithful exponent of his ideas. There were no important differences of opinion in regard to doctrine among these three. Letters and scattered utterances by other graduates of the college show that they pretty well reflected the views of the three.

While the Bishop's theologians were not unaware of the utterances of Liberals and higher critics they regarded the Methodists and the Evangelicals as a more immediate problem. This paper is mainly concerned with the attitude of Bishop's to these two latter groups.

It is necessary at the outset to outline the principal issues in dispute between the Tractarians and other Anglican high churchmen on the one hand and the Methodists and Evangelicals on the other. It is difficult to conceive precise terms which will be free from associations not intended by the author. For the purposes of this discussion I call the viewpoint of the Tractarians and other high churchmen "Catholic" and that of the Methodists and their Anglican counterparts "Evangelical". The two schools of thought represented very different conceptions of the nature of Christianity and of the Christian church. Unless these doctrinal issues are understood no real grasp of the historic controversy between "Anglican Catholics" and Evangelicals is possible.

The Evangelical was chiefly concerned with the relationship of the individual Christian to God. The Christian, he believed, was saved from the consequence of sin by a personal acceptance of God the Son as his Saviour. The church for the Evangelical was an invisible body composed of all those individuals who had established this vital connection with the deity. The Catholic too was concerned with salvation but, in the effort to secure it, he stressed the importance of membership in God's corporate church rather than the establishment of an individual or personal relationship with the deity. The church, to the Catholic, was the visible church: a body of priests in direct succession, if not from St. Peter himself, at least from the original group of apostles.

Out of this initial difference came all the other differences. For the Evangelical salvation was secured by faith. Good works were a part of the Christian life and were an inevitable result of faith; but they were not a means of salvation. The Catholic by no means disregarded faith but he thought primarily in terms of salvation as a result of good works. He regarded faithful participation in the sacraments of the church as both a source of refreshment and a species of

good work. The Evangelical stressed the need of some process of conversion by which the individual became fundamentally transformed in a new relationship with God the Son. The Catholic thought less of conversion than of a continuous association with the church through participation in its offices: baptism, confirmation and the holy communion. He tended to assume that all who were in close communion with the visible church were converted. Differences in attitude toward the church and the nature of salvation involved a difference in attitude toward the clergy. To the Evangelical the clergyman was essentially a minister in the literal sense; to the Catholic he was a priest, a mediator between the individual Christian and God. The authority of the Evangelical was essentially the Bible; that of the Catholic the church which interpreted it. In short the Evangelical was in the tradition of the Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century; the Catholic was in the tradition of the mediaeval church.

Between these two schools of thought, Catholic and Evangelical, no *via media* was really possible. Either one believed that the Church of England as an institution was the true church or at least a part of the true church or one did not. For the Evangelical no visible church nor any combination of the visible churches was the true church. Religious denominations were convenient organizations in which Christians could find fellowship together; but the Evangelical denied that they could make any claims to exclusive authority or to exclusive privileges. The Anglican Evangelical differed from the Methodist Evangelical mainly in a preference for the Anglican polity and the Anglican liturgy; but in other respects their positions were the same. Neither regarded it as of vital importance whether the Christian was inside the Church of England or outside it so long as he was converted.

Although they expressed some ideas on salvation of which the Evangelicals would have approved,[1] Mountain, Nicolls, Roe and indeed the whole Bishop's group were dominantly Catholic. The only Evangelical of any importance at Bishop's in this period was Isaac Hellmuth, later Bishop of Huron, who was Professor of Hebrew; but he resigned in 1853 after a quarrel with another member of the faculty and had no appreciable influence on the theology of the university. Although in regard to man's need of salvation, Mountain at times appeared to talk like the Evangelicals,[2] unlike them, he insisted upon the unique function of the church in making possible its achievement. He envisaged the church not as any body of believers which might agree "upon this or that arrangement" but as "an Order of men" constituted to preach the word and administer its religious ordinances.

[1]G. J. Mountain, *Charge delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Quebec*, 1848, (Quebec, 1848), p. 20: A. W. Mountain, *Memoir of G. J. Mountain*, (Montreal, 1866), pp. 170, 199; J. H. Nicolls *A Confirmation Sermon, preached in the Chapel of Bishop's College, Lennoxville, June* 17, 1866, (Montreal, 1866), p. 4; Henry Roe, "Sermon on the death of Bishop Mountain, preached in Quebec on January 11, 1863", (manuscript in possession of Bishop's University); Isaac Brock, *The English Reformation; its Principles and Blessings*, (sermon preached in St. Peter's Church, Sherbrooke, 1878), p. 6; *Lennoxville Magazine*, 1868, p. 237.

