

Vox Populi, Vox Dei?

Democracy and the Church

David Streater

This article about the shift from biblical authority to 'democracy' in the Church of England amplifies a paper given at the Protestant Reformation Society Conference in 1995 and is published with permission.

Introduction

The Protestant churches which originated in the break from Rome in the sixteenth century are today showing dangerous and alarming liberal tendencies, not the least of which is to equate the process of democracy with the revelation of God's will. By democracy, we mean that political process by which a majority view of elected representatives is held to be of sufficient authority to make radical changes in an institution. By the Church, we understand the visible body of Christ in its institutionalized form.

If we join these two parts, we can see that the democracy of the Church is a process of government by an elected body which is able of its own right to make radical changes to its beliefs, practices and structures without reference to any other authority, whether it be Scripture, reason or tradition. On this basis the voice of the people is therefore equated with the voice of God.

The question must be asked as to how this state of affairs came about. It needs to be recognized that the present position, while unique in itself, is not unique in the way that the Church has developed through the centuries. The thesis which we shall attempt to prove is that the Church has been involved with the power structures of the world from early in its life and divisions, like earthquakes, have often followed such 'fault lines'.

This should not surprise us as even the disciples who accompanied our Lord during his earthly ministry exhibited this tendency. The kingdom of Israel which had been taken away from the Old Testament people of God was still equated with the coming kingdom of God, in which Israel would be the leader in spite of prophetic predictions to the contrary. It is noteworthy how the disciples struggled for pre-eminence with one another while Salome, the mother of James and John bar Zebedee, requested the chief places for them in this kingdom. The reply of the Lord Jesus was that

while they could **and would be baptized** with his baptism of suffering, the place of pre-eminence **was reserved** for those chosen by the Father. The Lord Jesus then **called the disciples** and taught them how the question of precedence and order should be handled.¹

1 The Biblical Basis

We begin with a biblical perspective and note that two societies have existed on earth since the special creation of the human race. We shall describe them simply as the Church and the State. The Church is primary because it began with creation in the duty of the creature to worship God and to enjoy him for ever.² The State began after the Fall when sin and wickedness began to develop and there was a need for restraint. Such a view assumes that the human race developed from one family which is the foundation of all the families upon earth in their wide diversity in common grace. But the Fall created a division between those who worshipped and served the living and true God in special grace and those who did not. The early chapters of Genesis form a rich background to our understanding of the Church in the world amid all its difficulties.

For the nature of the Church in the world is always complicated by the fact that, as the Articles put it: ‘...in the visible Church the evil be ever mingled with the good, and sometimes the evil have chief authority in the Ministration of the Word and Sacraments...’³ In simple terms, the Church on earth is always a mixed body of true and false, of good and evil, complicating its witness in the world, not least in Church and State relationships.

While Scripture lays down guiding principles concerning the government of the Church, it is silent on the precise manner in which a State should be governed. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans clearly indicates proper Christian obedience to the ‘powers that be which are ordained by God’⁴ and the reason is that the task of the State is to act in restraining evil. It is noteworthy that when Paul wrote his Epistle the Roman Emperor was Nero! So government may be by monarchy, aristocracy, meritocracy or democracy. The Church can function as well under one system as the other but this does not mean that there are no advantages in being under a benevolent government. The democracies have in the past been the more benevolent, even though we may well agree with the words attributed to Sir Winston Churchill that ‘democracy is an awful system of government but it is the best one that we have got!’ That is true for the State. The question is: ‘What of the Church?’

1 Matt 20:20-28

2 The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly of 1647 *The Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland 1967)

3 The Thirty-nine Articles: Article XXVI

4 Rom 13:1-6

The Church in the world has a spiritual and eternal purpose; the State is restricted to this world and to temporal functions. Both have their origin in God's decree. It is God in Christ who has called the Church into being in grace and love. It is God in Christ acting in law and love who has called the State into being. The State legislates, executes and acts as judge in affairs of law, both criminal and civil. The two societies, while having a common origin in the plan of God, are designed for different purposes, but by virtue of their partial overlap of membership there is a mutual relationship which needs to be very carefully defined. The degree to which that membership is shared is a critical factor in the way that the Church operates in relation to the State.

2 The Historical Position

Historically, there have been four different attempts to deal with this relationship. Firstly, there is a voluntary system in which the Church and State function independently of one another, often in hostility. Secondly, the Church is subject in some way or other to the authority of the State. Thirdly, the State becomes subservient to the Church. Fourthly, there is an establishment position in which the State recognizes the Church and seeks to assist it by its legislation. Such an arrangement should exclude any intrusion into doctrine, sacraments and moral practices of the Church by the State.

