

PLATE XX



G. W. H. LAMPE

# GEOFFREY WILLIAM HUGO LAMPE

1912–1980

GEOFFREY LAMPE was a giant in many senses—tall and fine in physical presence, large-hearted and generous and without a trace of pettiness, broad in his sympathies and wide in his range of learning. In our youth, some of us were brought up on a popular rendering of τὸ ἐπιεικὲς ὑμῶν in Phil. 4: 5 as ‘your sweet reasonableness’, and this well describes Geoffrey’s temperament and outlook. Reasonableness was important to him. He detested anything superstitious or irrational and, still more, anything pretentious or ‘bogus’. His instinct was to deflate the pompous and to explain and reduce to orderly comprehensibility everything he possibly could—and this, with a genial and tolerant grace. He felt that if a matter could be explained, then he had come to terms with it and, in a sense, mastered it. To within half an hour of his death, having long before come to terms with his medical condition, he was quietly and serenely ordering his affairs down to the last detail of his own memorial service.

He was born on 13 August 1912, and died on 5 August 1980, a few days before his sixty-eighth birthday and less than a year after superannuation from the Regius Chair of Divinity at Cambridge.

His father, who came from Alsace, with forbears from Utrecht, had been a successful conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, but left England before the outbreak of the 1914–18 war, and Geoffrey was brought up by his remarkable mother who lived to see him become Ely Professor of Divinity at Cambridge. He went to Blundell’s School and then, with a scholarship, to Exeter College, Oxford, where he had a first-class record in both Greats and Theology Schools. He had chosen Theology because, by then, it was clear to him that he should seek Holy Orders, and he went for training to the Queen’s College, Birmingham, whence, in 1937, he was ordained deacon. After a short curacy at Okehampton (1937–8), he became an assistant master at King’s School, Canterbury, marrying Enid Elizabeth Roberts from Tiverton in 1938. In 1941, after the school had been evacuated to Cornwall, he joined up at the earliest opportunity as an army chaplain, and quickly won universal respect and affection from officers and men. This was due to his devoting his gifts and natural charm quite simply to the service of all, without the slightest

discrimination. Whether it was playing bridge with officers while waiting in England before the Normandy landings—apologetic and apparently surprised when he won, as he usually did—or inviting an NCO up to sit with him and the other officers at a concert; whether it was grinding through dull routines before the invasion, or, in the trenches, repeatedly risking his life in bringing in the dead and ministering to the wounded (in the action in which his conspicuous courage won him the MC); whether he was black with mud and smoke and haggard with the appalling things he had seen, or enjoying a regimental dinner—it was all the same: always, a consistent humanity, free of self-concern, and at the disposal of others.

As soon as the issue of the war was decided, and before demobilization, his gifts were enlisted for finding and training recruits for the ordained ministry in the Church of England. He was among the leading agents of the Church's Advisory Council of Training for the Ministry, engaged in running selection courses in Germany. Here, the theological learning which as an army chaplain he had sedulously concealed became evident in lectures and courses for the ordinands.

After demobilization there followed the unbroken academic career, from the Chaplaincy and Fellowship at St. John's College, Oxford, to the Edward Cadbury Chair at Birmingham (1953–9), where he became also Dean of the Faculty of the Arts and Vice-Principal of the University, then to the Ely Chair (1959–71), and finally to the Regius Chair of Divinity at Cambridge. Honours accrued: honorary doctorates from Edinburgh (1959) and Lund (1965), election as a Fellow of the British Academy (1963) and as an Honorary Fellow of St. John's College, Oxford (1976), Honorary Canonries of Birmingham and Ely. In 1978 the King of Sweden created him a Commander of the Northern Star for his distinguished services in conferences between Anglicans and Scandinavian Lutherans.