[2]Mountain, *Charge to the Clergy of Quebec*, 1848, p. 20; Mountain, *Letter addressed to the Clergy and Laity of the Diocese of Quebec—together with some Considerations previously prepared to be addressed to the same parties*, (Quebec, 1858), p. 71; A. W. Mountain, *Memoir*, p. 199.

It was a body whose bishops were "invested with authority to transmit this commission from age to age"[3]. Mountain, and the whole Bishop's group, believed firmly that the Church of England was in direct, historical descent from the apostolical and primitive church from which its authority was transmitted. The design of the Reformers in the sixteenth century, according to a headmaster of Bishop's College School, had been merely "to restore that which was most ancient and edifying in the form and order of the Church . . .; that which was Apostolical, that which was Primitive, that which was Catholic; . . ."[4]

Emphasizing as they did the position of the visible and apostolic church, the members of the Bishop's group laid greater emphasis upon the sacraments as channels of divine grace than did the Evangelicals. "The Church of England maintains the high and sacred importance of the two sacraments and their living efficacy, when rightly applied, as direct vehicles of grace . . . ," wrote Mountain in 1858.[5]

Although admitting that the Bible was the rule of faith Mountain and his associates insisted that its interpretation was a function of the church. The bishop stoutly denied the proposition, "*there* is the Bible, and every man is to make what he can of it, and that is the way in which the Christian Faith is to be propagated over the world."[6] The Bishop's group also stressed the authority of the clergy. Nicolls, for instance, insisted that if the clergy be a chief medium of blessing to the people, "it cannot but be an awful thing to despise and trample under foot, as some do, their authority."[7]

In every issue over which Catholics and Evangelicals were in disagreement (the nature of the church, the place of the sacraments in the Christian life, the need of conversion, the authority of the clergy and of the Bible) Bishop's was essentially Catholic. The Bishop's library contained numerous pamphlets expounding the Catholic viewpoint.[8]

It naturally followed that Bishop's was sympathetic to the Tractarians. Nicolls had been an undergraduate at Oriel in Newman's time and was much influenced by the movement. Mountain, an older type of high churchman was a little nervous about Nicolls' ideas. When about to become his father-in-law, he wrote to Mrs. Mountain, "he may have some *leanings* in Religion upon particular points,

[3]G. J. Mountain, *Letter to the Clergy and Laiety of Quebec*, p. 35.

[4]Brock, *The English Reformation*, p. 8; J. Nicolls, *The Ministerial Office, A Sermon Preached at the ordination of priests, in the Cathedral Church of Montreal*, (Montreal, 1852), p. 11; Henry Roe, "Sermon on the death of Bishop Mountain January 18, 1863", (manuscript in possession of the author).

[5]G. J. Mountain, *Letter . . .*, p. 35; *Charge . . .*, 1848, p. 33.

[6]*Ibid.*, p. 23.

[7]Nicolls, *The Ministerial Office*, p. 7.

[8]*Schism*, published by the S.P.C.K.; *The Danger of Dissent*, by the Rev. W. Gresley M.S., Church Society, Diocese of Toronto; *A Caution against Enthusiasm*, being the Second Part of the Bishop of London's Fourth Pastoral Letter, London 1818, S.P.C.K.; *The Authority of a Threefold Ministry in the Church*. Bishops, Priests and Deacons Proved from the New Testament. By William Hey, (London, 1839). *A Letter to a Methodist* by a Presbyter of the Diocese of Maryland, United States. Part 1, Invalidity of Mr. Wesley's Ordinations. Part 2, Objections to the Principle and Policy of the Methodist Society. Part 3, The Apostolical Succession of the Christian Ministry, (Cobourg 1844. Church Society, Diocese of Toronto).

acquired at Oxford, which are not in *perfect* accordance with my own views upon those points"; but he added that Nicolls was "a sound believer — and uncompromising Churchman."[9] Mountain believed the Tractarians to be essentially sound. In correcting "many loose and low notions which widely prevailed" he considered them as a healthy counter to the Evangelicals. He regretted that many of the Tractarians had entered the Roman Catholic church because, as he said, it enabled the Evangelicals to "represent all maintenance of ancient order and discipline — as tending towards popery."[10] Mountain's attitude toward the Tractarians was characterized by incidental doubt and basic sympathy; that of Nicolls and the younger Bishop's men probably by less doubt and more sympathy.

