

A LOOK AT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN LONDON AND AT SOME OF THE BUILDINGS INVOLVED

by Dr. Gordon Huelin

One of the particular concerns of Ivor Bulmer-Thomas has been to encourage theological study. Indeed for several years he undertook the responsibility for arranging courses of lectures on a variety of religious topics at the City of London church of St. Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe in what was known as the Advanced Sunday School. It therefore seems fitting that this collection of papers in honour of his eightieth birthday should include one which considers the efforts made to develop theological education in London, paying attention not only to the part played by individuals in such efforts but also to the buildings involved.

The medieval Church in London as elsewhere was not greatly concerned with the problem of theological education. Provided the faithful fulfilled their obligations regarding Mass and the other sacraments, and obeyed the Church's rules, that was sufficient. In any case services were in Latin which few of the laity—and even sometimes the clergy who performed them—could understand; the Bible remained a closed book; and what religious teaching there was came through the media of paintings on the churches' walls and imagery in their stained-glass windows.

It was the Renaissance and Reformation which brought a change of outlook. Certainly by the time of Elizabeth I moves were afoot to enable Londoners to deepen their knowledge and understanding in various fields, not least the religious. Pride of place here must go to the great Elizabethan citizen and merchant Sir Thomas Gresham, with his foundation of Gresham College. As T. Kelly says: 'We must regard Gresham College as the first major enterprise in the field which is now customarily called Adult Education'.¹ Gresham was a Mercer, and by his Will dated 1575 he left money to the Mercers' Company together with the Corporation of London for the setting up of seven lectureships, one of which was in Divinity. It was after the death of his widow in 1597 that Sir Thomas's wishes were put into effect when his former house in Bishopsgate Street became Gresham College, with rooms for the seven professors who then took up residence there. Ward in his *Lives of the Gresham Professors* shows the Professor of Divinity's lodgings as situated on the first floor and looking on to the quadrangle known as 'Green Court'.² According to the 'ordinances and agreements' of 1597, the professor's duties were to deliver two lectures every week during term-time, the first lecture to be given in Latin on Wednesday mornings from eight until nine, and the second lecture in English on the same day between two

and three in the afternoon. As the reign of Elizabeth I was a time when Anglicanism was under attack from various quarters, the ordinances recognised the need 'that the common people be well grounded in the chief points of the Christian religion'. Accordingly, they prescribed that the Divinity Professor should deal with matters of theological controversy 'specially those wherein the Church of England differs from the common adversaries, the papists and other sectaries'.³ It would be interesting to know how the first Gresham Professor of Divinity, Anthony Wotton, Fellow of King's College Cambridge, fulfilled this obligation in his initial course of lectures given during the Michaelmas term of 1598, and, no less, the sort of people who comprised his audience. Unfortunately no such information is available. Gresham College remained in its original home until 1761. From the middle of the nineteenth century until fairly recently, the divinity lectures were delivered in a building known as Gresham College on the corner of Basinghall Street. Now their audience may enjoy them in the comfort of the new Barbican centre.

If papists had little opportunity of expressing their views publicly in the London of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, this was not the case with those referred to in the Gresham College ordinances as 'other sectaries'. Indeed, as early as 1559, the Puritans had arranged what were called 'lectures'—though we should probably describe them today as 'homilies'—at the church of St. Antholin Budge Row, in the very heart of the City. Within a short space of time these lectures were being delivered on every week day morning at six o'clock. The Scriptures were expounded and the Calvinist theology of Geneva was taught: much to the satisfaction of the Puritan Londoners who supported these lectures with their presence and their purses. Notwithstanding changes in their theological content, and the fact that in spite of strong opposition the particularly fine Wren church of St. Antholin was demolished during the 1870s, the St. Antholin Lectures continued to be given in the City until after the Second World War—though, it should be added, at a more reasonable hour of the day than 6.0 am! However, the Golden Lectures still continue, and usually nowadays take place annually at the City church of St. Lawrence Jewry. These originated through the bequest of a generous Haberdasher, William Jones, who died in the early seventeenth century and left money for a lecturer to be appointed by his Company, the lectures to be delivered weekly at St. Bartholomew-by-the-Exchange, another City church which was pulled down in the mid-nineteenth century. By that time the lectureship had so increased in value that it could be truly described as 'Golden'.⁴ With the temporary triumph of Puritanism during the 1640s and 50s, lectures in London churches abounded. It was in the time of

the usurper Oliver Cromwell, when the Anglican services were banned, that John Pearson—later Bishop of Chester—availed himself of the freedom allowed to lecturers to give a course of lectures on the Creed in the church of St. Clement, Eastcheap. These were subsequently published, and Pearson's *Exposition of the Creed* can still sometimes be found on the shelves of second-hand booksellers. Some idea of the theological learning which Pearson imparted to that City audience may be gauged from the fact that on certain pages the notes and references exceed in length the actual text.