In the Old Testament, Church and State were united in the Davidic monarchy through prophets, priests and kings. It is noteworthy in that divine arrangement that a king might be a prophet (David), a prophet might come from the priestly family (Ezekiel), but no one man might be prophet, priest *and* king. These men were but types of Christ for whom that honour was reserved. But with the advent of the New Testament era and the spreading of the gospel into the gentile world the kingdom was taken away from Israel, as the blessing promised to Abraham through the promised Messiah now reached out into the whole world.⁵

i Voluntary System

The New Testament itself leaves us with the Church in a dynamic missionary situation. The success of its missionary endeavours had created a tension between itself and the Roman Empire which focused in the refusal to give divine honours to the Emperor. As Christ is Lord, Caesar cannot also be Lord. The gospel also created tensions in the social, economic and domestic fields. Ephesus was the scene of a riot because the financial welfare of the silversmiths' guild was threatened by the fact that the sales of the city's idol, Diana of the Ephesians, had fallen.⁶ From a human point of view, the Church was a voluntary association and the fires

⁵ Gen 22:18

⁶ Acts 19:26-7

of persecution created *ipso facto* a disciplinary system which maintained, to some degree, a doctrinal and ethical purity of the membership. It is worthwhile reflecting on what this meant for the Christians of that time.⁷

This period might well be described as the period of persecution. Against all odds, the Church continued to expand in the Empire and beyond over this period of some three hundred years. It is not that the persecutions were continuous; in the providence of God, Roman generals were so busy fighting one another for political power that they had little time to turn their attention to the Christian Church. While this time is regarded as a great period of the Church, nevertheless many doctrinal errors had begun to arise by the time of the Emperor Constantine. Constantine's reign marks a tremendous change in the status of the Church in the world.

ii State Patronage

The Church moved very quickly from the position of being a voluntary but illicit association to quite another relationship with the State. We must remember that it is only in modern times that some states claim to be neutral in matters of religion. Every State had its own gods and to be a loyal member of that State there had to be loyalty to those gods. Hence, refusal to pay respect to the gods was a treasonable offence. Rome had tolerated all religions, making an exception for the Jews, but the exclusive claims of Christ were an offence to the Imperial power. An event occurred in the fourth century which completely changed the position.

This was the conversion of the Emperor Constantine to Christianity. The story is well known. On his way to battle with a rival⁸ Constantine was convinced that he saw in the heavens the sign of a cross with the inscription: 'In this sign conquer.' He believed this to be an immediate divine revelation, and proceeded into battle at the head of the legions bearing an ornate jewelled cross. Constantine won a signal and overwhelming victory against numerically superior forces. The result of this victory was that the Church, instead of being a persecuted religion, now found itself tolerated and respectable. Toleration and respectability are not necessarily wrong but the patronage of the authorities turned

7 Michael Green comments: 'It was not only in public life that Christians excited so much suspicion and hostility. Imagine what it would have been like in a family where one member was a Christian married to a pagan. Tertullian graphically describes a divided house and gives us a vivid insight both into the problems of a Christian wife and into what the pagan husband must have thought of his wife's Christian activities...There was no getting away from the fact that Christians were different...Harnack made an interesting study of the growing self-consciousness among the Christians, and awareness among the pagans, that Christians constituted a *tertium genus*, a third type of person in the world alongside Romans and Jews.' (*Evangelism in the Early Church* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1970] p 41)

8 AD 312

Christianity into a more popular religion. Miller says:

The Bishops appeared as regular attendants upon the court, the internal dissensions of Christianity became affairs of State...The profession of Christianity being now the sure way to wealth and honours, all ranks and all classes applied for baptism...a white garment and twenty pieces of gold was promised by the Emperor to every new convert.⁹

The only way that the Church might have overcome the dangerous disability of popularity was through wise baptismal discipline. This was neglected and the Church became a leading part of the State. The free admission of former pagans brought strong pagan elements into the Church in the East, but worse was to follow in the West as the Roman Empire began to break up under the assaults of the Teutonic invaders.

iii The State under the Church

Rome at the time of Constantine was the acknowledged capital of the Empire. For strategic reasons he transferred the seat of Government to Constantinople. This created two centres of authority for the Church: in the West, the Bishop of Rome and in the East, the Patriarch of Constantinople. The city of Rome itself, deserted by the political power, turned to the administrative skills of the Church to fill the vacuum. Slowly, but then more definitely, Rome achieved an unscriptural authority of temporal power. William Temple wrote:

