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THE OXFORD CONFERENCE OF EVANGELICAL CHURCHMEN.

GENERAL SUBJECT: CHURCH AND STATE.

THE REPORT ON CHURCH AND STATE.

Opening Address by the REV. C. M. CHAVASSE, M.A., M.C.,
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WE are met to consider the anxiously awaited Report of the Archbishops' Commission, set up in 1930, "to enquire into the present relations between Church and State." We must be careful in what spirit we approach so thorny a subject, and especially lest prejudice should prevent us giving it that impartial study which so important an issue demands and the Report itself deserves.

The task of the Commission was rendered doubly difficult by reason both of its origin and also of its composition. The appointment of the Commission was "directly due to the rejection [by Parliament] of the Prayer Book Measure of 1927."¹ When an admittedly delicate question, like the historic relationship between Church and State, is raised in the heat of indignation, if not of petulance, it is unlikely to find the right answer.

As for the composition of the Commission, it was again a bad omen, and as remarkable as it was unusual in English public life, that no person known to have opposed the revised Prayer Book was appointed a Commissioner; and that protest failed to remedy what looked like a packing of the Commission. It speaks volumes, therefore, for the patience, fair-mindedness, and wisdom of the Commissioners that their Report is a valuable contribution towards the elucidation of an intricate problem. Hereafter, it may be found that they have pointed the way to the eventual solution; though neither they nor we are likely to live to see the end of the pilgrimage. After all, we are not yet in sight of the carrying out of the conclusions of the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline, though it reported thirty years ago.

THE REPORT

The Report first clears out of the way two ill-advised solutions. Disestablishment it rules out as gravely injurious both to Church and State. And "The Scottish Solution" it dismisses as inapplicable. Next, the Report frankly recognises that Parliament cannot grant to the National Assembly full legislative independence in matters of doctrine and ritual, until the various schools of thought in the Church have secured agreement among themselves on those

¹ Report, p. 36.

questions which were mainly responsible for the rejection of the revised Prayer Book. It therefore recommends, as an essential preliminary before any approach to Parliament is possible, the setting up of a Round Table Conference with reference, in particular, to Reservation and the Service of Holy Communion.

Finally, as the Report foresees that "it may take some time to secure such general agreement as ought to exist in the Church before an approach to Parliament is made,"¹ it suggests that an immediate measure be framed regularising non-doctrinal deviations from the Book of Common Prayer. To this recommendation I would join the administrative measures suggested by the Commission for the restoration of discipline in the Church; for it is hard to follow the Report in regarding them as concurrent with, rather than as preliminary to, the general advance towards spiritual agreement and independence.

We shall, I think, come to the conclusion that much of what the Report terms its Interim and Judicial Proposals might well be put into effect forthwith; when the Church would find itself possessed of practically all the freedom it really requires. But it seems to me equally clear that the summoning of a Round Table Conference is dangerously inopportune; and even more perilous, at the present time, the raising of fundamental constitutional issues between Church and State.

PRESENT ACTION INOPPORTUNE.

As I see the position, there are three conditions that must be fulfilled before it is possible even to contemplate any sort of adjustment in the relations between Church and State. First, as the Report so emphatically declares, there is the need of agreement within the Church itself.

Secondly, there is the requirement of order and discipline in the Church; or the demand for spiritual liberty becomes one for spiritual licence and legalised anarchy.

Thirdly, the National Church must in fact, as well as in name, express the religion of the nation; and possess a legislative assembly truly representative of national religious feeling and tradition. This last condition is recognised, in part, by the Report, which is genuinely concerned about the rights of the laity, and admits that "some time must elapse before the general body of Church people becomes accustomed to take its part in the Councils of the Church."²

Only when a State Church is a *united* Church, a *well-ordered* Church, and a *truly national* Church, can it properly expect legislative independence. At present, none of these three conditions finds adequate fulfilment in the Church of England.

THE CHURCH AND UNITY.