Post-Restoration London saw the foundation of numerous Religious Societies, one of the leading figures in this movement being Dr. Anthony Horneck, preacher at the Savoy Chapel. In his *Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies in the City of London*, Josiah Woodward refers to 'the benefit of Dr. Horneck's awakening sermons, and the morning lectures on the Lord's Day in Cornhill, preached by Mr. Smithies (chiefly designed for the instruction of youth).⁵ He also mentions 'an evening monthly lecture set up in St. Clement Danes to confirm communicants in their holy purposes and vows which they made at the Lord's Table'. According to Woodward, these public lectures drew large numbers, being preached by some of the most eminent City divines, 'from whose lips and pens', he adds, 'Popery received such wounds as all her arts will never be able to cure'.⁶

The great ejection of the Nonconformists from the Church of England in the summer of 1662 led to the setting up of the Dissenting Academies, so named after the celebrated Academy in Geneva which John Calvin founded in 1559. These Academies were to play a very important role in the dissemination of theological learning during the centuries which followed. Their original purpose was to provide ministerial training for Dissenters, since these were barred from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge; but as time went on, they welcomed the sons of Nonconformists whether or not these intended later on to serve as ministers of the Gospel.

One Dissenting Academy, not far from the City, came into existence around the year 1700. This was situated in Hoxton Square, not far from Shoreditch church, which at that time was regarded as a pleasant residential district. The tutor responsible for theology was Dr. Joshua Oldfield, a learned man whose qualifications were described as 'of the first order'.⁷ Oldfield's *Essay towards the Improvement of Reason*, published in 1707, suggests that Hebrew, New Testament Greek and Ethics formed part of the curriculum for the Hoxton divinity students. Some years earlier, an Academy had been opened in Newington Green, and it was to this that the young Daniel Defoe was sent. In 1697 the Congregational Fund Board sent students there, but later discovered

that the teaching given was not such as they approved of.⁸ Hence, the Board decided to set up its own Academy in Moorfields, north of the City wall: but despite the fact that the tutors here were beyond reproach, the students were obviously not. It seems that the congregations to whom these students subsequently ministered crumbled away on account of the unorthodox views to which they were exposed!

Following this unfortunate experience, a group of Congregationalists, who were strictly Calvinist and severely critical of the Moorfields students, met at the sign of the King's Head in Poultry, and there in 1730 formed the King's Head Society. Eventually, this Society purchased a site for another Academy in the High Street of what was then the village of Homerton to the east of London. Under its residential tutor, students at Homerton Academy pursued a course of theological studies which, although basically orthodox, took account of Biblical criticism, and turned for guidance in preaching and pastoralia to be published lectures of Philip Doddridge, the celebrated hymn-writer. Numbers so increased that the Academy had to be enlarged, until in 1822 the old house was declared unsafe. A new building, completed in the following year and re-named 'Homerton College', is described by Sir John Summerson as 'architecturally less ambitious' than certain others, yet still perhaps among those of which 'the porticos sanctioned the worthiness of the institutions in the eyes of governors and subscribers and stamped their efforts with a conspicuous and respectable zeal'.⁹ Many of its students became ministers either in England or abroad. By the middle of the nineteenth century, negotiations between the governors of Homerton College and those of Highbury College and the Coward Trustees College in Southampton Row resulted in the decision to set up a purely theological college for members of the Congregational Church. So, in 1850, there was laid the foundation-stone of New College, Finchley Road, a building designed in the Tudor style, its architect being John T. Emmett of Hatton Garden.¹⁰ This became a Divinity School of the then recently formed University of London. New College, London continued to flourish as a centre of theological learning, until the changed circumstances of the second half of the twentieth century forced its closure a few years ago. Among its more recent teachers of distinction have been Principal John Huxtable and Dr. Geoffrey Nuttall.

