

THOMAS BRADBURY CHANDLER'S *AN APPEAL TO THE PUBLIC*

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A NATIVE of Australia, Dr. McCulloch was en route to Oxford when a sudden illness detained him in California. There he remained, and in 1944 he received his doctorate from the University of California and became an American citizen. After holding teaching positions at Oberlin, Amherst, and Michigan, he joined the staff of the Department of History and Political Science at Rutgers in July, 1947, as an Assistant Professor. His major field of interest is the humanitarian movement within the British Empire.

THE LIBRARY is most fortunate in possessing one of the key tracts in the pamphlet controversy of the 1760's concerning the campaign for an episcopate in the colonial Anglican church. The tractarian nature of Chandler's book can be judged from its typical eighteenth-century sub-title: "Wherein the Original [*sic*] and Nature of the Episcopal Office are Briefly Considered, Reasons for Sending Bishops to America are Assigned, The Plan on which it is Proposed to Send Them is Stated, and the Objections against Sending them are Obviated and Confuted." Actually the scheme of entrusting the government of the Anglican church in America to resident bishops was as old as the jurisdiction of the Bishop of London. The project almost succeeded in Queen Anne's reign, but it was thwarted by her death. Efforts continued to be made during the eighteenth century, by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in the first two decades, by the Bishop of London in the forties, and by the colonial clergy—among whom Chandler was a star contender—in the sixties and seventies. All failed due to a combination of the inertia of the English Church caused by its inherent conservatism and the opposition of three powerful groups—the English Whig politicians, the English dissenters, and the colonial dissenters.

Unfortunately there never has been a biography of Chandler (1726-1790), so we know very little about his life.¹ Born in Con-

¹ Several short articles have appeared: Frank Gavin, "The Rev. Thomas Bradbury Chandler in the Light of his (unpublished) Diary, 1775-85," [Reprinted from *Church History*, June, 1932]; Joseph Hooker, "Thomas Bradbury Chandler, Doctor and Confessor," *The Church Eclectic*, XVIII (July, 1890), 289-303; Albert Harrison Hoyt,

necticut, he was educated at Yale, where he came under the Episcopalian influence which was strong there at that time. He studied theology under the guidance of the Rev. Samuel Johnson, first president of King's [later Columbia] College, and in 1747 was appointed lay reader and catechist at St. John's Church, Elizabethtown, New Jersey. A few years later he sailed for London to receive holy orders, then returned home immediately. He obtained considerable notoriety in 1763 when he refused to permit George Whitefield to speak in his church. He had also become recognized as a leading advocate of American episcopacy, so that when a convention of Anglican clergymen from New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania met in 1766, he was delegated to make the plea which became *An Appeal to the Public, in behalf of the Church of England in America* (printed by James Parker, New York, 1767). This was the beginning of his controversy with Dr. Charles Chauncey of Boston. As the colonies tended towards revolution, Chandler's profound royalist sympathies became more ardent, and in 1775 he left for England. He returned to Elizabethtown ten years later in failing health. Only sickness prevented his accepting an offer to become first bishop of Nova Scotia in 1786.

Chandler, in his advertisement to the *Appeal*, tells how he came to write it. The idea was originally proposed by Dr. Samuel Johnson, who wished to make a detailed advocacy of episcopacy, but was prevented by a tremor in the hand (p. ix). Then fellow clergymen "in voluntary convention" urged Chandler to undertake the project.² In his biography of Dr. Johnson, Chandler goes further and explains that Johnson wished to reply to one of the participants in the Mayhew Controversy.³ This controversy was the opening barrage of the pamphlet warfare and started when one Jonathan Mayhew published in 1763 some *Observations on the Charter and Conduct of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel*, which maintained that the chief

"Thomas Bradbury Chandler, 1726-1790," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, XXVII (July, 1873), 227-236; Harold N. Renfrew, "Thomas Bradbury Chandler," *American Church Monthly*, XXVI (September, 1929), 194-208; Harrison John Thornton, "Thomas Bradbury Chandler (1726-1790)," *Dictionary of American Biography*, III, 616.

² An original manuscript of the convention is printed in William Stevens Perry, *The History of the American Episcopal Church* (2 vols., Boston, 1885), I, 415.