First, there is not, as yet, sufficient agreement in the Church for a Round Table Conference to serve any useful purpose. In-

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 64.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 44.

stead, such a Conference would defeat its own object by reviving barren and even bitter strife; and that, just when the Report can speak hopefully of a new and better spirit of mutual understanding growing up in our midst. The object of the Round Table Conference—namely, to settle the chief points of difference in the late Prayer Book dispute—shows how the whole question of Church and State is, at the present juncture, fatally poisoned and prejudiced by its inevitable and close connection with that unhappy controversy. The Church and State Report might with equal accuracy be described as “The History of the Rejection of the Revised Prayer Book, and the Necessary Action thereon.” The second volume of the Report, containing the Evidence of Witnesses, reads like a debate upon the merits of the Deposited Book. And although the Commission expresses the hope of us all, that the excitement caused by the defeat of the Prayer Book Measures eight years ago “has long since died down,”¹ the speeches in the National Assembly, last February, when the Report was first introduced, revealed unmistakably that feeling on the subject still smouldered strongly, and would blaze up again if stirred by any ill-timed Church and State crusade. Why cannot we face facts and frankly recognise that the same generation cannot undertake both a Prayer Book controversy and an impartial consideration of its relations with the State? The fostering of that unity of the Church to which the Commission earnestly invites the co-operation of their fellow Churchmen,² must be a natural development of slow and secret growth; and any premature attempt at a manufactured agreement by a Conference, or the forcing of a division on a challenging issue, would throw us back a dozen years or more, to the time when the late Bishop Burge complained in my hearing that he had never known party feeling run so high in the Church.

There is a further consideration. Is it sanity to risk serious disunion in the Church, and the reopening of still-unhealed wounds, in order to promote a Bill in Parliament which has not the slightest hope of success? The House of Commons would be fully aware—even without reading the Report—that any measure submitted to it, at the present time, for remedying what the Commission terms “the subordination of the Church to Parliament,” was a consequence and a condemnation of their action in twice rejecting the Deposited Book. Is it conceivable that Parliament would thus pass a vote of censure upon itself; and, in the circumstances, would it not be indecent to ask Parliament to do so?

Recall the pledges given by Archbishop Davidson on behalf of the Church during the passage of the Enabling Act. “We are not taking away from Parliament any power which it at present possesses. By all means let Parliament use that power if it will and if it can.” And again, “I rejoice in what has been said as to the recognition of the right and privilege and duty of the Houses of Parliament to exercise absolute freedom of judgment on the

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 96.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 98.

final rejection or acceptance of Measures which come before it in this way"—that is from the National Assembly.¹

Bear in mind, also, the Primate's declaration on December 12, 1927, during the debates on the Deposited Book. "We hear words which I think windy and even foolish to the effect that this is not really a matter for Parliament, that the Church has spoken its own mind decidedly, and that the duty of Parliament is to endorse what the Church has said. I dissent altogether from that view and dissociate myself from those statements. . . . Every member of this House has, in my view, his absolute right to vote upon a matter of this kind." Would it not be an incredible exhibition of peevish littleness and lack of humour to request Parliament, after hearing such emphatic assurances, to proceed against itself for acting upon them? The State is exceedingly well disposed towards the Church and sincerely anxious for its welfare. Why, then, force a friendly Parliament into an inevitable conflict, and precipitate a crisis that might be disastrous?

The answer of the Commission is that the attainment of spiritual liberty by the Church is a living problem, of pressing interest and urgent importance.² But is this a sober judgment?

THE CHURCH IS FREE.

Is the Church really in bondage to the State? The terms of reference, under which the Commission was appointed, set forth the "inalienable right" of the Church, "*when its mind has been fully ascertained,*" to formulate its doctrine and ritual uncontrolled by the authority of the State.³

Is that right seriously questioned? The State has never presumed to formulate or dictate the faith and practice of the Church. The State certainly does possess the "right of veto in spiritual matters." But, and this is the crux of the whole matter, the Report recognises that Parliament never refuses to authorise proposals submitted to it by the Church, "*when its mind has been fully ascertained.*" It was, indeed, as the Report admits, because Church opinion was divided, that the revised Prayer Book was rejected. And the main conclusions of the Report are based upon the significant assumption that the State may be depended upon to accept any measure upon which the Church itself has first secured general agreement.⁴ What more spiritual autonomy does the Church desire? Not, surely, the despotic power of forcing upon protesting minorities innovations about which there is strong disagreement!