Pope Gelasius I (492) had laid down the doctrine that Emperor and Pope were alike supreme each in his own sphere. This became the formula of the Imperialist party [but] Gregory VII (Hildebrand 1073) made the Pope alone supreme [with the dictum] that: 'If Peter's successor has the right of judging and unbinding in heavenly and spiritual matters, how much greater is his right over earthly and worldly things.'¹⁰

Gregory the Great's incumbency (AD 590) was the watershed for, in his skill as an administrator, he organized not only the Church, but the physical defence of Rome against the Lombard invaders. While we would in no way wish to impugn Gregory the Great by likening him to Gregory VII (Hildebrand), his administration opened the way for the claim of supremacy in both spiritual and temporal matters.

iv Establishment

With the Fall of Rome, Western Europe entered the Dark Ages. Such light

⁹ Andrew Miller *Church History* (London: Pickering and Inglis) p 194

¹⁰ William Temple *Citizen and Churchman* (London: Eyre and Spottiswood 1941) p 15

Churchman

of learning as was left was to be found within the Church. The Imperial power was transformed into a feudal society which itself gave way to personal monarchy. The Church entered the period of the Middle Ages strong in political power and in learning but weak in biblical truth and gospel proclamation. Scholasticism produced many great intellects and the Church produced many skilful politicians and administrators. In Western Europe, under the feudal system, Church and State were united through the Papacy. There was a heavy price to be paid. The Church had departed from the simplicity of the gospel. The Lollards and Hussites who protested for a more biblical Christianity were largely suppressed and the Waldensians heavily persecuted. There are many and varied records of the abuses in the Church. Paul Johnson aptly illustrates the point:

From the twelfth century abbots were particularly under fire for living like great territorial magnates. In particular critics objected to their hunting, which was, above any other activity, the hallmark of upper-class status and behaviour. At the Fourth Lateran Council in Canon 15 Innocent III laid down:

We forbid hawking and hunting to the whole clergy...

This injunction, often repeated, was totally ineffective. Abbots argued that, if they had to entertain the great, they had to keep up the hunting.¹¹

We are often reminded of the glories of the medieval church by the revisionists, and no doubt there were some at that time. In the relativism of the secular age in which we live today, the ordered existence of a slow-paced life organized around the seasons of the year may appear idyllic. The truth is far otherwise. V R R Green writes of that period that it was:

...a world of baronial castles and church spires, of great cathedrals and abbeys where brilliant decoration, coloured glass and gleaming vestments served to impress the worshipper... [but it was] a world of basic poverty and great wealth, of gargantuan banquets and grating hunger...¹²

The main ambition of the Church was to be identified with the aristocracy and the rich in an hierarchical order. The world was in the Church and the gospel of the free grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was excluded. Pride paraded under the form of humility in sanctimonious and superstitious ritual. There was a desperate need for the reformation of the Church which would lead to the renewal of society and through society the

11 Paul Johnson *A History of Christianity* (Harmondsworth Middx: Penguin 1976) p 237

12 V R R Green *Renaissance and Reformation* (London: Edward Arnold 1964) p 17

State.

The Reformation of the sixteenth century sought to Christianize the State by bringing the Bible as God's Word to bear upon society. This is evident in Luther's relationship with the German princes. It is seen in Tyndale's *Obedience of a Christian Man* in England and carried forward by Cranmer under Henry VIII and Edward VI. It is at its most profound in Geneva under John Calvin.

3 The Beginning of the Modern Age

We need first of all to ask why we emphasize the Reformation generally and John Calvin specifically. The answer is that the Reformation placed the Bible at the centre of Church and State. Francis Schaeffer's comments are important on this point:

In the Anglo-Saxon world, England showed clearly the results of the Reformation, as did Holland and in varying degrees other Reformation countries. Too often we think of law...only in the context of civil and criminal conduct, forgetting that law is related to the entire structure of society, including the government. Here the return to the Bible in the Reformation had an important and beneficial influence. The exact impact in any one place or country varied according to circumstances and opportunity. But, in general, the constitutionalist ideas of a Martin Bucer... or a John Calvin produced results because, unlike the ... moribund ideas of the late Middle Ages, they did not lose contact with daily life.¹³

In simple terms, Schaeffer is pointing out that whatever a government believes will influence it in its law making and policy decisions. The late Middle Ages in Western Europe saw the decline of Scholasticism, which with its various schools of philosophical thought had flourished for over six hundred years. During that time, it had drifted from its early high ideals of *credo ut intelligam* (I believe in order that I might understand), based on the teachings of Augustine, to *credo quia absurdum* (I believe because it is absurd), which was William of Occam's irrational 'postmodern' contribution. The Reformation removed scholastic philosophies and replaced them with the Bible. In particular, it was Martin Bucer who influenced John Calvin's views.

