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Pam's Prelates

Nigel Scotland

Who were they?

One of the most significant developments of the nineteenth century episcopate was the emergence of those bishops who became known as the 'Pam's Prelates', 'Pam' being the nickname of the Whig Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston during whose ministry they were appointed. As Owen Chadwick asserted in the *Victorian Church*, 'the fifteen years after 1847 put a new complexion upon the English episcopate'.¹ The reasons for this change began in the following year when the Evangelical, John Bird Sumner, replaced the high church Howley as Archbishop of Canterbury. In the days that followed there were few high churchmen on the bench of bishops save the vitriolic and quarrelsome Henry Phillpotts of Exeter and Bishops Richard Bagot of Bath and Wells and John Kaye of Lincoln.

Palmerston and Shaftesbury

When Palmerston succeeded Aberdeen as Prime Minister in 1855 he ushered in a new era for the bench of bishops. Palmerston remained in office as Premier for ten years save for a short interval in 1858. His step son-in-law was Lord Shaftesbury whose wife was the daughter of Palmerston's wife by her first marriage. By temperament Palmerston found it gentlemanly to sit lightly to religious obligations, although he did attend Church of England services at Romsey Abbey and perhaps elsewhere, but his Christian commitment was no more than a nominal one. For this reason, one might perhaps have expected he would distance himself from Lord Shaftesbury, but this was not the case. Palmerston was somewhat ignorant in religious matters and was pleased to remain so, at least in appearance. 'He does not know,' Shaftesbury wrote, 'in theology, Moses from Sydney Smith.'² As things turned out Shaftesbury was somewhat naïve in his assessment of his stepfather and later found himself surprised at the acuteness of Palmerston's religious insights. Evangelicals feared that Palmerston's appointments would be dreadful but in the end they were pleasantly surprised. Palmerston turned again and again to Shaftesbury for ecclesiastical counsel and advice, even on his death bed.

Palmerston had a somewhat hazy and perhaps idealised view of what a bishop should be. 'If the man is good,' he was heard to remark, 'I don't care what his political opinions are. Certainly I had rather not name a bishop who would

make party speeches and attacks on the government in the House of Lords; but short of that, let him do as he likes.³ Both Palmerston and Shaftesbury eschewed learning as a qualification for preferment. In contrast to many of his predecessors, Palmerston believed that what the Church needed was neither scholars nor divines, but conscientious pastors with solid parish experience. Many, probably most, Evangelicals would have agreed with his assessment. Queen Victoria on the other hand, longed for the appointment of learned men to the episcopate. Palmerston replied to her by stating that—

bishops are in the church what generals are in the army: their chief duties consist in watching over the clergy of their diocese, seeing that they perform properly their parochial duties, preserving harmony between the clergy and laity, and softening the asperities between the established church and the dissenters. For these purposes it is desirable that a bishop should have practical knowledge of parochial functions and should not be of an overbearing and intolerant temperament. His diocesan duties are enough to occupy all his time, and the less he engages in theological disputes the better. Much mischief has been done by theological bishops.⁴

On this conviction Palmerston and Shaftesbury could agree. Palmerston wanted straightforward, pious bishops who would not pass their time writing theology. He did, on the other hand, also want bishops who could speak competently on religious and church matters in the House of Lords when necessity demanded it. Thus it happened over the course of time that Palmerston developed a certain trust, even dependence, upon Shaftesbury in these matters. On one occasion, for instance, when Shaftesbury advised the Prime Minister that he had better consult the bishops on a certain matter, Palmerston replied off-handily: 'No, no, you are quite enough; I had rather take your advice than that of all the bishops put together.'⁵ Despite the vehement tone of Palmerston's reply, there undoubtedly must have been some occasions when he relied on the advice of others. There were, nevertheless, many more occasions when Palmerston received a letter from a bishop and simply passed it on to Shaftesbury for comment. At the same time Palmerston remained shrewd, cautious and somewhat independent on matters of religion. His consultations may, on occasion, have extended beyond Shaftesbury but he trusted Shaftesbury more than anyone else in such matters. And Shaftesbury was more than pleased to be employed in such undertakings. So close was this working partnership, and so influential had Shaftesbury become,

that when Palmerston died in 1865, Shaftesbury lamented that a great and mighty door for doing good in the church had now been closed.⁶