For the Liberals Bishop's had no use. After the publication of *Essays and Reviews*, Mountain denounced its authors because they were "busy in suggesting, more than suggesting, busy in recommending — the rejection, piece by piece, of all which constitutes the value of the Bible."[11] A few years later the *Lennoxville Magazine* made a vigorous attack on Bishop Colenso.[12] The most measured attack upon the Liberals was made by J. H. Thompson, a former Professor of Divinity at Bishop's, in a sermon preached at Lennoxville in 1864. The Liberals, he said, had persuaded many that the idea of the peculiar inspiration of the Bible was a calamitous mistake and they were now attempting to establish "a hopeless contradiction between the discoveries of Modern Science and the ancient popular phraseology of the Bible." Having destroyed faith in the historic truth of Christianity, the Liberals sought to create a united, comprehensive and enlightened church formed by a vast complex of creeds, sects and religions. To Professor Thompson this was a gorgeous but cloudy vision.[13]

Thompson, and Nicolls also, insisted that it would be a disaster if an irreparable breach developed between the physical scientists and the church and that it was the function of the university to hold them together. Thompson asserted, "Here alone in this portion of the world can freedom of thought in scientific matters be combined with a reverent regard for Antiquity, a firm belief in a definite body of revealed objective truth, a careful retention of the Nicene Creed, and of all that is essential in the Nicene discipline." Nicolls expressed the same idea in his Convocation Address in 1860 in a passage which began, "it is the business of an University to gather into itself all the branches of learning, to adopt and interweave with the old and well-tried, what is new and modern".

Bishop's reserved its most severe criticism for Methodists and Anglican Evangelicals. They were the principal objects of denunciation by the inner circle at the University and among Bishop's men throughout the Canadian church. The Methodists they feared as powerful opponents who had made thousands of converts among Anglicans. A Bishop's graduate in Ontario referred sadly in 1862 to

[9]Bishop's University, Nicolls Papers, G. J. Mountain to Mrs. Mountain, January 22, 1847.

[10]A. W. Mountain, *Memoir*, p. 250.

[11]G. J. Mountain, *Charge delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Quebec*, 1862 (Quebec, 1862), p. 5.

[12]*Lennoxville Magazine*, 1868, p. 237.

[13]J. H. Thompson, *Revelation and Science, A Sermon preached in St. George's Church, Lennoxville, July* 1, 1864, (Montreal, 1864), pp. 5-8.

the "enormous masses thus stolen from the Church" by the Methodists.[14] This attitude was typical. Hating the Methodists the Bishop's group bitterly resented the Anglican Evangelicals as being, in effect, Methodists who were corrupting the church from within.

Mountain's sermons and episcopal charges were full of scathing remarks about both. He disliked the Methodists because of their views, "the mere contagion of feelings and opinions", as he called them, but even more because they had left the church and were one of "the endless and still multiplying forms of schism."[15] Quite characteristically he described a Methodist missionary to the Mississauga Indians as "a person of the name of Jones" while, in the same letter, he referred to an Anglican missionary as "*Mr.* M."[16] Equally objectionable were the Evangelicals whom Mountain always regarded contemptuously as 'a party' and, what was worse, a party consisting of "persons who have low and loose views of the church". These people, he asserted, although loud in their criticisms of Romanizing tendencies were not really the friends of those "who love the reformed Church of England".[17] Nicolls' attitude was similar to that of Mountain. He deplored the multiplication of sects, by which he meant the Methodists, and expressed the hope that they would "gradually return back to the fold".[18] He always refused to have anything to do with "party" which, in the language of the high churchmen, meant the Evangelicals. This was a lesson well learned by Archdeacon Henry Roe, one of Nicolls' pupils, who said that he had learned from his teacher "that we ought to try *not* to be party men". In a sermon preached shortly after Nicolls' death, Roe castigated the Evangelicals severely in a passage which began, "There is still found, tho' I hope and believe it is dying out, a lurking disloyalty to the English Church among English Churchmen".[19]