When one considers John Calvin and his work in Geneva, it is normal to think of him, rather unfairly, as the theologian who emphasized predestination and election, or as the author of the great work of systematizing Protestant theology, his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. It is rare to think of Calvin

13 Francis Schaeffer *How Shall We Then Live?* (Old Tappan NJ: Fleming Revell 1976) p 108

as being interested in political theory but he was. Douglas Kelly writes:

The thought and work of John Calvin form one of the most powerful responses to the great European upheaval...the Protestant Reformation. Calvin's work not only constituted a response to revolutionary forces that were abroad when he came into prominence as a religious leader, it also contributed greatly to the European upheaval.¹⁴

And Schaeffer confirms this in his comments:

The Reformation's preaching of the gospel brought forth two things which were secondary to the message of the gospel but were nonetheless important: an interest in culture and a true basis for form and freedom in society and government. The latter carries with it an important corollary, namely that *fifty-one per cent of the vote never becomes the final source of right and wrong* in government because the absolutes of the Bible are available to judge a society. The little man, the private citizen, can at any time stand up and on the basis of biblical teaching can say that the majority are wrong. So to the extent to which biblical teaching is practised one can control the despotism of the majority vote or the despotism of one person or group.¹⁵

It would not be unfair to say that the Presbyterian polity of Geneva, which set up a system of checks and balances in the government of the Church, contributed largely to political thought in the creation of checks and balances in the government of the State where the Reformation had influence. The immediate objection is that Presbyterianism did not triumph in England. That objection is true in itself, but not valid in counteracting the argument. Although the attempt to achieve that Church polity did not succeed, the political ideas espoused by the Puritans, both conforming and non-conforming, influenced the various subsequent political settlements.

Not least, they trimmed the power of the absolutist Stuart kings, firstly by the abolition of the monarchy and the Church of England in the Civil War, and later, after the restoration of the monarchy and Church, removed the Roman Catholic Stuarts from the throne for good in the Glorious Revolution in 1688. In this way the foundation for biblical democracy was laid, although it was many years before it finally triumphed. What was true in England was also true in the United States. In fact, it was a popular argument that if an unjust king might be removed in England, an unjust

14 D F Kelly *The Emergence of Liberty in the Modern World* (Philipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed 1992) p 4

15 Francis Schaeffer *How Shall We Then Live?* (Old Tappan NJ: Fleming Revell 1976) p 110

king might also be removed in America.¹⁶

4 The Humanist Reaction

The change in the situation in England was brought about by a bloodless coup, although it has to be remembered that there was serious fighting in Ireland. Essentially, the change was from personal monarchy to constitutional monarchy. The people represented, at least in theory, by Parliament were in equal partnership with the crown. This settlement could be made because it was controlled by specific legal bounds of a Protestant nature which both curtailed and controlled the royal prerogative.¹⁷

The difference between France and England was striking. Liberty in England, for all its inconsistencies, was a biblical liberty of reason under the Word of God. In France, liberty was the liberty of unchecked human reason. We must remember that the great Huguenot Church had been persecuted out of existence, thereby leaving a political vacuum in which the aristocracy had no buffer between them and the peasantry whom they despised and who hated them. And the Roman Church was equated with the aristocracy.

The result was the bloody French Revolution based on the rationalism of liberty, equality and fraternity. Schaeffer writes:

The French philosopher Voltaire (1694-1778) often called the 'Father of the Enlightenment' was greatly influenced by the results of this bloodless revolution in England during his time of exile there (1726-1729). The impact of the Bloodless Revolution and the ensuing freedom of public expression is shown in Voltaire's *Letters Concerning the English Nation* (1733). He wrote: 'The English are the only people on earth who have been able to prescribe limits to the power of Kings by resisting them, and who, by a series of struggles, have at last established ... that wise government where the prince is all powerful to do good, and at the same time is restrained from committing evil ... and where the people share in the government without confusion.'¹⁸

At this point, we have to return to the Reformation period. The Reformation itself was born out of the reawakening, or rebirth, of classical studies of the Greek and Latin texts known as the Renaissance. In northern