The Palmerstonian Appointments

In his ten years of office, Palmerston, appointed three English archbishops, one at Canterbury and two at York, fifteen English diocesan bishops, six Irish bishops, and thirteen English deans. At the time of his death, more than half the bishops in England were Palmerstonian bishops. The influence which these often evangelical appointments had on the Church of England and on the advance of 'serious religion' is somewhat difficult to assess and indeed it has been the subject of some scholarly disagreement. During their time the Palmerstonian Evangelicals were closely watched, sometimes scorned, and even mocked and humiliated in the papers. Bishop Bickersteth of Ripon used ruefully to refer to himself as 'a Palmerston bishop'. Bishop Samuel Wilberforce of Oxford thought the appointments to be wicked insults to the Church.⁷ On the other hand, there is much to admire in the work of the Palmerstonian bishops. Their legacy is probably no worse, and might well be regarded by some as better, than the episcopal appointments of other Prime Ministers during the last two centuries.

It should be noted that not all the appointments were Evangelicals. Some, such as Charles Longley who had three Palmerston appointments to Durham, York and Canterbury had high church leanings and Archibald Tait was more inclined to low Protestant churchmanship. Three of the appointments of Palmerston's second ministry, Henry Philpott of Worcester, Harold Browne of Ely and William Jacobson of Chester, were decidedly High Church in their convictions. With this in mind, we will proceed to examine Palmerston's appointees to the episcopal bench in terms of their convictions, activities, theology and politics.

Their Church party allegiance and theology

The majority of Palmerston's bishops were members of the Evangelical party, and of those who were not, at least one or two had strong sympathies in that direction. Archibald Tait was described by the Church of England *Quarterly Review* as 'evangelical without being fanatical'⁸ and Charles Ellicott, who was appointed to the See of Gloucester in 1861, described himself as neither high church nor Evangelical but as belonging to the 'Constitutional Party' within the Church.⁹ Edward Browne, although having High Church inclinations, showed sympathy towards the Evangelicals.¹⁰

Several of those who were appointed in Palmerston's first ministry were pronounced Evangelicals who were not only diligent pastors of their clergy and dioceses but also shared in preaching and evangelism. Montagu Villiers, the first Palmerston bishop, had become an Evangelical whilst an Assistant Curate at St. Mary's Deane in Lancashire. When he subsequently became Rector of St. George's, Bloomsbury in London in 1841, he worked vigorously with the dissenters, some of whom were members of his vestry and eagerly supported him in his ministry. On Sunday mornings in London he greeted William Brock, the minister of the nearby Bloomsbury Baptist Chapel, with the ancient greeting: 'The Lord be with you,' to which Brock responded, 'And with Thy Spirit.'¹¹

Charles Baring, who was appointed by Palmerston to the See of Gloucester in 1856, was described by the journal, *Evangelical Christendom*, as having a 'reputation for sound evangelical doctrine and decided personal piety'.¹² Robert Bickersteth who was consecrated as Bishop of Ripon in 1857 was described by his cousin, Edward Henry Bickersteth, as 'a standard bearer in the front ranks of Evangelical Churchmen'. His cousin continued: 'Whether in the sacred circle of his own home, as son, and brother, and husband, and father, and friend, or on the public platform and in the House of Lords,' he was 'an unflinching witness for the truth and a denouncer of compromise'.¹³ Equally, John Thomas Pelham, who was made Bishop of Norwich in 1857, was a man of pronounced evangelical views. *The Times* asserted that 'he never swerved from his strict evangelical principles'.¹⁴ According to Owen Chadwick, 'he came upon the Norfolk clergy like a stream of living water after years of drought'.¹⁵ He was a man of prayer and a student of the Bible and went about encouraging his clergy and people to deepen their personal relationship with God. Other evangelical appointees in Palmerston's second ministry shared these convictions. Joseph Cotton Wigram who was consecrated to the See of Rochester in 1860 and Samuel Waldegrave who went to Carlisle in the same year were both men of deep evangelical piety and conviction. William Thomson who was appointed to Gloucester in 1861 and translated to York the following year and Francis Jeune who went to Peterborough were also of the same convictions. Commenting on Thomson's views, *Evangelical Christendom* declared: 'Substantially, the views of truth held by Dr. Thomson are those cherished by the great body of Scottish Presbyterians and English Wesleyans and Non-conformists. Be Lord Palmerston's tenure of power, long or short, by these appointments he has earned a lasting claim to the gratitude of all Evangelical Protestants.'¹⁶

