

'From Here to Eternity'

The Keene Lectures

Chelmsford Cathedral

November 2000

'Church and State'

The Rt Revd Colin Buchanan
Bishop of Woolwich

'Jesus and Faith'

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'Gospel and Culture'

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Foreword by Andrew Knowles, Canon Theologian

The Millennium, when it came, was a year of uncertainties. The Dome was unprofitable, the Bridge was soon closed, and the initial celebrations in London were grid-locked and under-resourced. Jesus Christ was celebrated in '*Seeing Salvation*' - a memorable exhibition at the National Gallery - and in many acts of Christian worship and witness, included a moving and effective ecumenical gathering in our own cathedral on New Year's Eve.

There was a concerted *Jubilee 2000* campaign, urging First World governments to cancel Third World debts. But as the Northern Ireland peace process stalled at Stormont, our transport infrastructure derailed at Ladbroke Grove and *Concorde* crashed near Paris, it was a time to reflect on the shortcomings and pitfalls of human endeavour rather than the dizzy heights of our achievements. In the Church it felt as though, after the high days of Christendom, we were back to basics: a minority seeking to stand for God against a tidal wave of materialism, self-absorption and fragmentation. The final dispiriting (but symbolic) episode was the closure of Bethlehem for Christmas!

Into this medley of impressions came our Keene lecturers. Their overall theme was '*From Here to Eternity*': what will endure in this Third Millennium, in terms of faith in the Historical Jesus, his Gospel and his Church? Our speakers were from the Evangelical wing of the church, but not all conservative, ordained, or Anglican. