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THE LIFE AND GOVERNMENT OF THE NATIONAL CHURCH.

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IN arranging this subject the Committee no doubt had in mind the ideal and the actual, the ideal of what the life and government of the National Church ought to be, and what that life and government actually is. The subject, moreover, is inextricably bound up with the Church and State Report which is our main preoccupation at this Conference.

Perhaps our best starting-point is to see how the National Church acted at its inception, for the study of origins usually gives the clue to the after-history of any subject. Omitting the history of the British Church, whose story remains for us as yet only in broad outline, we can at all events get some leading ideas from the early Anglo-Saxon Church. Whether we take Ethelbert of Kent, Ine of Wessex, or Alfred later, we see certain salient facts. We find that through the agency of the King and his Witan, a definite Christian impress was laid upon a pagan people, or upon a people feeling its way from paganism. This impress is seen in the new value given to human personality, in a higher value given to human life, in the moralising of law, and in the general inculcation of principles which affected the lives of the individual Anglo-Saxons.

The same thing is seen from an examination of any of the national Church Councils of the period, such as Cloveshoe. An ideal standard of official life is held up for bishops and other clergy, whilst a high standard of morality is demanded from all in orders.

In its broad results, as J. R. Green and others point out, the National Church acting through King and Witan, through bishops and clergy, revolutionised the old pagan standard of life, and held up a new ideal for everyone.

No doubt such a task was relatively easy in a rude age, and amongst a pagan people, just as it is easy to see a revolution in life and conduct when Christian missionaries to-day have the joy of seeing heathen people converted to Christ. But the same truth holds good in the days after the Anglo-Saxon period. We can see it in the stand by individuals such as Lanfranc and Anselm against the grossness and immoralities of kings like William I and William Rufus, as in the vigorous protests of Grosseteste against the corruptions of the Papacy. We find it in the satires of Langland, Chaucer, and Wycliffe against the casuistry and immorality of the Friars. We see it in the rising standard of morality in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the principles of the Reformation are being worked out, just as we see it in the definite improvement in the whole outlook of national life, individual and social, which resulted from the Evangelical Revival.

Thus from the beginnings until the present era, the broad sweep

of our national life shows us a continual move forward, with many retrogressions at times, but a development from a rude and gross paganism to a civilisation which is trying, however imperfectly, to work its life on Christian principles. The mainspring and the driving force have been Christian principles enunciated by Kings or Archbishops, Councils or Bishops, prominent individuals or groups of individuals.

Closer examination no doubt will show that it was not always the Church as a whole which was responsible for the high standard which meant progress. The vigorous condemnation by Boniface, Alcuin and others of the scandalous lives of King, Bishops and monks, is sufficient indication of the lax morality of the Anglo-Saxon Church of the eighth century, and this type of condemnation can be found in varying forms up to the eighteenth century. In every organisation individuals will fall from the ideal, and every organisation seems at times to go back upon the aims of its founder. And this, unfortunately, is as true of our own National Church as of other churches. But admitting all such imperfections, the broad fact remains true that the National Church changed our ancestors from pagans to Christians, and has laid the impression of Christian ideals upon every aspect of our national life. It matters not what our definition of the National Church may be, whether we see our ideal in the Middle Ages, or in later days, the main truth remains.

There is nothing very striking in this, in fact it is merely stating an obvious truism. For the Church after all is composed of Christians, it is a body of people who profess to follow the example of Christ, it is a corporation of those who, as individuals as well as in their corporate capacity, are trying to bring the spirit of Christ into the affairs of everyday life. Their efforts may at times have been hampered by a restricted and perverted view of Christianity, and the page of its history is strewn with many a shameful story, but the ideal was ever there, and the progressive moving towards the ideal has meant a far more real Christianity, and a consequent greater influence on the national life.