The fact that many of the Palmerston bishops were Evangelicals should not be taken to imply that they were devoid of scholarship. Charles Baring took a double first in classics and maths at Christ Church, Oxford in 1829. Longley, Tait, Waldegrave, Jeune and Philpott also all achieved first class degrees in classics. William Thomson became a distinguished academic, being appointed Dean of Queen's College, Oxford. Waldegrave was a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford and Bampton lecturer in 1854. Francis Jeune was Master of Pembroke and Vice Chancellor of the University of Oxford, William Jacobson was Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Oxford while Edward Browne was appointed Vice-Principal of St. David's College, Lampeter and Professor of Hebrew in 1843 and elected Norrisian Professor of Divinity at Cambridge in 1854. In addition, Tait was headmaster of Rugby and Longley headmaster of Harrow. From all of this it should be clear that those writers who asserted that Palmerstonian appointments were devoid of scholarship had not assessed the evidence in an objective manner.

The Evangelicals among the Palmerston bishops were strongly committed to those doctrines of justification by faith and personal conversion which their party prized highly. Montagu Villiers stood firm on the Thirty Nine Articles as the basis of faith interpreted 'in the true, usual and literal meaning of the said Articles'. His friend, William Marsh, noted that 'in his diocese Villiers was found to be preaching in the open air, visiting from cottage to cottage, praying with the dying, exhorting the living' and 'elevating to a wonderful degree the tone of morality among the working classes in the neighbourhood'.¹⁷ Robert Bickersteth took a major role in assisting the clergy in the Mission to Leeds in 1875 and delivered addresses day after day in various factories.¹⁸ In his Charge of 1861, Bickersteth urged his clergy 'to dwell much upon the central truth of the whole scheme of the Gospel, the Atonement effected by our Saviour Jesus Christ, when He died upon the cross. Of all the doctrines, there is none which the Church has hitherto regarded with greater reverence than this; none which is more fitly entitled to be called a fundamental truth of the Gospel'.¹⁹

In a similar vein John Pelham told his clergy in 1865 that they must 'clearly preach Christ and Him crucified'. He went on to make the point that 'if we do not fully understand we cannot properly instruct others'.²⁰ Francis Jeune in his Charge of 1867 spoke of the crucial importance of finding 'peace with God by faith in the Atonement on the cross'.²¹

Evangelicals such as Villiers, Bickersteth and Wigram took particular interest in the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ. Each year from 1842 Villiers invited well-known Evangelicals to come to London to give Lenten lectures on this topic.²² Bickersteth gave a lecture in 1854 entitled “Romanism in its Relation to the Second Coming”. In the lecture which was published, Bickersteth noted that ‘the day of Christ, or in other words the second advent, would not take place until there had been previously the development of a huge apostasy’.²³ After Christ’s return there would be ‘the dawn of a millennial day which is to terminate in the everlasting extinction of error and supremacy of truth’.²⁴ Joseph Cotton Wigram gave one of a series of lectures on the Second Coming at Winchester Cathedral during Lent 1850. His contribution which was published was entitled *The Advent of the Lord the present Glory of the Church*.²⁵ In it he stressed that the day of Christ’s coming will be one of ‘peculiar resurrection blessedness for the saints’. This blessedness, he asserted, lay in the thousand year reign in which believers will participate on Christ’s return.²⁶

Even some of the Palmerston prelates who were not strictly members of the evangelical party stood firm on the Church of England’s Protestant basis. Charles Ellicott, for example, was deeply attached to the Reformation and the doctrines taught by the sixteenth century reformers. In an address on “The Revision of the Rubrics” he declared that to the Reformation ‘we owe the return to the true aspects of that great doctrine...on which all true morality absolutely rests—Justification by Faith in Christ Jesus’.²⁷ Ellicott went on to relate that he had been taught to reverence the English Reformation ‘from my earliest childhood’ and that he intended to remain true to that teaching to the end of his days.²⁸

Their Diocesan Work

Perhaps the most applauded aspect of Lord Palmerston’s bishops was their diocesan work. Some of the generation who had preceded the Palmerston appointments were still taken up with wider church issues and with Parliamentary concerns. Some, like Sumner and Blomfield, had served on Government commissions. Others, such as John Kaye of Lincoln and James Monk of Gloucester, had devoted time to academic writing or given themselves wholly to the debates in the House of Lords. By and large the Palmerston bishops were felt to have given a much greater commitment to the work of their dioceses. Robert Bickersteth, for example, was reluctant even to leave his Ripon diocese and speak in Parliament although when he did go, he displayed ‘capable eloquence’.²⁹ On the

other hand, Samuel Waldegrave was noted for his regular attendance in the house.

