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THE VALUE OF THE NATIONAL CHURCH.

A TALK BY THE RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF NORWICH, K.C.V.O.

I ALWAYS call myself an English Churchman. I am not so very keen on the subject of Church and *State*; what I am keen on is the National Church of England. I am always rather afraid when people talk about Church and State, that they may have in their minds a State Church; and then may turn their eyes on Germany and begin to say things which are wholly irrelevant in England. It is rather the National Church than the State Church on which I would prefer to be allowed to speak. I am glad I am not going to be asked to talk upon the established Church. The word "established" I think does much harm in our consideration of the national Church. As a matter of fact it is not until the seventeenth century that you get the phrase, "established by law," and the phrase "established by law" has led to the misconception that the Church of England was originally set up by law. "Established by law" really means recognised by law as being already established. The Church was established in English life something like 800 years before the phrase was used. The Church has been an integral part of English life from the beginning. The position of the Church of England is therefore quite different from the Church in Ireland. People will sometimes speak as if the Church of England could be disestablished by repealing an Act of Parliament. That is not the case.

It is also forgotten that the disestablishment of the Church, if it ever came, would have to be the work of Parliament. You would have to pass an Act, not repealing an existing Act, but a new Act. The disestablishment of the Church would not be the work of the Church itself, but the work of Parliament. I like to look upon the nation and the Church as co-operating together. I like to set my ideals high. There are many people who talk about the divergences between Church and State; what I love to think of is the nation and the Church united hand in hand for promoting the Kingdom of God. It purifies our arguments and clarifies our vision if we think of the Church and State working together for God. Consequently it is very important that the nation should observe what is being done by the Church. The nation, as represented in Parliament and in other ways, is deeply concerned in the work of the Church. The nation, taking it at its best, is out for the welfare of all the citizens. When you come to such an important thing as, shall we say? the revision of the Prayer Book, it is, to my mind, not only the legal, but the moral duty of bodies representing the State, to say: "Now we want to look at the highest welfare of the citizens. We believe that forms of worship

influence conduct ; let us be sure that we make no change in forms of worship which might have, or could have, a mischievous effect upon the conduct and character of the nation." We cannot divide forms of worship from character and general welfare by a sharp line. There is an inter-connection between them, and those who are responsible for the welfare of the nation must take care that no unfortunate influence should come to operate upon the character of the nation in a way to affect the general welfare. That is the idea with which I start ; we have the nation and the Church working together for God. It is their privilege to advance the general welfare, and that means the work of God in the world.

When you come to what is the value of the national Church, perhaps I have already said all that I have to say. But I can divide it up into a good many different aspects. First of all I believe that it is to the fact that our Church is a national Church that we owe our parochial system. It appears to me that the disestablishment of the Church would immediately cripple that beneficent influence that has spread all over the country. People, of course, can be Christian men and women without belonging to the national Church, but our national Church gives a corporate consolidation to the Christian outlook of the nation : *that* would cease if the Church were disestablished.

We cannot separate disendowment from disestablishment. Disestablishment, to my mind, would be a tenfold worse disaster than disendowment, but if disendowment came the Church would first fail in its opportunities among the poorest people. Rich congregations, no doubt, could put up satisfactory stipends and make satisfactory arrangements, but you would find in a short time, outlying districts would be surrendered : that is a very big thing. For, at present, wherever you go in England, there is one man set down with his family in every parish or every two parishes, and no one can estimate all the steadiness, wholesomeness and uplifting power that has emanated through the ages from the parsonages throughout the whole length and breadth of our land. That kind of thing would be very much impaired.

We may pass to the influence of the parochial clergy upon those who are not members of the Church of England. The wise parish priest makes friends with his Free Church parishioners. Many of them are not Free Churchmen from an argumentative standpoint. We have to remember that some of the weaknesses of the Church of England 150 years ago were repaired by the Free Church bodies. These Nonconformist people talk of the village church as " our church " ; they look with no hostility on the Church of England, and we may be very thankful that they have not so logically and accurately read the Enabling Act as to see that they have no part or parcel with the Church. Though they are very properly excluded from the government of the Church, there is no hostility between the Nonconformists in the parishes, and the Church of England ; there is no hostility between Nonconformist leaders and the Church.

Fifty years ago they favoured disestablishment : but the Free

Church people to-day regard the Church of England as a, or the, main bulwark against paganism. They do not wish the Church of England to be brought down. They would say: "We are all Christian men, and we are all out together for the upholding of Christian standards, and we are grateful that you, with your great history behind you and your remarkable opportunities, are leading the way; and we wish you well." We thank them for their charity, and we believe that what they say is true.