Turning to the Church of England where, in London as elsewhere, little provision was made for the theological training of the clergy until the nineteenth century, King's College—the heart of which is still Sir Robert Smirke's building in the Strand completed in 1831—became outstanding. Nevertheless, although the name

of King's College has come to be particularly associated with those studying for the Anglican ministry, it seems rather surprising that, in spite of its distinctively religious foundation with a chapel at its centre—later rebuilt to the design of the eminent architect George Gilbert Scott¹¹—the Department of Theology did not come into existence until some years after the College had got off the ground. However, by the mid-1840s the situation was such that many men were prevented from seeking ordination simply because they could not afford the expense of going to the older Universities. Accordingly, in January 1846, the Principal of King's College, Dr. R. W. Jelf, laid before its Council 'A Plan for the Establishment of a Theological Department' which was accepted.¹² This came into being the following Easter, and two years later students were enabled to qualify for the Associateship of the College, and, if successful, to put after their names the letters 'AKC'. Prospects greatly improved for the Theological Department when, early in the twentieth century, its members were able to study for the newly-instituted degree of Bachelor of Divinity of the University of London. The contribution made by King's College to theological education is as impossible to assess as it is to list those many teachers who have added to it. Merely to name such recent Deans as Drs. W. R. Matthews, Eric Abbott, and Sydney Evans is sufficient to indicate something of the debt owed by so many to this great institution. Changes in 1976 resulted in the merger of the Theological Department with the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies. Yet, King's College continues to play a major role in the field of theological education; and its public lectures afford ordinary people the opportunity of listening to theologians of international repute.

While King's College has always striven to combine religion and learning with, what Dr. W. R. Matthews called, 'a comprehensiveness as wide as the Church of England',¹³ it was otherwise in the case of another London college which for many years played a part in the theological education and training of men for the ministry, and also formed part of the University of London, namely St. John's Hall, Highbury. The reason was that the religious controversies of the nineteenth century, culminating in the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, and that volume of essays by seven churchmen entitled *Essays and Reviews* a year later, shocked many members of the Anglican Church, especially Evangelicals. So, in order to ensure that there would be clergy whose teaching would be strictly orthodox and based solely on the Bible and the Thirty-nine Articles, a wealthy Evangelical, the Rev. Alfred Peache, produced money to found a College with that outlook and tradition. Its first Principal, Dr. Thomas Boulton, named the temporary premises which housed the students 'St.

John's Hall' after his old College at Cambridge. Later, the buildings of what had been the former Congregational College at Highbury, were purchased, and the students moved into these in 1866. Through Alfred Peache's generosity a dining-hall and library were added, as well as a gateway modelled on that of St. John's Cambridge and presenting an imposing feature in what was then a somewhat drab neighbourhood. Dr. Davies in his history of St. John's Hall (also known as the London College of Divinity) comments on the aggressively 'Protestant' appearance of the chapel, in keeping with the strictly Evangelical principles of its foundation.¹⁴ Former students at Highbury have affirmed that the Holy Table was decorated with three aspidistras which were nicknamed 'Faith, Hope and Charity'! Despite this, some latitude was permitted as regards theological opinions. Among those trained at Highbury was Wilson Carlile, founder of the Church Army, who in his own novel way managed to spread the Christain Faith, not least in the City where the church of St. Mary-at-Hill, of which he was one time rector, was filled to capacity on Sunday nights. War-damage compelled the College to leave Highbury, and under its distinguished Principal, Dr. Donald Coggan (subsequently to become Archbishop of Canterbury), to seek a new home at Northwood in Middlesex. Today it flourishes in the surroundings of Nottingham, from which it takes its present title of "St. John's College Nottingham", but its associations with London have ended.

