

THE ANGLO-NORDIC-BALTIC THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE.

The first Conferences

The first meeting of the Conference took place in Cambridge in 1929, and the theme was, appropriately, the Doctrine of the Church: Comparative Points of View, Anglican and Lutheran. The list of names testifies to the strong conviction by the member-churches that here was an important initiative, which would contribute to the theological rapprochement between our respective churches. For example, from Finland came Aleksii Lehtonen, from Sweden, Gustaf Aulén, and from England, Oliver Quick. It is clear from the accounts of this and subsequent gatherings that the atmosphere of personal encounter was fundamental. The Conferences were not intended to draft ecumenical agreements but to feed a deeper growth of church theologians in their corporate life together.

For reasons of convenience rather than conviction, the language of the Conference has always been English, which necessitated having an English Chairman and Secretary, as time went on. Richard Parsons, Bishop of Southwark and then Hereford, chaired them from 1936-1949, when Leslie Hunter, Bishop of Sheffield took over, who in turn handed over to Professor Geoffrey Lampe in 1965. Professor Stephen Sykes assumed his mantle in 1981, and was made Bishop of Ely in 1990. In 1997 he handed over the Chairmanship to Kenneth Stevenson, who had been Secretary since 1987, and became Bishop of Portsmouth in 1995. At that stage, Martin Kitchen, then Vice-Dean of Durham, and now Dean of Derby, became the Secretary. The names of participants from the various nations include Eivind Berggrav and Einar Molland (Norway), Regin Prenter and P.G. Lindhart (Denmark), and Michael Ramsey, later Archbishop of Canterbury (England).

The Bishop of Chelmsford, Bishop John Gladwin, will be taking the Chair this year, in the light of the illness of Bishop Kenneth Stevenson. We shall also be assisted by The Rev'd Christofer Lundgren, who will be the Conference Chaplain.

The Conference attempted to meet approximately every two years - a sequence which was inevitably interrupted by the Second World War. Although the Baltic Lutheran Churches had increasing contacts with Finland and Sweden, and a little contact with England, they were not able at this early stage to participate. One of the indirect results of the Conferences was the growing ecumenical dialogue at the official level between these various Lutheran Churches and the Anglican Churches of the British Isles, which bore fruit in the Porvoo Common Statement (1993).

Recent Developments

As the theological encounters continued, and contacts between the Nordic Churches with England increased, a need was felt to provide a comparable forum for parish clergy to meet each other. Accordingly, in 1978 the first Anglo-Scandinavian Pastoral Conference was held in Sweden, and these have met in alternate years ever since, including in Iceland in 1993. History was made at the Theological Conference in 1989 in Visby, Sweden, when for the first time, official representatives from the Estonian and Latvian Churches attended. No one who was present at that meeting will ever forget the symbolic character of the venue - the beautiful and historic island of Gotland. Since that time, the Conference has spontaneously re-named itself as the Anglo-Nordic-Baltic Theological Conference, in the interests of greater accuracy and scope. The Church of Ireland was represented at the Riga Conference in 2003, and the Lutheran Churches of Lithuania and Poland were represented for the first time at Joensuu in 2005.

The Purpose of the Conferences

Invitations to participate in the Conferences have always been extended both to professional theologians teaching in Universities and Seminaries, and also to church leaders. What is sought is a meeting of theological insight and concern for the life of the present church; both strands in the Conference are equally valued. All participants have enjoyed the opportunity to be exposed to a variety of styles of theology, and the differences which exist within, as well as between, the Lutheran and Anglican delegations. The respective churches commonly use the Conferences as a way of introducing Lutherans to Anglicans, and Anglicans to Lutherans, in the Nordic-Baltic context. There is a tradition of hospitality and preaching in churches of the host country. Since the signing of the Porvoo Agreement it

has become more important than ever for us to have a forum in which delegates from member churches can meet, talk and do theology as members of the same family. The conference has stayed true to its roots in remaining a place for theological encounter free from the need to produce agreed statements, thus allowing genuine conversation and engagement to take place.

Background

Contact between the British Isles and the Nordic and Baltic nations goes back a long way. In the Middle Ages trading links made for strong relationships, for example between England and Norway when Christianity was introduced to Norway at the end of the tenth century. There were, moreover, parts of the present United Kingdom that were in the ecclesiastical province of Nidaros. At the Reformation, theological cross-fertilisation was not so strong, though there is evidence of influence from Denmark on the early Scottish Reformed Church. In the immediately following centuries, individuals travelled across the Nordic seas; for example, the great nineteenth-century Danish theologian, educationalist and hymn-writer, N.F.S. Grundtvig visited England several times, which had a profound effect on his researches into the old Nordic myths.

In the twentieth century, the two most important direct influences on the formation of our Conference were, in the first place, the 1925 Conference on Life and Work, at Stockholm in 1925, in which the central figure of Nathaniel Söderblom stands supreme. The other was the individual initiative of Arthur Headlam, Bishop of Gloucester, in making personal contact with various Scandinavian theologians and churchmen. Among them was Dr. Kenneth Stevenson's grandfather, Skat Hoffmeyer, who was at the time a pastor in Jutland, and who later became Bishop of Århus. Bishop Hoffmeyer took part in the Conferences after the Second World War.

The Conference - dates, themes and venues over the years

1929	The Doctrine of the Church: Comparative Points of View, Lutheran and Anglican	Cambridge (England)
1931	Christianity and Platonism	Sparreholm (Sweden)
1934	Salvation	Gloucester (England)
1936	The Church	Fritzoehus (Norway)
1939	The Atonement	Durham (England)
1947	Law	Liselund (Denmark)
1950	The Eucharist and the Christian Life	Durham (England)
1952	The Christian Conception of Man	Järvanpää (Finland)
1955	The Church and State	Sheffield (England)
1957	Scripture and Tradition	Båstad (Sweden)
1959	The Gospel and the Modern World	Oxford (England)
1961	The Mission of the People of God	Oslo (Norway)
1963	Creation	Rugby (England)
1965	Baptism	Løgumkloster (Denmark)
1967	Christian Theology and its Contemporary Setting	Cambridge (England)
1969	Incarnation	Järvanpää (Finland)
1971	The Holy Spirit	Durham (England)
1973	Interpretation in an Age of Historical Criticism	Graninge (Sweden)
1975	Man's Understanding of his Salvation	Canterbury (England)
1977	The Church and the Structures of Society	Utstein (Norway)
1979	The distinctiveness of Christian Revelation (England)	Lincoln
1981	The future of Western Protestantism	Copenhagen (Denmark)
1983	Freedom in Christ and Contemporary Concepts of Freedom	York (England)
1985	Ecclesiology in the Light of recent Ecumenism	Larkulla (Finland)
1987	The Presence of Christ	Salisbury (England)
1989	Creation	Visby (Sweden)
1991	Growing up into Christ	Durham (England)
1993	The Church: Sign, Instrument and Foretaste of the Kingdom	Lohusalu (Estonia)
1995	Initiation	Verdal (Norway)
1997	Salvation	Cambridge (England)
1999	Christianity Facing the Millennium	Portsmouth (England)
2001	Theology and Music	Århus (Denmark)

2003	Atonement and Memory	Riga (Latvia)
2005	Understanding Salvation: justification and theôsis	Joensuu (Finland)
2007	The Holy Spirit	Uppsala (Sweden)
2009	Theology and Art	Canterbury (England)
2012	Christian Anthropology	Mirfield (England)
2013 (Ireland)	Education, Ethos and Social Transformation	Dublin