³ *The Life of Samuel Johnson, the First President of King's College in New York* (New York, 1805), 114-116.

plan of the Society was to root out "Presbyterianism" and establish an episcopal form of church government.⁴

Chandler finished his *Appeal* in 1767 and sent a copy of it together with a letter to the Bishop of London. This letter is important because it contains Chandler's estimate of his own book. The *Appeal*, he says, outlines the opinions of the clergy in most of the colonies, that is, the desire for a purely spiritual episcopate. But, he continues:

There are some Facts and Reasons, which could not be prudently mentioned in a Work of this Nature, as the least Intimation of them would be of ill Consequence in this irritable Age and Country: but were they known, they would have a far greater Tendency to engage such of our Superiors, if there be any such as are governed by Political motives, to espouse the Cause of the Church of England in America, than any contained in the Pamphlet. But I must content myself with having proposed those only which could be mentioned safely, and leave the event to Divine Providence.⁵

This could indicate that Chandler was thinking of a temporal establishment, and that was precisely what his foes feared most. Such duplicity on his part seems doubtful, and the remarks probably refer to other more loyal clergy who later advanced their ideas openly. In his introduction to the *Appeal*, Chandler said that the exposition of the plan would reveal its inherent reasonableness and harmlessness. It would invade neither civil nor religious privileges. If any objections continue, announces Chandler, "the Objectors are invited to propose them in such a Manner, that they may be fairly and candidly debated, before the Tribunal of the Publick" (p. 2).

The *Appeal* itself is divided into eleven sections; but these can be organized under four main headings: (1) the origin and nature of the episcopal office, (2) reasons for sending bishops to America, (3) a plan by which they are sent, and (4) a refutation of objections against the plan. The first heading, comprising two sections, deals with ecclesiastical history, and need not concern us here. The next five sections take up the subject of the second heading, namely, the need of an American episcopate. The main function of the bishop would

⁴ For a description of this controversy, in fact, for the whole episcopal problem, see Arthur Lyon Cross, *The Anglican Episcopate and the American Colonies* (New York, 1902), *passim*.

⁵ Chandler to Bishop Terrick, Elizabethtown, New Jersey, October 21, 1767, in Fulham Palace MSS, printed in Cross, *op. cit.*, Appendix A, No. xiii, 345-346.

be that of ordination and confirmation. To impress his argument, Chandler points out the unsuccessful jurisdiction of the Bishop of London and the ineffectuality of the commissaries, since they were the mere shadows of a bishop. Chandler promises that there will be no restoration of primitive discipline if bishops are sent, that they will provide the necessary discipline and no more.

Chandler emphasized that the absence of local means of ordination had proved disadvantageous to the colonial Church. He himself well knew the hazard in going to England. Many were deterred from going because the casualties were about one-fifth, and even if safe passage could have been guaranteed, the financial burdens were often too great. As a result the supply of ministers was always less than the demand. For example, in 1767, says Chandler, New Jersey had twenty-one churches and only eleven ministers. Other colonies were in a similar predicament, and, worse, some of the ministers were "poor characters" who had "slipped through" to England. Indeed, the Church was "in a most wretched and deplorable Condition" (p. 40). Our case is unprecedented, he argues, and, after all, in petitioning for bishops we ask only for liberty and equality. Bishops, he feels, would terminate the great neglect that has been the fate of the American Church. The reasons bishops had not been sent were: (1) the private settlement, (2) the early struggles for existence, (3) the fear of "infringing the religious Rights of Protestant Dissenters" (p. 48), (4) negligence in England, despite the valiant work of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and (5) colonial negligence.

Warming to his argument, Chandler stresses the fact that the present time is favorable for forming an episcopate. The war is over, there is harmony among the English and the colonists, the Church in America has increased in size to about a million members (obviously a much too optimistic figure—Chauncey in his reply to Chandler said there were only 300,000), the colored population has need of Church and bishop, and the colonists have obligations of gratitude for the help of British arms, and, adds Chandler, of God too. He even takes a whole section to point out why an episcopate would aid the Indians. Since imperialism and religion go hand in hand, the expansion of British territory would be aided by conversion of the Indians, and would, at the same time, challenge the influence of the French Jesuit. The Indians must be civilized, they need schools, and

yet past plans to aid them have been sent out by people ignorant of colonial conditions. Therefore unusual care is needed, and that care can come from a bishop who would unite the people and could enforce a uniform system of educating and civilizing the Indians. Even Sir William Johnson, so experienced in Indian affairs, "declares his Readiness to assist and cooperate with a Bishop in so good a work" (p. 73).

Chandler next proceeds to the third division of his book (section viii), namely the definition of a plan by which bishops are to be sent, and it is the weakest part of the book. He mentions little of the plan because he spends so much time classifying the opponents of it. In orderly fashion he names them as: enemies of all religions; enemies, secret and open, to the Protestant religion; and enemies of the extension of episcopacy merely because property and religious liberty might be endangered, not through antipathy to religion in general. On the last named group he concentrates his whole *Appeal*. He firmly promises that "in this Age of British Freedom and improved Liberty" the Church would not dare to take away any rights. In fact the Church is being persecuted and punished by those people who oppose episcopacy. An ungrateful return for toleration, he concludes!