Most of the Palmerston bishops were good pastors to their people and gave particular attention to the needs of their clergy. In this matter John Pelham of Norwich was well known. He would arrive at a country parsonage on a Saturday afternoon and spend the evening quietly with the clergyman and his family. On Sunday, if there was an early celebration of the Holy Communion, he took part in it and then preached at the morning, afternoon and evening services. He would also visit the Sunday school and speak to the teachers.³⁰ Robert Bickersteth was also strongly concerned for his clergy. According to his biographer 'he was never happier than when he could arrange to spend a whole Sunday with some earnest clergyman'.³¹ Robert Bickersteth was, according to his son and biographer, the first bishop to organise a retreat for his clergy. This took place at the Training College in Ripon.³²

Palmerston's bishops showed a particular concern for the welfare and spirituality of their clergy. In his second charge to the clergy of Rochester diocese, Joseph Wigram noted that the average clerical income was £369 per annum. There were however 181 parishes with a clerical income of less than £200 and 38 had a stipend of less than £75.³³ Wigram stated that he had therefore established a fund with a view to raising all small livings to the value of £200.³⁴ Samuel Waldegrave made particular efforts to be available to his clergy. At his first visitation of 1861 he said, 'I have striven to make myself as accessible as possible to the clergy.' Because his residence was some distance from Carlisle, he made it his rule to be present every Wednesday at the home of his secretary, Mr. Mounsey in Castle Street.³⁵ Waldegrave was also concerned that in sixty-seven of the parishes, 'more than one fourth of their whole number, there was no adequate house for the incumbent'.³⁶ In his first Charge to his diocesan clergy in 1858 Montagu Villiers expressed 'his very great' regret 'that while the Scripture teaches "the labourer is worthy of his hire" the value of benefices in this diocese is so miserably small, that there are in fact, scarcely any livings yielding such income as can support the clergyman without calling upon him for the expenditure of his private fortune'.³⁷ Robert Bickersteth had a particular concern that his clergy should exhibit holy living. In his Charge of 1876 he observed 'how necessary it is to secure time for prayer, meditation and study of God's word'. He noted that we live in a busy age in which there is often a strong temptation to abbreviate the time which ought to be devoted to private communion with God.³⁸

Rural Deans

One of the ways in which almost all bishops in the nineteenth century sought to improve the pastoral care and support of their clergy was through the revival of the office of rural dean. This revival appears to date from 1835 and was stimulated by the publication in that year of William Dansey's *Horae Decanicae Rurales*.³⁹ Most of the Palmerston bishops seem to have been enthusiastic supporters of this development. John Pelham took immediate steps on his consecration to the See of Norwich to revive the work of rural deans. There had been no rural deans in the diocese for a century and a half until Bishop Stanley revived them in 1842. In his early days Pelham made these officials the immediate means of communicating with his clergy.⁴⁰ Norwich rural deaneries discussed a variety of issues including in the 1870s the Agricultural Labourers' Union. Edward Browne of Ely expressed his satisfaction that 'in most dioceses, Ruridecanal chapters are now assembled periodically and with the happiest result'.⁴¹ Browne saw the rural deanery as an excellent context in which to bring together both clergy and, if possible, laity. He recommended that where possible, 'practical' rather than doctrinal questions should be discussed.⁴² Ellicott also affirmed the growing benefit which was being realised through the rural deanery. 'Every diocese in the Kingdom', he declared, 'can bear witness to the efficacy of this ancient and helpful organisation'. He did, in passing, also express his regret 'that the resolutions of our Rural Deaneries generally do not come sufficiently to the surface'.⁴³ In his Charge to the Clergy of Carlisle in 1858, Montague Villiers said: 'In arranging the work of the Diocese, I have had recourse to that which has been found of the greatest service in other places, I mean the appointment of rural deans.'⁴⁴ Villiers created eighteen rural deaneries within the two archdeaconries of Carlisle and Westmorland.⁴⁵

Church Building

Another aspect of Palmerstonian episcopal diocesan strategy was that of church building. In this matter they were the heirs, in particular, of the Sumner brothers who had seen it as vitally important to take the church into places where the people were. Archibald Tait noted in his visitation address in 1866 that since his previous visitation fifty-three churches had been consecrated, all of them new except seven. He commented: 'We still need 325 new Clergy with a proportionate staff of Scripture readers, and 194 new churches before London is brought to that scale of arrangements for religious instruction which our statistical inquiries have suggested.'⁴⁶ During the episcopate of Robert

Bickersteth at Ripon, 158 churches were consecrated of which ninety-two were new parish churches, forty-seven were churches which were rebuilt or enlarged, and nineteen were chapels-of-ease.⁴⁷ John Pelham established a Diocesan Church Building Association which increased the number of churches and also provided rectories and vicarages.