The whole demand for spiritual freedom rests upon a delusion; for the Church already possesses freedom in proportion as it possesses agreement. We can apply to the ideal of Spiritual Freedom precisely what Bishop Creighton said of Socialism⁵—that it "will only be possible when we are all perfect. and then it will not be

¹ *Op. cit.*, vol. ii, p. 161.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 96.

³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 1 and 42.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁵ *Life*, vol. ii, p. 504.

needed." Or we can adapt the logic of Peter Piper, if we want a *reductio ad absurdum* :

"Parliament passes proposals approved by powerless Apostolics.

Does Parliament pass proposals approved by powerless Apostolics ?

If Parliament passes proposals approved by powerless Apostolics,

Where are the powerless Apostolics whose approved proposals Parliament passes ? "

We, I think, will elect to be numbered among those of whom the Commission says "to some, perhaps to many, of those who read our Report it will appear that the matters with which we have been dealing are of theoretical rather than of practical interest."¹ We shall feel, I am sure, that it would be a crime to unsettle what the Report describes as "the ordinary life in the parishes of England" which "goes on for the most part undisturbed by questions as to legislative or judicial autonomy."² We shall, I hope, refuse (again to quote from the Report) "to run the risk of fanning into flame the embers of forgotten controversies";³ and all for the illusory gain of extorting from the State the empty title to a right which, in practice, is freely conceded to the Church.

THE RESTORATION OF DISCIPLINE.

The second condition to be realised, before a State Church can qualify for legislative autonomy, is the possession of order and discipline within its own domain.

The Report attributes the refusal of Parliament to authorise the New Prayer Book very largely to the fact that it "found difficulty in trusting the will, or at least the power, of the bishops"³ to enforce its provisions, as they had promised. The same consideration of impotent administration must continue to prevent the State relinquishing its veto over spiritual innovations, as long as anarchy persists in the Church. Especially is this the case, now that the misgivings of Parliament, eight years ago, have proved to be well founded. The Commission justifies the action of the Bishops in authorising the use of the rejected Prayer Book, on the ground that they intended, thereby, to restore order on its basis.⁴ Yet one of the Commissioners, the Archdeacon of Westminster, speaking in the name of fifteen hundred Liberal Evangelical clergy, describes the failure of the Bishops to procure obedience, as the "growing sore in the position," and witnesses to an increasing anxiety in the Church lest its trust has been deceived.⁵ His fellow Commissioners seem to concur; for, in their Report, they devote more space to the present disorders in the Church than to its relations with the State.

Under these circumstances, the Church would squander its time and energy by convening a Round Table Conference; unless there first existed a real confidence that if any agreement were reached it would be certain of administrative effect. Until there have ceased

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 96.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 96.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, vol. ii, p. 154.

to exist in the Church the cult of the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and other equally flagrant illegalities, disallowed alike by the Royal Commission of 1906 and the new Prayer Book of 1927, it is farcical to expect loyal Churchmen seriously to discuss "permissible deviations from the Office of Holy Communion . . . and the use and limits of Reservation."¹

The Commission considers that the judicial measures it suggests, for the restoration of order, must coincide with the carrying out of its proposals for legislative independence; and not be preparatory to them. The reason advanced by the Commissioners is the necessity of relaxing the excessive rigidity of the law which the present Ecclesiastical Courts are bound to administer.² But no such consideration applies to their new Pastoral Tribunals, or to their other important recommendations for the recovery of the lapsed authority of the Bishop; by which means, indeed, they hope to obviate the need of recourse to such Ecclesiastical Courts.³

With conspicuous insight the Report points out the two steps necessary for the re-establishment of discipline and self-respect in the Church.⁴ Neither of them has anything to do with the Ecclesiastical Courts; and, therefore, there is no reason why both of them should not be regarded as essential preliminaries to any advance towards constitutional independence.