For many years the Methodists had a theological centre at Richmond, which gave it its name: Richmond College. Although it was actually situated in Surrey, the fact that from 1909 onwards it was a recognised Divinity School of the University of London permits its inclusion here. Opened in 1843, it was the first Methodist Theological College to be built. Of all the buildings mentioned in this paper Richmond College was the most delightfully situated, standing on the top of Richmond Hill in an estate of about ten acres. Originally, the old manor house to which the new college buildings were joined, had belonged to Squire Williams who had planted some rare trees in his grounds.¹⁵ The architect of Richmond College, Mr. A. Trimen of Adam Street, Adelphi, chose Bath stone for his building, which was in the Perpendicular style, with an impressive stone tower decorated with turrets and battlements. There was a dining hall and lecture rooms, as well as a library which contained priceless treasures, including John Wesley's personal collection of books. Soon afterwards a chapel was added, with the actual pulpit from the old Foundery in Moorfields from which Wesley had on many occasions preached. The contribution of Richmond College to theological education was noteworthy, especially in the years after the First World War. Those training for the Methodist ministry could read for the B.D. degree

of London University, or if they were less academically minded, could take the University Diploma in Theology. The two courses ran together, and by this means everyone at Richmond ranked as an internal student of the University. The College had on its staff such distinguished scholars as Principal F.B. Clogg, whose lecture on demonology was so well-informed and knowledgeable that his audience concluded that it could only be derived from first hand experience!¹⁶ Probably one of the best known Richmond teachers was Dr. Harold Roberts, a great ecumenist, who was described by Cardinal Heenan as 'the best speaker I have heard on the subject of the Second Vatican Council',¹⁷ and who worked tirelessly with Archbishop Michael Ramsey and Dr. Robert Stopford—then Bishop of London and himself a theological educationalist—on behalf of Anglican-Methodist unity. Inflation and a decrease in the number of candidates for the Methodist ministry unhappily led to the demise of Richmond College some years ago.

It was not until 1970 that the Roman Catholics moved their college from the village of Heythrop in north Oxfordshire to the centre of London. Since that time they have been housed in what was formerly the Convent of the Holy Child Jesus in Cavendish Square. The eighteenth century buildings were severely bombed during the Second World War and suffered much interior damage. Since then they have been 'imaginatively restored', with a new chapel and lecture hall added.¹⁸ An arched buttress which serves as a communicating bridge between the College buildings, has on the Cavendish Square front Sir Jacob Epstein's statue of the Madonna and Child, dated 1953 and described by the sculptor as his 'passport to eternity'.¹⁹ Heythrop College is recognised as a Divinity School of the University of London, and has gained a reputation for its theological scholarship and for the impressive collection of books contained in its Library.

No paper on the development of theological education in London can ignore the contribution made by Libraries. The oldest of these is Sion College Library, housed since the end of the nineteenth century in Sir Arthur Blomfield's building on the Victoria Embankment. Dr. Thomas White, vicar of St. Dunstan-in-the-West, Fleet Street, died in 1624, leaving provision in his Will for a College to contain a hall where clergy could meet socially and 'maynetaine love in conversing together',²⁰ as well as for an Almshouse for the poor. His executors purchased a site in London Wall which, had, prior to the Reformation, been Elsing Spital: and there the first Sion College was erected in 1630. This seems to have been an attractive building with a set of rooms for clergy and students, a gate and a turret, and a garden containing trees, vines, damsons and gooseberries. It should be noted however, that

although White was a man of learning, there is no mention of a library; and it was not until later that his executor, the Rev. John Simson, rector of St. Olave, Hart Street, hit upon the idea of using part of the building in London Wall for this purpose. The College suffered considerably in the Great Fire of 1666, even though the Librarian arranged for carts to convey as many of the books as possible to the nearby Charterhouse. A water-colour drawing in the present Library shows the rather attractive post-Fire College building, in the style of architecture of the period and topped by tall chimneys along the side wall. A volume of the *Gentleman's Magazine Library*, which contains an 'Account of London Libraries' (from Harl. Mss., 5900) says of old Sion College that it was 'an object well deserving of pious benefactors that are lovers of learning, it being a place very conveniently situated out of the noise of coaches, carts and waggons, and the only public library within the walls of the City of London'.²¹ Lectures later came to form a part of Sion College's programme. In the nineteenth century they were devoted to topics such as 'The reformation of fallen women and how to assist it', and 'The state of education in the City and suburbs of London and how to improve it'. Nowadays, the Advent and Lent lectures which take place each year in the present building offer more stimulating theological fare.

In the late seventeenth century, Dr. Thomas Tenison, vicar of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, provided at his own expense a library in St. Martin's churchyard. The building which was erected to house it was the work of Sir Christopher Wren. As to the library itself, it was said to be furnished with the best modern books in all faculties—including of course theology—perhaps the best of its kind in England.²² It remained in existence until 1861, when the books were sold by public auction.