Education

Hand in hand with the promotion of church building, almost all of the Palmerston bishops displayed a major concern for education. This was clearly visible in their encouragement of Sunday schools, the building of national schools and in the training of teachers.

Before the formation of the National Society which aimed to build a Church of England day school in every parish, the Sunday school was of major importance. But even in the middle years of the nineteenth century as many as half of the children under age fifteen were not able to attend a parochial school. It was for this reason, Sunday schools were still important. Many of them offered a grounding in the three Rs to poor children who had no other opportunity open to them. Palmerstonian bishops were among those who were acutely aware of the value of Sunday schools. Addressing his clergy in 1858, Montagu Villiers said 'your school machinery is and must be utterly incomplete without a well-worked Sunday school'.⁴⁸ Interestingly, Villiers' view was that 'instruction should be purely religious, the teachers and volunteers, and the style of teaching as cheerful and encouraging as possible'.⁴⁹ In 1870 Bickersteth reported that there were 832,009 scholars in Sunday schools in the Ripon diocese.⁵⁰

In the matter of building Church primary schools, possibly no Palmerstonian bishop was more keenly aware of the need than Joseph Cotton Wigram. During his time as assistant preacher in the parish of St. James, Piccadilly, he had also been secretary of the National Society from 1827-39. In his second charge to the clergy of Rochester in 1864, he observed that in 1852 there were 74,425 children in diocesan National Schools. This figure had increased to 82,843 in the present year, 1864. He noted that, in Essex, 22 school buildings '6 of them with teachers and residences have risen up since the autumn of 1860'. He further added that in Hertfordshire 'six new buildings...have been raised up since 1860'. Robert Bickersteth had a particular concern for primary education and devoted a

considerable section of his 1870 charge to the matter. He stated that the number of pupils in national schools in Ripon had risen from 57,180 in 1858 to 78,434 in 1867.⁵¹ He also spoke of the vital need to maintain good standards and thanked those clergy who, at his request, had filled the role of diocesan inspector of elementary schools. He went on to say that the time had come to appoint a full time paid diocesan inspector whose main duty 'shall be to examine the schools placed under his supervision with respect to their religious knowledge, and whose whole time shall be devoted to the duties of his office'.⁵²

1870 was a key year for British education. The Forster Act laid down that local boards of education would be established in every area. The Churches would then be given six months to ensure that there was a school in each locality. After that time the local board was required to supply any remaining need and erect a non-denominational Board school which would be under Government control. Bickersteth therefore urged his clergy as follows: 'It is the plain duty of churchmen to anticipate the inquiry, and by prompt effort to aim at founding Church schools wherever the necessity is found to exist.'⁵³

John Pelham in his diocesan visitation of 1865 stated that 'in spite of many hindrances' the work of education is 'making progress in the Diocese'. He continued, 'The provision of 130 new schools since my last Visitation is one palpable proof of it.'⁵⁴ Pelham also stated that the reports both of Her Majesty's Inspectors and of the Diocesan Inspectors 'bear testimony to the improvement in the teaching in the schools, and in the attainment of the scholars'. He also praised the 44 Diocesan Inspectors who undertook 'a service requiring no ordinary amount of time and labour, without any emoluments'.⁵⁵ Francis Jeune, Bishop of Peterborough, expressed his satisfaction that in only forty-six parishes was there no school. He particularly praised the good standards attained in Northants and Rutland 'where an excellent system of school inspection and prize schemes exist'.⁵⁶ Jeune valued the work of Diocesan Inspectors very highly, particularly because they ensured 'a good standard in the religious and moral teaching of the lambs of the flock'.⁵⁷

Church Worship

In the matter of Church worship the Palmerston bishops showed a particular concern. They wanted the Church services to be relevant to the needs of the poor with plain worship and good straightforward preaching. Archibald Tait,

later to be Archbishop of Canterbury, urged his London clergy to be faithful preachers of the Christian message.