No doubt we shall be conscious of a difference in the way in which the influence of the National Church is felt and exercised at different periods in her history. In pre-Conquest days the influence of a Christian King seems paramount as we notice the Christian tone of the laws he promulgates: in the Middle Ages the standard seems to be set by clergy and barons—though this may only be because they were the people of whom Chroniclers take most notice: in post-Reformation days the rank and file of the laity came into their own, and the influence of the ordinary man is seen in increasing importance from the sixteenth century onwards.

This enables us to see that the National Church touches the life of the nation in very different ways at different periods. Up to the days of the Norman Conquest there is a continuous effort through the agency of powerful Kings and Church leaders to stamp out heathen practices, and to inculcate Christian ideas in law and in life. In the Middle Ages, when the country is nominally Christian,

the Church and the Nation are simply two sides of the same medal, and it is often difficult to see whether it is the Church which is influencing the nation or whether the nation is influencing the Church. But in post-Reformation days the position becomes clearer. The rising standard of conduct is seen, not so much now in monarchs as in the saintly lives of different members of the Church, both clerical and lay. The ever-increasing knowledge of the Bible from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards inevitably makes itself felt. Christian principles were now more generally known, and they began to be more generally applied. The result was that a higher standard resulted in individual lives, and a higher sense of responsibility began to arise about matters which concerned the general life of the nation. Something of this latter may be seen for example in the great Poor Law Act of Elizabeth's reign, at the beginning of the post-Reformation period, just as it is noticed in the social legislation of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

But the driving force for such changes comes, as a rule, from below and not from above. It is not a body of officials driving a reluctant organisation along the path of progress. Just the reverse. It is the enlightened conscience of individuals, stirred to action by Christian principles, influencing their fellows and convincing them that changes are necessary—it is in this way that the great changes came.

Such a condition seems axiomatic, and yet to many people it is not so. It may be that the tendency to dictatorship and authoritarianism of to-day predisposes people to look for causes of influence always from those in authority. But this is certainly not true of the religious world since the days of the Reformation. For amongst the outstanding results of the Reformation was the realisation of the value of the individual in the sight of God. And if the individual had value in the sight of God, then he had value, or ought to have value, in the sight of his fellow-men. Therefore individual liberty, the right of the individual to think for himself, and to spread his views, are part of the Reformation heritage, and it is this individualism and this democracy which caused the expansion and the development of England from the sixteenth century onwards.

Hence whatever part Parliament or Convocations or Church Assembly may play in the life of the Church, and their part is important enough, yet the life of the Church is obviously the life of the individual members of it. Outstanding personalities may occasionally arise to influence their fellows, and official and representative assemblies may at times make proclamations which have their weight and influence, but in the last resort it is the individual members which make the Church, and the life of the individual members determines the value and influence of the Church.

All this has a direct bearing upon our view of the government of the Church. We are not here concerned with theories about Episcopacy or Presbyterianism or any other method of Church organisation. We accept *ex animo* the statement of our formularies that Episcopacy is traceable to Apostolic times, and we are content

with that. But whilst Episcopacy and the right of the individual to think for himself are not incompatible there is a real difference in value between the two. Episcopacy owes itself to a natural development in apostolic times, whilst the value of the individual in the sight of God is a fundamental point of the Christian revelation. If a balance must be struck between the two, then of necessity the value of the individual must come first.

The point is of considerable importance. Christianity is a revelation, and the revelation is contained in the Bible. We may reverence the Creeds, we may value the decrees of the early Church Councils, and we may look to the writings of the early Fathers or to the Reformers, but all these only have their authoritative value in so far as they are proven by the Bible. And in the interpretation of the Bible, and in assessing the value of creeds or Councils or Fathers, the average educated clergyman is as well qualified to do so as Pope or Archbishop, and the average educated layman may do so as well as Bishop, Priest or Deacon. There are no mysteries reserved for an ordained person or assembly of ordained persons which are not open to everyone else. The strength of the Christian faith is not because its secrets are for the learned, but because the faithful follower of Christ can test the truths of Christ for himself.