The first step is the immediate legalising of "common sense,"⁵ trivial, customary, and non-doctrinal deviations from the Book of Common Prayer. It is high time that loyal clergy who, at Holy Communion, omit the Long Exhortation or encourage the response "Glory be to Thee, O Lord" before the Gospel, should be delivered from the malicious accusation of being law-breakers, and of embarrassing the Bishop in the exercise of discipline. The second step advocated is the prevention and suppression of practices which are a clear violation of the formularies of the Church. For this, the Commission relies on the moral effect of public opprobrium, enforcing an improved and strengthened jurisdiction by the Bishop.

There is only one effective guarantee that order and discipline will be secured in the Church and maintained in the future.⁶ It is the immediate adoption and enforcement by the Church of those powers which, as the Report clearly indicates, already lie to its hand in the present.

If these two steps were resolutely taken, on the lines laid down so admirably by the Report; then there would result such a strengthening of that comprehensive unity of the Church, for which the Commission appeals,⁷ that its suggestion of a Round Table Conference might well be rendered unnecessary, and most of its other recommendations as well.

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 99.

² *Op. cit.*, pp. 72 ff.

³ *Op. cit.*, vol. ii, pp. 151 ff.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, pp. 65 and 100.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 88.

⁶ *Op. cit.* p. 57.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 97, 98.

THE OBLIGATIONS OF A NATIONAL CHURCH.

There remains the third condition before the Church of England can claim the right, conceded to the Church of Scotland in 1921, of being "free from interference by civil authority."¹ It is because the Church is not yet sufficiently *national* in character, that the Commission rules out "The Scottish Solution" as irrelevant.

The status of an Established Church must carry with it, not only the privileges of a State Church, but also the obligations of a National Church. Thus, while a denominational Church is responsible only to its own adherents; a national Church is the expression of the native religion of the people in general. It is, therefore, quite wrong for the Report to speak of measures "affecting *only* the spiritual concerns of the Church."² In the case of the Church of England, these are also the vital and organic concern of the whole nation and indeed of the Empire.³

At the present time, as the late Prayer Book controversy showed, it is Parliament rather than the National Assembly of the Church which reflects more accurately the religious opinion and traditions of the English people. The reason is not far to seek, if we compare the situation in our own country with that on the other side of the Border. In Scotland, as the Report reminds us, "since 1592 the laity have always had a full share of Church government, both locally and centrally, while in our Church the constitutional claims of the layman have only of late been at all adequately acknowledged";⁴ and (we might add) are, as yet, far from finding adequate satisfaction. As Professor Trevelyan has pointed out, the laity exercise their control of religion in Scotland from within the Church, but in England from without, through Parliament.⁵ The Commission goes to much pains in seeking the remedy. But their proposals are palliatives. They are not the radical cure that is necessary before the laity are likely to surrender their power of veto in Parliament, and hand over the fortunes of their National Church to what is now a clerically dominated Assembly. In the view of Archbishop Davidson, with his wealth of experience, "the House of Lords, speaking roughly, is never anti-Church, but always anti-clerical."⁶ Parliament must remain so, till the laity, as much as the clergy, are the Church.

But there is a difference of even greater moment between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland, though it finds no mention in the Report. There is, practically speaking, only one Church in Scotland, for the Episcopal Church numbers less than 3 per cent of the population; and, what is more, the enrolled members of that one Church are well over a quarter of the whole nation. In England only three and a half million, out of its thirty-seven and a half million inhabitants, are numbered upon the Electoral Roll of the National Church; while another million and a half of, what the Archbishop of York terms, "the worshipping

¹ Declaratory Article No. 5 (see Report, pp. 53 and 134).