16 William Henry Drayton of South Carolina stated: 'If the Convention Parliament of 1688 had the right to declare the throne vacant because of James' violations of office, so did the Continental Congress. Both kings had violated the covenant.' (Cited by Douglas F Kelly *The Emergence of Liberty in the Modern World* [Philipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed 1992] p 133)

17 It is interesting to note the Oath sworn by each monarch at the Coronation.

18 Francis Schaeffer *How Shall We Then Live?* (Old Tappan NJ: Fleming Revell 1976) pp 120-21

Europe the Renaissance was strongly influenced by Christianity and the application of historical and grammatical exegesis to the text of the New Testament, and in particular to the theology of the apostle Paul. But in the South the Renaissance was involved less with Christian studies and more with the reawakening of pagan ideas.¹⁹ In those ideas, it would be true to say that the study of mankind was man. It was man-centred and not God-centred.

The objective of Voltaire was to emulate the English situation but the means by which that was to be achieved was totally different. The Glorious Revolution had a biblical base and it led on to a biblical democracy which was itself under the authority of the Word of God and therefore under the authority of God. In other words, it had a perspective point to which reference could be made. This meant that the tyranny of the monarch and the tyranny of the mob were both capable of being under control. The French Revolution sought to achieve the same goals, but without the biblical base and without any perspective other than man himself. The result was a bloodbath. Schaeffer writes:

How quickly all the human ideals came to grief! In September 1792 began the massacre in which some one thousand three hundred prisoners were killed. Before it was all over, the government and its agents had killed forty thousand people, many of them peasants. Maximilien Robespierre (1758-1794), the revolutionary leader, was himself executed in July 1794. This destruction came not from outside the system; it was produced by the system.²⁰

The rapid breakdown of the French Revolution into the dilemma of anarchy or repression was resolved by the despotic and authoritarian rule of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821). It is interesting that the Russian Revolution of 1917 went the same way under Joseph Stalin as did China under Mao Tse Tung in the Cultural Revolution. The French Revolution is the father of humanist rebellions whereas the Glorious Revolution is the triumph of biblical liberty over ungodly repression.

5 The Development of Democracy

It is obviously impossible to recount the precise historical development of democracy in either the United States or the United Kingdom. Suffice to say that, in the United States, there has been the development of a democratic republic in which Church and State are separate. This is not surprising given that many of the early settlers from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, as well as elsewhere, had left their homes for religious

¹⁹ Both in Italy and Spain the Reformation met with success but persecution quenched the movement.

²⁰ Francis Schaeffer *How Shall We Then Live?* (Old Tappan NJ: Fleming Revell 1976) p 124

freedom. However, the precise intention of that separation is a matter of debate. In the United Kingdom, there has been the development of a constitutional monarchy but one in which the Church of England has maintained an established position in the kingdom of England.²¹

It has been our contention that the Reformation created an ethos in which what we might call biblical democracy was enabled to flourish in those countries which had embraced its principles. There could be no tyranny of the fifty one per cent where the general consensus of the biblical faith was held dear by a significant proportion of the population. The question which needs to be raised at this point is what happens when that significant majority dwindles to a minority. In other words, when the community of faith becomes a community of secularism.

We have no time to deal with the rise of science, except to say that this has been influential in the development of secularism. The growth of science, which began in the Middle Ages, has played an immense part, not only in how we live, but in how we think. Again Schaeffer points out that:

Living within the concept that the world was created by a reasonable God, scientists could move with confidence, expecting to be able to find out about the world by observation and experimentation. This was...the philosophical foundation with which they were sure they could know...Since the world had been created by a reasonable God, they were not surprised to find a correlation between themselves as observers and the thing observed – that is, between the subject and object...Without this foundation, Western modern science could not have been born.²²

The founders of modern Western science such as Newton started from a biblical base. Unlike the secular scientist today, such scientists were interested in asking the question 'why' as well as 'how'. The rise of theological liberalism in Germany accompanied by the rise of secular science (aided and abetted by atheistic evolution) has had a serious effect upon the churches of the Reformation. This, in turn, has led to the dilution of a biblical faith and the loss of a Protestant Christian consensus which was exemplified in the United Kingdom by the 'nonconformist conscience' in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth.

In the United Kingdom legislation has been passed in the last thirty

21 This does not apply to Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. The history of Presbyterianism in Scotland and the disestablishment of the Episcopal Churches in Wales and Ireland is another story. The establishment position in England is likewise a matter of debate.