The Christian religion therefore puts the individual in a unique position. The sacredness of personality, the right to think for oneself, these are fundamental to the Christian revelation.

At first sight this seems to put a premium on individualism run mad, but there is no logical necessity for this. The ideal citizen of Aristotle found his place in a state which allowed the full development of the individual. The Monarchical State of our own England is working its way to the fuller development of the individual citizen within the framework of a constitution which is monarchical. If an ancient and a modern state, working on different lines, have not found it impossible to allow the fullest place for the individual citizen neither has the National Church.

The accuracy of this statement will at once be challenged. Men will think of the sufferings of the first band of men who pleaded for toleration in Elizabeth's reign, i.e., the Brownists or later Independents. They will think of the struggles of the seventeenth century when Episcopalians and Puritans of differing types showed each other little toleration. They will think of the very slow developments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when toleration was grudgingly doled out to Nonconformists, to Quakers, Jews and Atheists.

This, however, is really part of a different question. Where a body of men, be they Independents or Presbyterians or Quakers, happen by circumstances over which they have no control, to be within the ranks of the National Church, they have two alternatives. They may attempt, as the Presbyterian Cartwright did in Elizabeth's reign, to convert their fellows to their own point of view. They may attempt, as did the Brownists who had conscientious scruples about the State connection with religion, to cut themselves

adrift from the National Church. The difficulty for Presbyterian and Brownists or Independents of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was that the vast majority of men felt that Church and State must be one, and it was because of this, that intolerance and persecution ensued.

We are faced, however, with a very different position to-day. Membership of the National Church is now not a matter of compulsion, but of free choice. We may be baptised therein as infants, but our free choice comes at Confirmation when we make our affirmation of faith in Christ and implicitly our adherence to the National Church. The Church to which we have given our adherence has fixed formularies, viz., in its Prayer Book and Articles, formularies which are to be interpreted by the teaching of those who drew them up. The Church in its corporate capacity claims "auctoritas," or moral authority, in matters of faith, as Article xx declares, with the limiting and interpreting explanation that the Church must not "ordain anything that is contrary to God's word written." The kind of auctoritas referred to can be seen in such examples as St. Paul's address to the Ephesian Elders (Acts xx. 31), his advice to Timothy (1 Tim vi. 20 ; 2 Tim ii. 2) and to Titus (i. 9). But at the same time St. Paul made it clear that he had no "dominion" or "lordship" over the faith of his converts (2 Cor. i. 24), and if he had not, neither has the Church over the individual to-day. The safeguard from any disastrous impasse is the appeal of both Church and individual to the Bible, as Article xx indicates.

Thus in principle the Church safeguards the right of the individual member, and gives full weight to the fundamental principle of the Christian faith, viz., the value of the individual in the sight of God. It thus safeguards liberty of conscience, it gives scope to prophesying, and it gives, or should give, equal rights to laity with clergy in matters of doctrine and worship. For there is a distinct fallacy in regarding the Church as composed of "Bishops with clergy and laity," just as much as if one described it as composed of "Laity with Clergy and Bishops."

This leads us to a brief consideration of the "government" of the Church.

The modern system of government assumed its early form in the thirteenth century when the representative system was hammered out for both Church and State. In this, just as in the origin of a national assembly, the Church led the way, but in the Model Parliament of 1295 both Church and Parliament achieved something like a National representative system. In this 1295 Parliament the nation was represented by Lords Spiritual and Temporal in the House of Lords, whilst in the House of Commons were found representatives of the boroughs and of counties. The Clergy representatives in Convocation met as a "House" of Parliament, and there is evidence that Convocation met in this way as a "House" of Parliament on various occasions in the early part of the fourteenth century. For all practical purposes, however, the nation has been

represented in Parliament from 1295 onwards. The passage of the centuries has modified the constitution in various ways, but the ever-widening of the franchise has gone to make Parliament more truly representative of the nation. Convocation, on the other hand, has not widened its franchise to the same extent as has the general Parliamentary system.