Chandler is now satisfied that he has outlined the functions and limitations of the proposed episcopate, so he passes on to the fourth and last division of the *Appeal* (sections ix to xi), which is an answer to all objections to his proposition. Dissenters, he firmly believes, cannot be hurt by an episcopate. They desire only "Security in the Enjoyment of their present Advantages" (p. 89), and certainly English dissenters have lived happily under bishops; surely if they do not complain, Americans need not worry. He does admit some instances where "the Power of our Bishops has been strained too high" (p. 91); but the English episcopal government is now milder and more liberal. Another objection is the fear that spiritual courts will be established. Chandler is confident there is no foundation for this complaint, even though he himself feels they are necessary. "If our American Bishops," he writes, "are to have no Authority over Dissenters, nor indeed to exercise Discipline over our own People, the Clergy excepted; then the frightful Objection of *Spiritual Courts* intirely vanishes" (p. 95).

Nor will tithes ever be introduced; it is ignorance and misapprehension, he insists, to think that they will. "Tithes cannot be demanded by Bishops in this Country," he writes, "because there are none belonging to the Church: they are demanded in England, only because they are due to the Church" (p. 97). This seems hardly a fair argument, and it is not a conclusive argument to say, as Chandler does later, that tithes will never be introduced because it would take an act of parliament to do so. Nevertheless this section on tithes is made readable by an interesting excursion into the history of medieval English tithes. Chandler proves himself erudite in this and other examples of historical exposition and analysis.

Further suspicions and objections are quashed. He answers in the negative as to whether there will be new taxes (funds, he says, have already been set aside by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, and others), or whether bishops will increase their power.

Chandler's conclusion to the *Appeal* is good, although he overstates the case when he says: "It need not be repeated, that unless Bishops should be speedily sent us, we can foresee nothing but the Ruin of the Church in this Country" (p. 113). And he certainly shows where he stands as to the problems of 1775: "Episcopacy can never thrive in a Republican Government, nor Republican Principles in an Episcopal Church" (p. 115). Evidently his powers of prophecy were not so great as his skill in argumentation. In the remaining part of the conclusion he hopes that the prejudices of his opponents, which he charitably believes have arisen from misapprehension, are now ended. "If they are in Reality the Friends of Truth, and Justice, and Liberty, which they pretend and we are willing to believe them to be, they must be heartily disposed to act a friendly Part towards us, with Regard to an Episcopate; which Disposition will add greatly to their own Happiness, as well as ours" (pp. 116-117).

The *Appeal* was answered the following year by Dr. Charles Chauncey of Boston in a book entitled *An Appeal to the Public Answered, in behalf of the Non-episcopal Churches in America*. Chauncey insisted that bishops were mere creatures of the state, and not the real governors of the Church. He was also frightened that tithes would be introduced, not to mention ecclesiastical courts. However, the crux of his objections centered in the fear that bishops,

being arms of the state, would clothe themselves with temporal power.

The remainder of the controversy need only be briefly summarized. Chandler replied with the *Appeal Defended*, which was followed by Chauncey's *Reply*, and Chandler's *Appeal Further Defended* (in which he reinforced his own arguments by correcting Chauncey's grammar!). In 1769, a letter from Archbishop Secker to Horatio Walpole defending an American episcopate and written in 1750 was posthumously published. This so irritated Archdeacon Francis Blackburne, who was already sympathetic with dissenters, that he published his *Critical Commentary*. Chandler was likewise goaded into action, and dissected Blackburne's arguments in *A Free Examination of the Critical Commentary*, published in 1774. Thus ended his part in the controversy.

In evaluating the *Appeal* it must be said that Chandler presents the Episcopal case in a very convincing light from the religious point of view. But even the more reasonable elements among the anti-episcopalians admitted this. The main point was that, whether Chandler liked it or not, the introduction of bishops was part and parcel of certain political consequences that were anathema to many liberal colonists. Chandler's attempts to solve this difficulty lead him on to unsure ground in many parts of the *Appeal*. That he tried to prove that only a spiritual episcopate would be founded is obvious; yet his efforts were in vain because they were beside the point. He vainly repeated every plausible argument he could think of; but he failed to satisfy his opponents a whit because he did not allay their one basic fear—that a bishop once established would try to extend his powers. Nor did Chandler squarely face the issue of what might be the reaction of the ordinary Anglican church members, especially the vestries. The real control of the colonial Church completely resided with the local vestries, not with the Bishop of London, the commissary, or the colonial governor. The leaders of independence were active in vestries, and some authorities have stated that the seeds of the American Revolution came from their bold stand against bishop, commissary, and governor.⁶ If Chandler was cognizant of the fact, he did not say so.

⁶ Wesley M. Gewehr, *The Great Awakening in Virginia, 1740-1790* (Durham, 1930), 31.