22 Francis Schaeffer *How Shall We Then Live?* (Old Tappan NJ: Fleming Revell 1976) p 134

years which is to all intents and purposes anti-Christian, even though in a recent opinion poll at least seventy per cent of the population regarded themselves as having some affinity to Christianity.²³ How has this impacted upon the Church of England in its development?

To trace this we must return to the closing years of the nineteenth century when talk of disestablishment was in the air and being pursued with some vigour by the Protestant Churches that were not established. Within the Church of England itself there was a continual agitation for more lay involvement in the government of the Church. This began to come to a head in the First World War when the Reverend William Temple, as the chief spokesman of the 'Life and Liberty Movement', pressed for greater freedom from Parliamentary control. This led to the passing by Parliament of the Enabling Act of 1919. Bishop Bell of Chichester, the official biographer of Archbishop Randall Davidson, the Primate of All England at that time, wrote that: '...a remarkable change in the relations of Church and State was effected by the Enabling Bill of 1919.'

At this point we need to understand that the developments from the 1688 Revolution had created the beginnings of a Parliamentary democracy in which the Crown by its Coronation Oath, Parliament and the Church of England were linked in a Protestant Christian consensus based on the Bible as the Word of God. This led to the Act of Toleration for nonconforming Trinitarian Protestants of 1689 and later Unitarians in 1813. In 1829 Catholic Emancipation became law. There was toleration of differing religious beliefs with freedom of worship based on a biblical Christian consensus. This consensus worked through Parliament, and the Church of England was closely involved in the Parliamentary process.

The object of the Bill was to empower the Church to deal with its own housekeeping without time having to be found in a busy Parliamentary schedule to deal with relatively minor matters. At least that is the impression which Randall Davidson gave when he addressed the Representative Church Council on the subject in February 1919:

If I thought, with the Bishop of Hereford, that by passing this scheme we were in actual peril of losing that which I for one value so much, namely the maintenance of those traditions and that spirit, very real though very indefinable, I should feel bound to support him in opposing the scheme as it stands. But I think

23 This affinity to Christianity does not necessarily mean that all those questioned would automatically regard themselves as members of the Established Church of England or for that matter any denomination, although it would be fair to assume that this could be true of many.

nothing of the kind.²⁴

Randall Davidson impressed the Representative Council but not Hereford. Hensley Henson, the then Bishop of Hereford, indicated that he was not only not satisfied but deeply concerned as to the direction that the Enabling Bill was taking the Church in the long term. In a letter published in *The Times* on 17 May 1919 he wrote:

Since the Reformation, the Church of England has been the Church of the English nation, in which every Englishman has rights, and for which every Englishman has responsibility. Henceforward, if the Enabling Bill passes into law, the Church of England will be a denomination, one among many, though still suffered to possess the ancient religious endowments of the nation...The Enabling Bill implies the total, if gradual, destruction of the Establishment.²⁵

Henson was not alone. He was supported by Dr Knox, the Bishop of Manchester, and by others who perceived that there was considerable danger in following Randall Davidson's lead. *The Times* published a powerful leader at that same time taking a strong stand against the Bill in which it was stated: '...the Bill if passed must destroy some of the most valuable elements in the life of the Church of England [so] that we hope that it will not become law.'²⁶

However Davidson was not to be deterred. In the Second Reading of the Bill in the House of Lords on 3 June, the Archbishop pointed out many of the practical difficulties which faced the Church in the existing arrangement and he gave to the House the assurance that they were not dealing at all with '*deeper spiritual things*' (author's emphasis) but only with the framework – 'the outer secular rules within which our work has to be done'.²⁷ Notwithstanding this assurance, Lord Haldane objected that the Bill was 'rank treason to the doctrine of the constitution'.²⁸ Bell writes that: '...it was an able speech and travelled across very different territory from that of the Archbishop, suggesting before the end that the practical difficulties which the Archbishop had emphasized might be met through Orders in Council.'²⁹ However, Haldane's main objections were on the principle of Parliamentary protection of the rights of the subjects of England. He emphasized that, should the Enabling Bill be passed, it would convert the Church of England from being an organization representative

24 G K A Bell *Randall Davidson: Archbishop of Canterbury* (Oxford: OUP third ed 1952) p 968

25 Bell p 974

26 *The Times* 30 May 1919 cited by Bell p 975

27 Bell p 975

28 Bell p 975

29 Bell p 976

of the nation at large into a denomination, and substitute the influence of episcopacy for public opinion.³⁰

An interesting amendment was moved by Lord Willoughby de Broke concerning the protection of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* from alteration by this Measure. The response of Randall Davidson to this was also interesting, if we bear in mind the proposed changes which were mooted not ten years later.³¹ Instead of dealing with the major point which concerned the protection of doctrine, he argued that there were changes needed to some of the rubrics. While the rubrics were important, doctrine was more so and with hindsight the question has to be asked as to the intention of the Archbishop in fending off the amendment.