All through, the priorities remained the same. His career unfolded itself without ambition or scheming. Each step was taken in simple response to some immediate demand. His publications are equally eloquent of his aims. An early work, *The Seal of the Spirit*, was concerned with a current matter of debate in the councils of the Church closely affecting questions of Anglican relations with other communions. The great lexicon of Patristic Greek is designed to put at the disposal of scholars not Lampe's own theories but the facts of patristic language and thought. The Bampton Lectures, at the end of his life, sum up, in terse and lucid

prose, his understanding of the rationale—so far as he could reduce it to reasoned speech—of a lifetime's devotion to God revealed in Jesus Christ. Apart from the massive achievement of the lexicon, he published comparatively little. He did not write much for learned journals, since he was more interested in reaching a wider and less specialized audience. Most of his writing was directed to the elucidation of the theology behind urgent, practical decisions. His time and talents were lavished on teaching and on pulling his weight in university and college administration and in church policy-making. As a chairman of a university board or committee, if he appeared sometimes to cut through complexities in administrative debates by ignoring the niceties of a situation, it was his considered method of dealing with the legalists and nit-pickers and getting on with the important business. He was (as an observer wrote in *Theology*) 'often able with a smile or rueful comment to defuse a grumpy or irritable colleague or to dispose of some too fanciful suggestion without the maker of it feeling put down'. Very little that was of real moment escaped him. At Birmingham, he carried his responsibilities as Dean of the Arts and (for a period, simultaneously) Vice-Principal of the University, if not lightly, at any rate without neglecting scholarship or social life. At Cambridge, while discharging his academic duties fully and faithfully, he generously undertook many duties in his own college, Caius, of which he was a loyal Fellow, and in the University, and, when Ely Professor, also as a residentiary Canon of the Cathedral. In the Cathedral and city of Ely, he and his wife took their social responsibilities seriously. From their hospitable home in the great Norman 'Black Hostelry' light and enjoyment spilt over into the neighbourhood.

In the University, as well as the faculty administration that fell to him and a spell on the General Board of the Faculties, he was for many years a member, and latterly the devoted chairman, of the Board of Extramural Studies. In addition, he was an indefatigable lecturer for that Board. After a full day in the University, he would drive through foul weather to lecture to some small group of non-specialist seekers in a remote corner of the fens. He was a born communicator and he cared about those who would not normally come within range of theological study, or might not count themselves Christians until someone could untangle their confusions. His enthusiasm and excellence as a teacher would transform a handful into a large and still growing audience.

In addition to such local ministries, he was for many years the University constituency's representative in Convocation or, as it

became, the General Synod of the Church of England. Much as he detested the boredom or worse of long hours in London witnessing discussions of sometimes merely administrative matters, he established a reputation as a formidable orator, bringing learning and logic to bear on matters of importance that were close to his heart, 'on guard' [as a writer in *Theology* put it] 'at the intersection of theology and practical affairs'. He eloquently championed the cause of intercommunion between churches and of the removal of sexual discrimination. What has been called the greatest single step towards reunion since the war was largely due to his advocacy—the admission of communicants from other denominations to receive Holy Communion in an Anglican church. He was chairman for many years of the Anglican Group for the Ordination of Women to the Historic Ministry of the Church. He took a strong and reasoned line against the recognition of exorcism—not because he denied the need for man's release from the grip of evil, but because he believed that this method was intellectually indefensible and theologically retrograde.

He also found time and energy to devote to the important conferences between Anglicans and Scandinavian Lutherans which met periodically in England or abroad. The Lampes's hospitality when they were hosts became legendary. Equally, they extracted a great deal of enjoyment and amusement from the occasions when they were guests. After the delegates had spent a long evening at a hospitable Scandinavian dinner, Geoffrey was once heard to say that at last he understood what the Psalmist meant when he said 'I am become like a bottle in the smoke' (Ps. 119: 83). But his serious contribution to theological understanding, both by speaking and writing and by intensive listening, was incalculable, and he won respect and friendship from the Lutheran theologians, of which the accolade already alluded to was a symbol.

Lampe had the greatest difficulty in saying 'No', and occasionally this led to the acceptance of two simultaneous commitments at opposite ends of the earth. Graceful apologies and the selection of a suitable friend as deputy would soften the blow for the loser.