One of the great privileges of our being a national Church is that we have our beautiful churches. I remember a discussion in the early days of my episcopate when it was said that our cathedrals were too beautiful and too precious possessions to be left to the chance good offices of Deans and Chapters and that they ought to be brought under the control of the Office of Works. There was a good deal said on the subject, and the Bishop of Bristol of those days took a leading part in opposing any proposal for a new kind of control. Since those days, much more attention has been paid to our cathedrals and parish churches, and in the last twenty-five years we have come to do our work very much better. Those beautiful buildings are ours; that is because we are a national Church. If the Church ceased to be national, I do not quite know what the ownership would be. There we have this great heritage in which our history is written in stone. If disestablishment came, and disendowment, we could not be at all certain that we should still continue our historic ownership.

If you ask most people what does the establishment of the Church of England mean, they would tell you the bishops sit in the House of Lords, which does represent a small percentage of the total value of the establishment of the national Church. I read once that this was a great disadvantage because it made the bishops worldly. When one sees how seldom they appear in the House I do not know that my brethren really have their heads turned to worldliness by being in the House of Lords. I am sure they are useful when they are present.

It makes the very greatest difference to us that so much of our public life is initiated and consecrated to God by prayer. I do not believe that the prayers of the House of Commons are a mere form, though some say the Members can pray at home or in the open air: that is one of the reasons given for people not going to church, because they say they can pray at home, though it needs an extraordinary power of concentration to get near to God out of doors or by yourself. Whenever the Assizes are held, the law and order and liberty and the administration of right for which our judges stand, are all dedicated to God by the opening service of the Assize: so is it with Parliament.

What about the consecration of our whole nationality in the coronation service? The whole Empire is really present in the Abbey when the Archbishop anoints and crowns the King to his office, and the Church, in the person of the Archbishop, welcomes the King to a divinely given office, which is day by day further

dedicated to God by our constant prayers for the King and his ministers. Public men and officers can and do pray at home. But this is no substitute for national recognition of God.

Archbishop Temple of Canterbury once said: "I think disestablishment would be a step down for the whole nation." I have no doubt he was right. I believe it would be a step down for the whole Empire. (I refer to the coherence of the Church and Nation.) What would happen if the position of our national Church was impaired? What would happen if our national Church was changed into a shadow of its former self? Think how that would be received by the godless elements all over the world, in Europe and elsewhere. Among Churchmen, of course, it is the Roman Church which would stand to gain a very great deal. The Roman Catholic Church would say that it was still compact and stable, and that it still had a welcome for all those who would come into the true fold. They would say the Church of England had made it clear to the world, as it always had been to the Romans, that it was a mere sect, and that those who wanted to be in the tradition of Christ's Holy Catholic Church, must come and join the Church of Rome, and that there was no longer any rival that could pretend to offer a welcome to the devout.

It should also be remembered that we do not try to draw a line between the secular and the sacred. I believe we are right to do our recognised duties actuated by the highest devotion, and it would be a real misfortune for us to say: "On that side of the line I am a Christian, and on that side of the line I am a citizen." That division between the secular and the sacred would have a very bad effect on the individual outlook and upon both duty and worship.

It is our national Church that has a great deal to do with the coherence of our Empire. The Church of England is not established anywhere else outside England, but the Church in the Empire is in touch with the Church of England at home, and in many places you will find the Governor of a province who is glad to hear the views of the Anglican bishop on the chief questions, remembering that he speaks with authority because he is in touch with the bishops of this our national Church which is infusing the national life at home.

The Church and State report says very little about the obligations of the Church to the nation. There is nothing to complain of in this, for it was appointed to raise the issue from the other side. But it is because we have a national Church that the Church does still have an immense effect even upon those who are careless, and appear to take no interest in the ministrations of the Church. But think of Armistice Day, 1918; think of the King's Jubilee; think of the King's illness years ago and his death recently. Where do people turn? Immediately they flock to the churches. It is so, not only in national events, but in personal events. People who do not at other times come to church, do like to be married in church. They come to church when they are in sorrow. There

is the feeling that the Church is the friend of all when they want to be at their best, and it would be a dreadful misfortune if we stood down from that position. The Church is bound up with the deepest emotions of the lives of the people, and it would be a great pity if our Church became, perhaps academically more efficient, but a little body revolving around itself, instead of using the opportunity of consecrating the national life.

This is not a question of privilege. If it is, it is the privilege of service. You and I have a right in every home in the land. We may be welcome at the moment or not, but generally speaking, we are not intruders. What could be worse than to withdraw from people because they do not commonly use the ministrations of the Church? We do not want to deal with mere congregations. We want our Church to continue to be right in the middle of our national life, the Church and the nation each having its blessed hold upon one another.