O, my friends, all of your endeavour [must be] to spread the Gospel of your Master. Preach the Lord Jesus Christ faithfully in your sermons and in your lives; alas! There is far too little of Him in most of the sermons we hear. Preach Him faithfully and wisely.⁵⁸

Charles Baring was also much concerned about the need for improved preaching. Speaking in 1857, he urged on his clergy the need to preach in such a manner as 'to attract the presence or gain the attention of the less educated portion of their flock'.⁵⁹ Baring addressed the issue of why preaching is so often ineffective. One of the chief reasons, he suggested, was 'that the style ordinarily adopted is far better suited for the educated than for the uneducated'. He maintained that too many preachers being educated themselves 'shrink from the employment of common every day expressions or homely illustrations'.⁶⁰ Baring warned against reading sermons. 'However carefully prepared a sermon...if it be read it loses much of its life and force in the judgment of the uneducated.'⁶¹ Baring was not recommending extensive preaching but rather 'careful study and preparation followed by writing out the words and then committing the sermon to memory.'⁶²

Baptism

The issue of baptism was one which concerned the majority of the bishops that Palmerston appointed. They were of a common mind in their advocacy of holding the service of infant baptism in the church and at a time when the main congregation is present. To make the sacrament public in nature would cause parents to treat it with greater seriousness. In the words of Joseph Wigram, 'A public baptism is a memento to every man of his natural corruption, of the remedy provided for his sins by Christ and the Holy Spirit, and of the profession he is bound to carry out.'⁶³ Wigram observed that Baptism took place during public worship in 423 churches in his diocese but not in the remaining 221. 'Would that public Baptism were celebrated in all!', he said.⁶⁴ John Pelham also expressed his satisfaction in 1864 'to find that the practice of administering the sacrament of Baptism during the public service, and of making use of the Font, once in such general disuse in the Diocese, is more frequent'.⁶⁵

Confirmation

Along with more detailed attention to the sacrament of Baptism, the Palmerston bishops began to take much greater care than some of their predecessors had done in the administering of the rite of confirmation. Earlier in the century, even Evangelicals had tended to hold large-scale confirmation services in central market towns with children from the surrounding parishes being drawn in. Charles Baring, by contrast, expressed his willingness 'to hold confirmations on the Sunday in any village on the request of the clergyman'. He also stated that in the three years 1857-60 he had held 136 confirmations of which thirty-six had been held on a Sunday. The number of candidates confirmed in any one service was evidently still quite large since the total of those confirmed was 12,425.⁶⁶ Baring felt that, where possible, Sundays or late on a week day evening was a preferable time so that the labouring classes would have opportunity to attend.⁶⁷ Robert Bickersteth typified the great deal of trouble which Palmerston bishops took over their confirmations. In 1857, the first year of his episcopate, the number of confirmation centres was nineteen and the number confirmed was 3,753. In 1883 the confirmation centres increased to 63 and the number confirmed was 10,781. During Bickersteth's episcopate the population of Ripon diocese increased by some 50 per cent, but the number of persons confirmed by nearly 200 per cent.⁶⁸

Holy Communion

Somewhat surprisingly perhaps, the Palmerstonian bishops, Evangelicals as much as the others, were advocates of much more frequent services of Holy Communion. It does need to be recognised, however, that the sacrament was almost a forgotten ordinance at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Most Evangelicals, like John Sumner when incumbent of the tiny Berkshire parish of Mapledurham, probably only held three or four communions during the course of the year.⁶⁹ Robert Bickersteth complained in his first diocesan charge that 'there were still a considerable number of churches where the Holy Communion was celebrated less frequently than once a month'. He urged, 'It is most desirable that in every Church the Lord's Supper should be celebrated at least once in the course of every month.' He also stated that 'he could not regard it as a sufficient reason for infrequent communion that the number of those who frequent the ordinance is small'.⁷⁰ In 1864 Wigram rued the fact that there were still 270 churches in his diocese where Holy Communion was celebrated less than 12 times a year and sixty-four where it was celebrated four times or less in the year.⁷¹ Charles Ellicott

expressed his thankfulness at his visitation in October 1873 'to be able to report a great increase in the number of celebrations'. 'Nine years ago,' he said, 'there were only 14 churches in the whole diocese in which it was administered weekly, and 23 in which the administration was fortnightly. Now, in one Archdeaconry alone, there are 32 churches in which there is a weekly...celebration. There are now 166 churches besides, in which the celebration is monthly.'⁷² Bishop Villiers said in 1858 that 'the practice of administering the sacrament only three or four times a year has a most injurious tendency'.⁷³ He continued, 'I hope to see the Lord's Supper administered in most parishes monthly.'⁷⁴