² Report, p. 61. ³ *Op. cit.*, vol. ii, note on p. 158.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 55. ⁵ *Op. cit.*, vol. ii, note on p. 160. ⁶ *Life*, p. 520.

laity" are Free-Churchmen. They form as large a body as the Church of Scotland, and they stand outside the Establishment. In the view of the Commission, these Free-Churchmen have no more right "to exercise some degree of supervision or control over the doctrine and ritual"¹ of the National Church, than have Roman Catholics or Moslems. I would agree, if the National Religion happened to be predominantly and traditionally either that of Rome or Islam. But as we are reminded by the Accession Declaration, shortly to be made by our new King, whom God preserve! the religion of the English people is fundamentally "Protestant." The Church of England, therefore, has close affinities, which she cannot repudiate, with what Bishop Hall called "the sister churches of the Reformation." If the Church were disestablished and disendowed, then it would be perfectly free (to the limited extent that any statutory denomination is free)² to introduce into its standards novelties of doctrine or practice; seeing that they would affect its own followers only, *and no one else*. But as long as the Church remains the National Church of the land, claiming to represent the essential Protestantism of the English, then the other smaller Protestant Churches, who gladly acknowledge its claim and the value of that national recognition of religion which the Establishment provides, must be granted some right of effective disapproval, if a new departure in the formularies of the State Church were to offend national religious opinion. Whether it will ever be possible to devise a means whereby the exercise of this friendly power of restraint by the Free-Churches can be transferred from Parliament to the National Assembly, is a riddle I leave to the apostles of Spiritual Independence. But one thing is certain. The cause of Reunion is infinitely greater than this illusory slogan of "Freedom from the State." And it offers, moreover, the straight and direct road towards spiritual freedom, by pointing to the goal of one truly national Church.

THE CHURCH AND THE NATION.

I would earnestly plead that in these critical and fateful days, big with opportunity, the Church be not distracted and diverted from its real work—for which it is as free as air—in order to follow wandering fires. As members of a National Church our true crusade is to alter the figure of our two and a half million Easter communicants into that of the eighteen million men, women, and children over fifteen years of age, who have been baptised in our founts.

It is as if the Great Shepherd of the sheep asked the question, "Were there not nine in the fold, where are the eight?" When we can return answer without shame, then, perhaps, it will be time, and we shall have time, to consider the relations between Church and State.

I hope, therefore, that the National Assembly in June will

¹ Report, pp. 42 and 43.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

voice its sincere gratitude to the Commissioners for their immense labours in presenting us with so succinct a standard work on the problem of Church and State ; for placing the issues with such clarity and precision before us ; and for thrusting a stake through the heart of the bogey of Disestablishment. I hope the Assembly will get to work forthwith on the Commission's wise recommendations for the restoration of order and discipline in the Church. But I hope with all my heart that the Report itself will not be commended to the Church at large for its consideration ; to waste its time, and to throw another apple of discord into every parish in the land.

The Coming Civilisation is an examination of the popular subject of enquiry as to the future condition of our Western world. The questions considered are : " Will it be capitalist ? " or " Will it be materialist ? " Some will feel inclined to put a proper question, Will there be any civilisation at all if things go on as they appear to be going at present ? Mr. Kenneth Ingram in this book (George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 6s. net) suggests that we are entering a new phase of civilisation in which the changes will be fundamental, as it will involve the substitution of society on an industrial basis for one that is practically feudal in character. The motive of this new society cannot be personal gain, as competition will have no place in it. But will Christianity have any place in it, or will it be entirely materialistic ? Mr. Ingram, in answering this question, shows the failure of materialism as a basis of morals and the need of the Christian inspiration and standard.

In *Odds and Ends* (James Clarke, 2s. 6d.) Mr. Vernon Gibberd has given us a varied collection of short addresses for children. As the title suggests, the volume is very much like a scrap-book. There is no connection between the different stories, and no attempt at systematic teaching. We are simply given a number of short stories loosely strung together, many of which will be found useful by teachers of Bible Classes and Sunday Schools. The addresses vary greatly in quality. Some are excellent ; others seem rather to miss the mark ; and we feel that all might have been presented in a more dramatic way. Perhaps the two best are the first, which bears the title of the book, and the talk entitled, " Underdone and Overdone," which explains in a vivid and original way the message to the modern world of the prophetic judgment, " Ephraim is a cake not turned."