As a scholar, Geoffrey Lampe was held in deep respect, not because he produced original theories but because of his massive learning, especially in the patristic field, and the soundness of his judgement. His first substantial book, constituting, in part, his claim to the Oxford BD and DD degrees, for which he was

approved in 1953, was *The Seal of the Spirit* (1951). This was a thorough and well-documented investigation into the relation between baptism with water and the reception of the Holy Spirit in Christian initiation in New Testament times and in the sub-apostolic period. It was designed partly to show that it was only after that that 'the long period of confusion and obscurity has begun, in which we still find ourselves groping today' (p. 190). But, as usual with Lampe, it was more than a history of doctrine. Most of all it was designed to show, whatever the importance of the rite of confirmation, that

if we keep in mind the implications of the teaching of the New Testament and the early Church, we shall refuse to accept the doctrine that it is in this rite [confirmation] alone that a man can receive the seal of the Spirit by which he is signed for eternity; we shall not see in it the means by which alone one can be made a full Christian. (p. 322.)

This conclusion, carefully supported by New Testament and patristic learning, was important for the Church of England, because one party, whose most learned spokesman at that time was Dom Gregory Dix of Nashdom Abbey, was insisting on the acceptance of episcopally administered confirmation as an indispensable prerequisite to reunion with other Christian communions. Anybody who took sides in this debate thereafter ignored Lampe's powerful advocacy to the contrary at his peril. The book was followed by papers or summary statements on the same theme, such as 'Baptisma in the New Testament' (*Scottish Journal of Theology*, 5, 1952), 'The Place of Confirmation in the Baptismal Mystery' (*Journal of Theological Studies*, NS 6, 1955), and *What is Baptism?* (Mowbray, 1958).

The study of the relation of water-baptism to the reception of the Spirit of God reflects one of Lampe's major doctrinal concerns—the doctrine of the Spirit. Many of his papers and contributions to collective works (such as *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*) are devoted to the subject, and it is possible to trace a growing conviction that in the conception of God as Spirit there is likely to be found the best hope of expressing today the relations between God, Christ, the world, and ourselves. The fourth-century debates had led to the formulation of this in terms of 'Father, Son, and Spirit' as defined by Greek ontological words—*οὐσία*, *ὑπόστασις*, *πρόσωπον*, and the rest; but Lampe was among those who question whether those terms can still serve. His convictions culminated in the Bampton Lectures for 1976, published in 1977 under the title *God as Spirit*.

The thesis had already been adumbrated in 'The Holy Spirit and the Person of Christ', contributed to a symposium, *Christ, Faith and History* (1972), and after the Bamptons a short sermon followed the same lines in 1978, entitled 'What Future for the Trinity?' posthumously reprinted in *Explorations in Theology*, 8, 1981. His answer to that question, if it was expanded to mean 'What future is there for the traditional, classical *doctrine* of the Trinity?' was 'Not much'. Lampe regarded it as impossible, as long as one used the fourth-century substance-language, to do justice today to the conviction that God, as Creator, operates from within his creation and not by invasion from without, and approaches human beings on a fully personal level. 'Incarnation', in its specialized doctrinal use, distinguishing it from inspiration, consequently fell under the same strictures. If, instead, one worked in terms of God's approach to humankind through inspiration—that is, through the fully personal approach of the divine to the human spirit—one might get somewhere. The Bamptons were concerned to show that the distinctively Christian religious experience, reflected from various angles in the New Testament and known ever since in the Christian Church, could be translated into terms of God as Spirit. The success of the attempt has been variously estimated. Nobody reading the book attentively could fail to see that, if pressed ruthlessly to its logical conclusion, its argument would lead to some kind of unitarianism, since essential to the argument are the interpretation of Jesus as an inspired man (albeit supremely and decisively inspired), and the restating of the resurrection of Jesus in terms of a new experience of the Spirit of God in the light of the life and teaching of Jesus. Correspondingly, it would mean an 'exemplarist' interpretation of how Christ brings new life (though Lampe is at pains to point out that 'mere' is a misleading epithet for exemplarism). Lampe himself knew all this better than anybody; but he had no intention of abandoning the essentials of Christian faith and practice, of which he was a shining and inspiring example. The essay in *Christ, Faith and History* shows a masterly grasp of the history of doctrine and of the issues at stake in this matter. One by one Lampe anticipates the objections to his interpretation and tries to meet them. In most cases he is able to show at least that the orthodox proposals raise formidable problems of their own. It is when he comes to the finality of Christ that he has most difficulty in logically defending his own position. In the end, he can only say that it is inconceivable that Christ should ever be superseded—which seems hardly

to follow from the premisses. His statement of his stance in the sermon referred to is this:

I believe we should rethink the use of doctrinal models which led to the formulation of this doctrine [i.e. that of the Trinity]—but not the faith which they are intended to express. If we do substitute unitarianism for trinitarianism it must not be the unitarianism that denies the divinity of Christ. On the contrary, I believe we can assert that God was in Christ, without using the model of 'God the Son'. It must not be a unitarianism which postulates a deistically-conceived God remote from the world, separated from our human hearts and minds; we must acknowledge the present reality of God with us and in us; yet without, I hope, the confusions of the fourth-century theology of the Holy Spirit. We have to preserve and safeguard the reality of Christian experience and faith; but there is room to try to find fresh forms of theological expression for it. (*Explorations*, pp. 36f.)

It would be foolish to underestimate the deep and prolonged reflection behind such statements or (most impressive of all) the personal devotion which inspired Lampe's whole life and work and made him eager to find an acceptable modern statement about it. It may be that even his severest critics will not find it easy to meet his comment on conciliar language about the third 'person' of the Trinity: 'no one has ever ventured to suggest what the difference is between generation and procession' (*Explorations*, p. 36).

Whatever posterity makes of his doctrinal work, the Patristic Lexicon is an impressive monument to his learning and ability. It had been conceived a generation earlier by H. B. Swete, and a beginning had been made under the leadership of Canon H. Moore. Dr Darwell Stone, the first officially appointed editor, had been succeeded by Dr F. L. Cross. Cross, however, who became Lady Margaret Professor at Oxford, was soon engaged on another big project—his *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*—and it was thus that Geoffrey Lampe came on the scene. He had recently come back from war service and had been elected into a Fellowship as Chaplain of St. John's College. It was an inspired choice when he was invited to become editor of the Patristic Lexicon in 1948. With his flair for the practical—and the practicable—he saw at once that the only hope of bringing the project to completion reasonably soon was to enlist more regular paid staff, and he set about raising money by successful appeals to various organizations (including the Academy) as well as to individuals. This enabled him to take on a small but dedicated staff. Miss Graef and Miss Grosvenor had already been recruited. Ultimately, he came

to be assisted, for longer or shorter periods, by some dozen scholars. The Bodleian lent a room, Cuddesdon College and Pusey House lent texts, and the work proceeded, thanks to the genial and tactful pressure applied by their master to 'the slaves of the Lampe' as they were affectionately called. They were rewarded by an annual picnic in Bagley Wood, which became famous. Lampe himself amazed his friends by his own capacity to work at high speed and accurately, using even the spare half hour, snatched from a heavy teaching and pastoral routine, to draft some short article. He himself undertook some of the major articles. The Patristic Greek Lexicon was designed to be complementary to Liddell and Scott and Jones, whose declared policy was to omit words, other than those of the New Testament, which were found only in Christian writers. Incidentally, Lampe points out in the preface the anomaly by which L. S. J. had not included the Neoplatonist Synesius simply 'because he ended his career as a Christian bishop'. Ideally, then, the Patristic Lexicon should have taken account of all words, whether of theological importance or not, which belonged—or of which some particular use belonged—only to Christian authors and which mirrored the idiom of such writers. Inevitably, however, the emphasis had to be laid mainly on the theologically significant. The decision of the Delegates of the Oxford University Press to publish the Lexicon was a vote of confidence in Lampe's learning and judgement. It began to appear, a fascicle at a time, and was first published as a whole in 1968, after Lampe had become Ely Professor at Cambridge. The Press excelled itself in the accuracy and excellence of this extremely complicated piece of printing. New critical editions of some of the patristic texts were coming out while the cards were in preparation or even when fascicles were going to press, and nobody knew better than the editor that, had time and money been no consideration, it could have been improved; but the fact that it was completed, and so excellently, despite all the difficulties which, to a less able editor, might have seemed insuperable, is a tribute to his capacity both as a scholar and in personal relations. It is characteristic, too, that this, his largest work, should have been the work of a team, and should have been an indispensable tool for the use of other scholars.

To come from the gigantic to the miniature, one of Lampe's posthumously published essays, obscurely entitled 'The "Limuru Principle" and Church Unity', illustrates exactly the same dedication of massive learning and expert ability to practical purposes. A conference held in Limuru in Kenya had been a land-

mark in the formation of the South India Church from Anglican, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist components. In his article, Lampe analysed the doctrinal options confronting the uniting communions.