Their Anti-ritualism

Lord Shaftesbury had an inbuilt fear of things ritualistic and Roman and in his later years sought to introduce a bill into the House of Lords for the regulation of vestments and other forms of ritualism. He had, on one occasion, attended service at St. Alban's Church, Holborn, which he described as being like the worship of Juno. In his advising Lord Palmerston on Episcopal appointments he seems to have had a real ability to discern those who would share his views on ritualism. This proved to be the case just as much with those who were not rigorous Evangelicals. All the Palmerstonian appointees stood firm on the Protestant foundations of the Church of England of Scripture rather than tradition, justification by faith alone and the substitutionary atonement. Montagu Villiers expressed himself convinced 'as strongly as you can be, of the Protestant doctrine that the elements remain unchanged'.⁷⁵ Charles Baring spoke of 'a few weak-minded persons forcing upon unwilling congregations frivolous changes in dress, and unauthorised novelties in ornament and ceremonies'.⁷⁶ In his Charge of 1867 Robert Bickersteth attacked the doctrine of the 'real presence' as a doctrine 'not maintained in the articles and formularies of the Church of England'.⁷⁷ To a clergyman of his diocese who had started to wear Roman vestments, Bickersteth wrote in January 1876: 'In the eye of the Church they are almost inseparably associated with tendencies to Romish error and superstition.'⁷⁸ Samuel Waldegrave stressed the dangers of ritualism which 'alienates people from the church of their forefathers'. Montagu Villiers warned of 'the filthiness of the confessional'.⁷⁹ In 1866 Archibald Tait bemoaned the fact that: 'There are Churches among us in which...it is difficult for a stranger to know whether he is in a Roman Catholic or a Church of England place of worship.'⁸⁰ He went on to attack 'certain persons' who have so changed the celebration of the Lord's Supper 'as to make

it scarcely distinguishable from the Roman Mass'.⁸¹ Harold Browne of Ely had an extended public correspondence with the Revd. John Molyneux over his use of lights on the altar at Holy Communion. Browne pointed out to Molyneux that 'the use of lighted candles on the Communion Table is unlawful unless for the purpose of giving necessary light'.⁸² In his Charge of 1865 Browne urged that 'processions, copes, altar-lights, incense...when they and the like of them press thickly upon our notice, they produce the conviction, that there is a doctrine involved in them which...I need hardly say, is the propitiary sacrifice of the mass'.⁸³ Charles Ellicott spoke in his charge of 1874 of 'his disapproval of the reservation of the sacrament, pyxes and chrismatories'. He also preached a sermon entitled, *Vestments and the Position of the Celebrant* in 1874.⁸⁴ Regarding the position of the celebrant he declared: 'I do sincerely trust that no alteration will be made to this rubric.' 'On the question of Eucharistic vestments,' he said, 'be it the cope or the chasuble, I feel the deepest anxiety.'⁸⁵ Bearing these facts in mind it is not surprising that most of the Palmerstonian bishops were supporters of the *Public Worship Regulation Act* of 1874.⁸⁶ They saw it as the only means left of securing some order in the Church's worship and bringing dissident clergy to order.

Essays and Reviews Bishops

In 1860 a collection of essays by a number of liberal Anglican scholars was edited by Henry Wilson under the title *Essays and Reviews*. The contributions took on board a number of findings which had been highlighted by biblical criticism and the discoveries of Charles Darwin. The essays which caused greatest offence were those on the question of the inspiration of Scripture. In particular, Benjamin Jowett had maintained that the Bible should be interpreted like any other book and that Scripture had only one meaning, namely, that which the original author intended to convey to his original readers.

There were a number of replies to *Essays and Reviews*, the most effective being that edited by William Thomson under the title *Aids to Faith* published in 1861. Among the other contributors was Charles Ellicott. Shaftesbury, who had a great loathing for *Essays and Reviews* and denounced it in forthright tones, was determined to reward its opponents. Thus it was that Thomson was shortly afterwards appointed to the bishopric of Gloucester and Bristol. This promotion lasted only ten months when Thomson was elevated to York. Ellicott was rewarded by being chosen as his successor at Gloucester.