The Enabling Act of 1919 was passed in both Houses, with one significant amendment: the Ecclesiastical Committee of the Privy Council was replaced by the Ecclesiastical Committee of both Houses. The new body was composed of fifteen members from the House of Lords and fifteen from the House of Commons. Bell writes euphorically of the great leap forward describing it as '...a very notable change in the constitution of the Church of England ... and with a speed that was startling...'. Iremonger, as William Temple's biographer, is less enthusiastic. He writes that: '...the laity had been encouraged to believe that they were now to play a vital part in the future management of their Church...' When, however, the newly won privileges were explained to them the change for many was less than satisfactory.³² What they did not realize was that the way was being opened for the centralization of the Church, so that by the removal of the doctrinal standards and customs of a godly tradition the checks and balances which made up the life of the Established Church were in the process of being removed. And this was being done by a democratic process which, not being subject to the authority of Scripture as laid down in the Articles of Religion, was to mean that all manner of changes might be made in the name of the people.

6 The Present Position

If we follow the Church at large from the time of Constantine, we shall be able to see that the complex relationship between Church and State has often worked to the detriment of the spiritual nature of the Church. Especially through the Middle Ages the Church aped the pretensions of the aristocracy and its ministry was often seen as the opportunity to rise in the political and social order. Cardinal Wolsey was only one of many who rose from the ranks of poor tradesmen to become second only to the king,

30 G K A Bell *Randall Davidson: Archbishop of Canterbury* (Oxford: OUP third ed 1952) p 976

31 *Prayer Book Controversy of 1928*

32 F A Iremonger *William Temple* (London: OUP 1948) p 277

Henry VIII, before falling into disgrace.

The Reformation, largely through the influence of John Calvin, brought the Bible as God's authoritative word into the centre of culture and society and went a long way to correcting this position, opening the way for form and freedom in a godly people. This freedom was gradually developed both in the United States and the United Kingdom from the eighteenth century onwards. Calvin himself had always believed in the union of Church and State but his followers in the New World moved to the position of complete severance between the two.

The Enlightenment, which was the younger twin of the Reformation – for both had been brought to birth by the Renaissance – led through Deism into the unbelieving Higher Criticism of Germany and the declension of the Church. With the removal of science from faith, the door was opened, not to biblical democracy which might be corrected by the revelation of God, thus ensuring maximum freedom, but to a humanistic democracy, which is government by the elected representatives of the people who can radically alter doctrine or practice without reference to any higher authority. What has occurred in society at large has been brought into the Church in a spurious equal rights campaign in which the biblical laws have been downgraded before being removed. R J Rushdoony writes:

In the name of equal rights, women are being stripped of the protections of the family and given no place except the perverse competition of a sexual market in which increasingly shock, perversion, deviation and aggressiveness command a premium.

And again:

The law...is warfare against that which is defined as evil and a protection of that which is held to be good. In the developing law-structure of humanism, warfare is implicitly waged against the parents and the family as evil, and protection is extended to perverts and law-breakers on the assumption that their 'rights' need protecting.³³

This has affected many of the denominations in America and has now entered the Church of England. No one can doubt that the Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure 1992 has drastically altered the doctrinal position of the Church today. It was passed by Parliament, not on arguments proved from Scripture, reason or tradition, but on the rationalistic grounds of equal rights. The doctrinal questions were ruled

33 R J Rushdoony *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley NJ: Craig Press 1973) p 208

out of order! It altered the position by permitting the doctrinal formularies to be altered by a General Synod vote, thus overriding Scripture and tradition and conflicting with the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, *The Book of Common Prayer* and the Ordinal.