The private papers of Jasper Nicolls are full of letters from Nicolls' students who had graduated and had entered the Anglican ministry in Canada. These contain many accounts of the desperate conflict with the Methodists who were obviously both hated and feared. Of these letters the longest and most striking was from Charles Forest who was one of the original students at Bishop's and who had become the Rector of the parish of Grenville in the Ottawa Valley. In December, 1848 he wrote to Nicolls a twelve-page letter containing a detailed account of his parish: its terrain, its economy, the nature of its people, its various religious denominations and the prospects of his own congregation. Forest devoted particular attention to the rival religious denominations especially the Presbyterians whom he respected and the Methodists whom he despised. He denounced them in the bitterest terms. "If these sectaries have done mischief elsewhere — beyond all bounds they have done so *here*. They have had emissaries at work — the most ignorant and debased of their kind — Men, not only unskilled in everything wh. a divine ought to

[14]Rev. J. Carry, "The Diaconate Needed as a Real Ministry", Appendix D to J. H. Nicolls, *Essay on the Subject of the Restoration of the Diaconate* (Montreal, 1863).

[15]A. W. Mountain, *Memoir*, p. 169; G. J. Mountain, *Charge . . .*, 1862 p. 19.

[16]A. W. Mountain, *Memoir*, pp. 123-4.

[17]Ibid., p. 206; G. J. Mountain, *Letter*, p. 65.

[18]Nicolls, *Essay on the Diaconate*, p. 7.

[19]Roe, Sermon on the death of Jasper Nicolls, manuscript in the author's possession.

know, but absolutely unable to read the ordinary text of our Eng. bibles without hesitation and spelling." He continued in this vein for four closely written pages concluding with a detailed and lurid account of a Methodist camp-meeting. "The mischief has been," he insisted, "that a religion of *feelings* has been established! — a "feeling well" or "lively" as they express it, has stood in place of those *convictions & principles* wh. conduce to faith & obedience of the gospel of Christ".[20]

Forest's letter fairly represented the attitude of Bishop's to the Methodists. Indicative of Bishop's attitude to the Evangelicals is a letter written by Nicolls' elder son, Gustavus, when an Oxford undergraduate. Gustavus described a breakfast engagement with a friend at Wadham College. Expecting to find about two or three other men he was horrified to find about twenty including Canon Christopher "the great low-churchman, conversion-man, and prayer-meeting man of Oxford" and Lord Radstock, a prominent Evangelical "supposed by many people to be *mad*, who goes about the country preaching all sorts of rare and curious doctrines". Gustavus described Radstock as "a professing churchman, though at heart almost if not quite a dissenter". Gustavus described his extreme distaste for the Evangelicals and their opinions and concluded, "I managed to sit it out without serious consequences, but came away as soon as I possibly could".[21]

The doctrinal views of the Bishop's group are important because the University exercised a considerable influence on the development of the Canadian church. The period of Nicolls' principalship (1845-77) was one of great expansion of the Church of England in Quebec. In 1846 Quebec had seventy-four clergy; by 1877 the number had nearly doubled. Of the clergy in 1877 over half (thirty out of fifty-three) in the Diocese of Quebec, and over a third (twenty-three out of ninety) in the Diocese of Montreal were Bishop's men, either graduates or members of the faculty. It would not be too inaccurate to say that all the Bishop's men thought alike in matters of doctrine and churchmanship. According to the Bishop of Quebec in 1878, Mountain, in founding Bishop's, had "fondly hoped that he was founding a seminary from which would in due season come forth champions to defend the Church — and maintain in unimpaired purity the faith once delivered."[22]

The result is clear. Henry Roe, in his sermon after Nicolls' death, testified to the unanimity of thought which prevailed among Nicolls' old students. Available evidence in the Nicolls' papers and in the texts of sermons bears out his statement. The impact of this body of thought strengthened the church in Quebec in the fight against Methodism and also helped to prevent the rise of any appreciable Anglican Evangelical movement in the Province. It remained for Ontario and for Wycliffe College, which was founded in 1877, to develop the modern Evangelical wing of the Church of England in Canada.

[20]Nicolls Papers, Letters to Jasper Nicolls from C. Forest, October 14, 1846 and December 30, 1848; Fred Robinson, March 29, 1848 and January 21, 1850; J. J. S. Mountain, February 21, 1849; Septimus Jones, September 24, 1851; Frederick Wilson, October 13, 1851; R. L. Stephenson, January 26, 1852.

[21]Nicolls Papers, Gustavus Nicolls to Harriet Nicolls, February 22, 1872.

[22]*A Sermon preached by the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Quebec at the Consecration of the Chapel of Bishop's College, Lennoxville,* June 14, 1878, (Montreal, 1878), p. 5.