It is because our Church is the national Church that one party in the Church is unable to dominate all the rest. It has been the case all the way through that as each party has tried to dominate the Church as a whole, the national Church and Government has had some say in the matter to prevent it; it is due to that that we have been kept together. If we ceased to be a national Church, and the Church was to be entirely guided by the Church Assembly as it at present exists, we might find that that generous tolerance and the remembrance that it takes all sorts of Churchmen to build up the Body of Christ, would be lost or impaired.

I will conclude by two extracts: one from a pamphlet by Chancellor Vaisey, who was one of the Commissioners who signed the Report: the other consisting of some words of our great philosopher, the Archbishop of Armagh, who writes:

There is no sign that the people of Great Britain, whether in communion with the Church of England or not, desire its disestablishment. The real question is this: Are Church and State to be driven into opposition by rash and ill-advised action? Remember that in great countries on the continent of Europe, not to look to more distant lands, Church and State are more or less in continual conflict, or in a condition of armed neutrality in relation to one another. The Church comes, in such circumstances, to be regarded by great numbers as a vast conspiracy against the liberties of the nation. That is a terrible state of things; and the freedom of England from that disastrous condition has been due to the fact that the English people, with their profound common sense, and their happy disregard of the abstract doctrines of the theorist, have always determined to be masters in their own house, and to have their own national Church as part of the whole economy of their national life. The real meaning of the Establishment of the Church of England is just that. It expresses the Christian Faith of the nation. It is the nation on the religious side. Some theorists, in order to throw discredit on all this, call it Erastian. Calling names is always a stupid form of argument. But Erastianism is really not the correct description. Call it organic, and the relation of Church and State in England becomes clear. The people of England inherited their Faith and inherited their Church as essentials of the national life, and there is no sign that they want to part with these great possessions. Recent events seem to prove quite clearly that the people, not merely of England, but of all Great

Britain, mean to preserve the Church, and to preserve it in such a way as may make it continue to be the true representative of the Faith of the nation.

Chancellor Vaisey has written:

What is really the gist of the matter is the undoubted fact that *no measure of disestablishment could possibly free the Church from the peril of such interference in the future.* Like every other institution, divine or human, in the land, it would continue just as before to be liable to be meddled with by the legislature in so far as public opinion or political expediency might from time to time require such a course to be adopted. No concordat can ever, in this world, be immutable. And a "disestablished" Church of England would continue, or at least ought to continue, to be far too potent a force in the life of the nation to warrant any hope that its affairs would ever be regarded as standing outside the province of permissible legislative interference. This is what the advocates of "disestablishment for the good of the Church" appear so frequently to overlook. The notion that establishment is equivalent to bondage, and disestablishment to freedom, does not really stand examination, and is a delusion. For it is inconceivable that the Church, no longer "established," would be allowed what is called a "free hand" to frame for all purposes and for ever its own future policy. Its adherence to or departure from the traditional lines of Catholic thought, and its insistence upon or minimization of its "Protestant" elements, would be not less jealously watched than at present, and if and when its tendencies should become out of harmony with public opinion, coercive measures would without question be brought to bear upon it. It is, however, important and only fair to remember that the State has rarely, if ever, since the Reformation attempted to dictate to the Church in matters of doctrine and practice, but has left it to the Church to initiate, reserving only the right to grant or withhold its sanction to what the Church has itself proposed. This can scarcely be counted a hardship when we reflect that there is no "free Church" in this country in which a novelty of doctrine or practice, not included, expressly or by implication, in its deed of trust, could be lawfully introduced without the sanction of Parliament; its introduction in the absence of such sanction would give a right of action enabling any dissentient member of that Church to prevent it.

I ask you to consider those words, and to see whether it would not be a disaster if, by trying in a spirit of logic to get those clear edges, which are so unusual in God's dealings, we destroyed a great co-operation and a great alliance. That is too weak a word. If you look back to early history, the Church was one before the nation was one, and they have grown up side by side. I prefer to think of them as interpenetrating, and as having inter-coherence with one another. I believe this is a time to take great trouble, to think and to change our thoughts into action. I believe that a nation has a life and a personality, and these must be developed on the noblest lines of progress. We must not try to remove the spiritual aspects of a nation's life. I cannot think it is possible to maintain that this relation between Church and State will be as effective to the highest good in one way as in another. We have a great heritage, and it is for us to guard it. We may get a self-centred and self-contained religious body, but when we have got that, I believe we shall have lost all.