Both Thomson and Ellicott were orthodox conservatives where the authority of Scripture was concerned. Thomson subsequently entered into a bitter controversy in the York diocese in 1869 with Rev. Charles Voysey, Rector of Helaugh in Yorkshire. Voysey preached a series of sermons entitled *The Sling and the Stone* in which he asserted that the whole system of Pauline theology rested on the supposed fall from perfection of Adam and Eve and that once 'this myth' had been exploded, the system fell to the ground. Apart from that, he doubted the miracles, the doctrine of the atonement and even the incarnation and the Trinity. Voysey was prosecuted in the Church courts, lost the case and was deprived of his benefice. Ellicott was a biblical scholar of considerable standing and chaired the committee on the Revised Version of the Bible. In his publication *Christus Comprobatur* of 1891 he argued that 'Jesus' endorsement of authorship and events was a sufficient guarantee of their reliability'.⁸⁷

Most of the other Palmerstonian Bishops who were already in posts at the time of the publication of *Essays and Reviews* set aside part of their various charges and addresses to denounce the offensive aspects of its contents. Robert Bickersteth condemned those 'eminently learned and distinguished members of our church' whose opinions 'go to unsettle all the grand fundamentals of the Christian faith'. Such men 'scoff at the idea of direct inspiration from God, exalt the human intellect to the position of sitting in judgement on revealed truth, discard the doctrine of atonement, discredit the truth of prophecy, and disparage the evidence of miracle'.⁸⁸ Bickersteth took *Essays and Reviews* to be a sign that 'we have surely fallen on perilous times'. He spoke of them as 'these pernicious writings' and urged his clergy to counteract them by proclaiming those doctrines which the essayists had assaulted.⁸⁹ Samuel Waldegrave spoke of *Essays and Reviews* as 'a recent notorious volume' about which he had 'serious misgivings'. He focused on the way in which plenary inspiration, the supreme authority of the Bible, the total corruption of man, the miraculous incarnation and the vicarious suffering of the Word for men's redemption and the operation of the Holy Spirit in man's regeneration had all been undermined.⁹⁰ "How are we to counteract the doubt and rationalism of the authors of this volume?" he asked. His answer was to 'preach the Bible, preach it in all simplicity, in all fullness, in all boldness'.⁹¹ Joseph Wigram concluded his Charge of 1864 by remarking on 'the fresh outbreak of the old spirit of scepticism, and more than tacit opposition to the authority of the word of God'.⁹²

Whig Bishops

Unsurprisingly the majority of Pam's prelates were Whigs. Lord Palmerston (1784-1865) had begun his political career as a Tory as a junior Lord in the Admiralty in 1807 and became a disciple of Pitt. However, a split in the party in 1822 led Palmerston to transfer his allegiance to the Whigs and in 1830 he entered the Whig ministry of Charles Grey as Minister of Foreign Affairs. He became Prime Minister in 1855 and remained in office until 1865 save for a break in 1858 when Lord Derby briefly held office. Whigs were those who had supported the expulsion of the Roman Catholic, King James II in 1688 and endorsed the accession of the Protestants, William and Mary, and 'the Glorious Revolution'. Evangelical prelates, therefore, tended to align themselves with the Whigs. Robert Bickersteth, for example, was prominent in his support of the Liberal agenda⁹³ though he felt himself to be on both sides, according to his son and biographer, because he was conscious that he owed his bishopric to both Palmerston and Shaftesbury.

It may have been for this reason that some of the Palmerston bishops were somewhat reluctant to speak in the Lords' debates. Probably in Bickersteth's case it was his desire to be at the centre of his diocese which made him reluctant to spend several months of the year in London. Both Longley and Tait who became successive Archbishops of Canterbury were Whigs as were Waldegrave and Jacobson. Some of the Palmerston bishops, including the Evangelical, Samuel Waldegrave, did give time and effort to be present in the House. Tait and Thomson made full and distinctive contributions. The only two Palmerston bishops who were not of his politics were Joseph Cotton Wigram who came from a distinguished Tory family and Henry Philpott. Neither, it should be noted, caused Palmerston any embarrassment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it needs to be recognised that history has judged the Palmerston bishops somewhat harshly. Samuel Wilberforce, the high church Bishop of Oxford called them 'wicked appointments'. Others,⁹⁴ such as Sabine Baring-Gould, urged that they were pastoral ignoramuses who knew little theology and were out of touch with the world of the industrial revolution. Clearly the evidence of their episcopates does not support such an assessment. When their lives and ministries are fully investigated, the Palmerston prelates emerge as having set a new pattern of episcopacy. They were men who were accessible to both their

clergy and people and who cultivated and established good relationships with dissenters. Most were in touch with the realities of the industrial life of the country's growing towns and cities. They saw the importance of providing education particularly for the poor. They were proficient managers of their dioceses who made good use of rural deans, promoted diocesan conferences and took confirmation and confirmation preparation seriously. Whatever else might be said of them, they were, in Shaftesbury's own words, 'good and proper men'.

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