A theological library in London still greatly valued by students and others, is Dr. Williams' Library situated since 1890 in Gordon Square, adjoining University College London. It was founded under the will of Dr. Daniel Williams, a Nonconformist, who declared that 'from five years old' he did nothing but study.²³ The Library was opened in 1720, and was originally housed in Red Cross Street, Cripplegate. At first it was restricted to Dissenters, but there are no such limitations today. Dr. Williams' Library has, in addition to the splendid printed books on its shelves, what is possibly the finest collection of Nonconformist tracts and manuscripts in this country.

To enumerate the many efforts on the part of individual men and women to further theological education in the London of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is beyond the limits of this paper. Some institutions which were started by clergymen on a definitely

religious basis, such as the Working Mens' College—the brainchild of the Rev. F.D. Maurice who regarded its Bible Class as that which interpreted all the College studies—and Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel—founded by Canon Samuel Barnett and his wife—have changed in character and tend to concentrate on social studies. Some like St. Christopher's College, Blackheath, founded in 1909 to offer what it advertised as 'a thorough theological and educational training to ladies engaged in, or wishing to undertake, religious education in connection with the Church of England,²⁴ have had their day and cease to be.

There is however one body which, although it would disassociate itself from any sort of religious allegiance, has made an important contribution to this field during the twentieth century: namely the University of London's Department of Extra-Mural Studies. It was in 1932, under the impetus of Miss Margery West, a distinguished lecturer in religious studies, that there emerged the Association for Adult Religious Education, with provision being made for courses at University College London in preparation for a new Diploma in the Study of the Bible.²⁵ So the subject of Biblical Studies—now called Religious Studies with the award of a Diploma after three-years attendance at lectures and examinations—came to take its place in the University Extra-Mural Department's regular programme. In recent years, the Wren church of St. Margaret Pattens in Eastcheap, with its particular function of providing a Christain Teaching Centre in the City, has included in its lunch-time courses of lectures several specially arranged by the Extra-Mural Department. Elsewhere in London, numerous courses are held in buildings which have no architectural claims or pretensions: among them the specially theologically-orientated courses at the South London Christian Study Centre in the rebuilt Christ Church, Blackfriars Road, and those known as 'Cornerstone' in the Conference Centre attached to Westminster Cathedral.

Thus, a venture which first saw the light of day nearly four hundred years ago at Gresham College, which has been associated with some of London's historic buildings, and which owes much to the efforts of countless individuals, still flourishes, No one more than Ivor would wish it continued growth and prosperity.

NOTES

1. T. Kelly, *A History of Adult Education in Great Britain* (1970), p.26.
2. John Ward, *The Lives of the Gresham Professors* (1740), illustration opp.p.33
3. *ibid.* Preface p.5
4. H. Prevett, *A Short Description of the Worshipful Company of Haberdashers* (1971), p.27

5. Josiah Woodward, *An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies in the City of London* (4th ed. 1712), p.21
6. *ibid.* p.25
7. T.G. Crippen (ed.), 'Early Nonconformist Academies', in *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, vol. VI (1913-15)
8. T.H. Simms, *Homerton College 1965-1978* (1978), p.7
9. John Summerson, *Georgian London* (Pelican Books 1962), pp.237-8
10. *New College London: Introductory Lectures delivered at the opening of the College, October 1851.*
11. Gordon Huelin, *King's College London: The Chapel* (3rd ed. 1985)
12. Gordon Huelin, *King's College London 1828-1978* (1978), p.19
13. *ibid.* p.169
14. G.C.B. Davies, *Men for the Ministry* (1963), p.78
15. F.H. Cumbers (ed.), *Richmond College 1843-1943* (1944)
16. *The Old Chariot* (Magazine of Richmond College), Michaelmas 1953
17. *ibid.* 1968
18. *Heythrop College: Prospectus 1986-87*
19. Ben Weinreb and Christopher Hibbert (eds.), *The London Encyclopaedia* (1983), p.128
20. E.H. Pearce, *Sion College and Library* (1913), p.16
21. *The Gentleman's Magazine Library: Literary Curiosities* (1888), p.100
22. *ibid.*
23. Dictionary of National Biography
24. Basil A. Yeaxlee, *Spiritual Values in Adult Education* (1925), vol. 2, p.292
25. John Burrows, *University Adult Education in London* (1976), p.52