The choice . . . is nothing new. Basically, it is whether we understand episcopal order in terms of a 'pipeline' transmission of the grace of orders, or whether we interpret it as an expression, within the complex variety of the work of the Spirit in the church's life and ministry, of the unity of Christian people in the historic and continuing apostolic mission to the world.

In stating his own belief that non-episcopal ministers were 'ordained by Christ with his ordination' and that the important question was whether they could be brought into communion with the bishop in an episcopally ordered church, he was able to appeal to Augustine who 'could recognize that by abandoning their schism and coming into communion with the Catholic church the Donatist clergy nullified the irregularity of their ordination'. In the same posthumously published collection, there is a hard-hitting and devastatingly clear statement on women and the ministry of priesthood. It shows Lampe's awareness of present circumstances as well as his antiquarian learning. In the last paragraph he meets the objection that alleged theological arguments for the ordination of women are really a smoke-screen to cover the advance of a purely secular liberation movement. On the contrary, he says, there is a much deeper question at stake. There has indeed been a revolution on the economic and social level, but

we should be cautious about using the word 'secular' to describe these changes. They do not come about without God's providence. God speaks to the church through the world as well as to the world through the church, and it is through the interaction of the church with the world that we may, if we listen, hear God's word.

There are other hitherto unpublished papers which deal purely with exegetical questions without direct application to the concerns of the church in the world today. These show how fresh and original his academic acumen was to the end, but they are not so characteristic of his attitude as are his essays in applied theology.

He enjoyed debate, and could be a formidable opponent. At one meeting of the Cambridge Theological Society he listened to a distinguished visitor delivering a frothy and jargonistic paper, and, when it was over, fired a few simple questions across his bows which brought him virtually to a standstill and compelled the

chairman to intervene with a rescue operation. At the New Testament Seminar, of which he was a regular member, he used sometimes to indulge in a little dignified slumber while some aspirant to originality unfolded an improbable or impossible thesis, but would wake in time to ask innocently about the exact meaning of a passage in the text under discussion. This usually led to the downfall of the theory and some hasty sweeping of the fragments under the carpet. For his sixty-fifth birthday his friends devised, appropriately, not a *Festschrift* but a *Fest* for him and Elizabeth, his wife—two days of festival, including a thanksgiving Eucharist in Great St. Mary's Church, with Geoffrey Lampe himself as celebrant and a close friend, Canon William Purcell, as preacher; a dinner in Clare College; and a colloquium in Westcott House, at which papers bearing on Lampe's theological positions were read and debated. He said afterwards that it seemed to him rather like a prolonged D.Phil. viva at the end of which the candidate was not sure whether he had been approved; but his enjoyment of every moment of it was evident. So was his enjoyment of all friendly contact with persons, whether inside or outside university life, whether academic or social. Here was a scholar wearing his learning and ability lightly, because his priorities were dictated by Christian humaneness.

At the end of his life the courage that had won the MC became evident again. In 1976 extensive cancer was suddenly diagnosed and he underwent drastic surgery followed by exhausting radiotherapy. He and his wife together faced the situation and came through with quiet determination. In an amazingly short time he was back in circulation again, shirking no duties and refusing no social invitations—indeed, living with more verve than ever, perhaps because he knew it was borrowed time. He talked openly about his illness, yet with a dismissive casualness that made it seem a mere incident in an enjoyable life. He celebrated his retirement from the Regius Chair by doing a 72-mile walk along the South Downs Way with his son Nicolas and his daughter Celia; and the next year, he and Elizabeth did one more of the adventurous tours they so much loved, in the Balkans and Greece and Italy. He returned a very sick man, but lived to baptize his second grandson as he had baptized the first, and to plan his daughter's wedding service: it was a close and affectionate family and they planned everything together. He died a month before the wedding took place.

C. F. D. MOULE

*Note.* The writer is indebted for much of this information to contributions to *G. W. H. Lampe, Christian, Scholar, Churchman—a Memoir by Friends*, ed. C. F. D. Moule (London: Mowbray, 1982), and must express thanks to the publisher for permission to quote a few sentences verbatim.