But putting on one side any general details, the government of the Church has been through Bishops, Clergy and Laity in Parliament and in Convocation. This has been the case from the thirteenth until the twentieth century when the Church Assembly was added to the machinery of government. The word "added" should be noted, for the Church Assembly was never intended to supplant Parliament. This was made explicit in the debates on the Enabling Bill as well as in the Enabling Bill itself.

Moreover, the Church Assembly cannot expect, at present at all events, to equal Parliament in prestige or influence. Parochial clergy who took their part in introducing Church Councils and Electoral Rolls to their people will know something of the difficulties they encountered in getting the new system into operation. It is too much to expect that in the space of a few years the Church Assembly can be truly representative or that it can be the true mouthpiece of the Church.

For the moment, therefore, it is perhaps not unfair to say that the government of the Church is in a fluid state, if not in a state of transition. We cannot look for government to the Bishops only. The Bishops have executive powers, but these powers and the general administration of the Episcopate seems to differ according to the personnel. The difference in the manner of administration to-day, as compared with that of twenty years ago, will be apparent to the most casual observer.

Nor can we look to the Houses of Convocation only, since they represent, and that inadequately, the ranks of the clergy alone.

The Church Assembly cannot be expected to assume the real place of government at present, for the reasons previously mentioned.

The only place where the average person can expect to see his religious interests safeguarded is in Parliament, and that body is hampered by the increasing pressure of general affairs, whilst moreover it has delegated the initiation of measures to the Church Assembly. Yet it is in Parliament where the traditional government of the Church is yet to be found, and that is where the average Churchman still looks for the safeguarding of his historic position in the national Church.

For the moment therefore the evolution of the government of the national Church seems incomplete, and in the determining of the course of that evolution the nation must have a voice for more reasons than one. The position of the King in relation to the National Church, is one matter for example which brings Parliament and nation into the discussion. For this involves the Bill of Rights and the Act of Settlement which laid down that the monarch

shall be a Protestant King of a Protestant nation and the official head of a Protestant National Church.

And if the Bill of Rights and the Act of Settlement calls the nation in Parliament to a watching brief, we must not overlook the fact that the Reformation itself was embodied in Acts of Parliament. The nation, through its parliamentary representatives, will in the last resort therefore have a voice in deciding the future of the Church.

The above survey therefore suggests such conclusions as the following :

(1) The "life" of the Church is not to be looked for primarily in officials or assemblies. The multiplication of officials and official bodies and the many official pronouncements and exhortations are not necessarily an indication of real life. Too often the increasing importance of officialdom is a mere effort to support organisation, and to lose sight of the man in the interest of the machine.

Therefore while the life of the Church may be reflected in Convocation, Church Assemblies, Diocesan Conferences and the like, the real life must be found in the parish and in the individual in the parish.

(2) The influence of such a life will be felt in its immediate surroundings, in home and at work as well as among those with whom the individual worships. The influence may make itself felt through the representative bodies of the Church, but it has an equal chance of making itself felt through other bodies. The pervasive influence of the English Churchman can therefore be found at work in all departments of the national life, and in a very real sense the national Church is making itself felt to-day through its individual members.

(3) Thus though there are very different conditions prevailing to-day in comparison with those in days gone by, yet the influence of the Church on the nation is in essence much the same as it has been since the days of the Reformation. It is impossible, therefore, to separate Church and State in a radical sense to-day, in the conditions existing in this country, though the incidence of the relations of Church and State may be different to what they were.

(4) Moreover, there is nothing contrary to Divine revelation in the present practical relations between Church and State in this country. These relations may seem illogical from a theoretic point of view, but they are grounded in our national history, and they have a value which is conceded even by those who have no connection with the National Church.

(5) If there is to be any change in the existing relations between Church and State, it will not come simply by resolving the National Church into a mere "sect." The latter result is looked for by few, and the consensus of opinion is against it. But if a change is to be attempted or forced, then the whole nation will be involved, since the ramifications of such a change will touch the whole structure of our national life.