The constitutional point at issue was whether General Synod could change the biblical formularies of the Church of England by initiating legislation which obtained a two-thirds majority in each House and was then rubber-stamped by Parliament on the advice of the Ecclesiastical Committee. The following words were written at that time:

To understand the position of the Church of England, it has to be recognized that behind the legislation there is a very serious concept. That is the relationship of the Crown and Parliament to the Church of England which can be traced from the reign of Elizabeth I (and which was significantly reinforced in 1688). The intention was of the nation 'availing itself of a divinely called ministry to perform its duties in accordance with the interpretation of the Word of God accepted and professed by the nation'. This idea is enshrined in the Coronation Oath of June 1953:

I solemnly promise and swear to govern the Peoples of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the Union of South Africa, Pakistan and Ceylon, and of my Possessions and the other Territories to any of them belonging or pertaining, according to their respective laws and customs.

I will to my power cause Law and Justice, in Mercy, to be executed in all my Judgements.

I will to the utmost of my power maintain the Laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel. I will to the utmost of my power maintain in the United Kingdom the Protestant Reformed Religion established by law. And I will maintain and preserve inviolably the Settlement of the Church of England, and the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government thereof, as by law established in England. And I will preserve unto the Bishops and Clergy of England, and to the Churches there committed to their charge, all such rights and privileges as by law do or shall appertain to them or any of them.

The things which I have here before promised, I will perform and keep,

So help me, God.

It is also pivotal to various Acts of Parliament and the formularies of the Church of England to which the clergy have to assent in this scheme. Parliament is objectively the defender of those formularies, a fact which few Parliamentarians today seem to recognize... Archbishop Davidson, in his speech in the Lords concerning the Enabling Act of 1919, was at pains to reject the notion that Parliament's devolution of powers upon the old Church Assembly represented the Church of England's right to change its formularies... If General Synod can proceed by way of a Measure to promulge a Canon which essentially changes the received biblical doctrine of the Church of England in this instance, it can in many others.³⁴

The serious nature of the situation can hardly be overestimated. Already the pressure is growing to normalize homosexual relationships within the ministry of the Church of England. The denial that equal rights for the ordination of women is nothing to do with homosexuals is in one sense right. The connection lies not in equating women with homosexuals but in the downgrading of scriptural authority in both cases. Remove the barrier to the one, it is clear that the other can follow. Fifty-one per cent must be right! (In the case of General Synod sixty-six per cent!) This is the price of humanistic democracy.

But the government of the Church must always lie under the authority of Jesus Christ whether it be in the wider or local church. He rules by his Word through the Spirit and his ministers and leaders are always servants of the Word of God. The tyranny of the Middle Ages arose as the Church took to itself power which it had no right to exercise, especially in episcopacy. The Church aped the world and its governing bodies. To say so is not to deny that there is a proper relationship between the Church and the State, nor is it to deny that there is a proper place for toleration of those who dissent. But humanistic democracy in Church and State will inevitably lead to anarchy and chaos. Because anarchy and chaos are in the end self-defeating, the danger then lies in the acceptance of an autocratic figure who will endeavour to gain control by repression.³⁵

What is the answer to the current problems in Church and State? It is the re-creation of a biblical democracy in both. The present Turnbull Report being debated by the Church of England demonstrates alarming tendencies to centralize power in the hands of a minority group by authorities who are accountable to no one. The Church's need is for proper checks and balances so that no one person or group is able to maximize power either to the disadvantage of others or to the denial of biblical principles. The

34 D A Streater 'The Need for a Legal Challenge' *Directions of the CEN* 30 August 1993
35 2 Thess 2

Churchman

same answer is true for the State, if the enjoyment of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are to be enjoyed by all citizens. Democracy is only the answer if it is a biblical democracy; for the Church this involves an overt acknowledgement that its responsibilities are exercised within the framework of a theocracy. From General Synod to Parochial Church Council it means seeking to apply in practice biblical precepts instead of substituting whatever current position can be 'justified' by a majority vote.

Since this article was written, the democratic process has sought to trundle the Church of England yet further down an unbiblical path. The Times (27 November 1997), speaking of the current proceedings of the General Synod, said, under the heading 'Creed "wrong on Mary"':

Proposed changes to the Nicene Creed are in danger of elevating the status of the Virgin Mary to that of God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, the synod was told.

The new version forms part of the revised Communion service in the new Common Worship prayer book, which will replace the 1980 Alternative Service Book in the millennium. In it, Christ is said to become incarnate 'of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary', instead of by the power of the Holy Spirit 'of the Virgin Mary'.

A couple of weeks earlier, the BBC had quoted a report in The Sunday Times on the Liturgical Commission's proposals for the service of Holy Communion in Common Worship. The Ten Commandments were recommended for relegation to an appendix, in order to render the service less 'sombre'!

Where will 'democracy' lead next?

DAVID STREATER is the Director of Church Society.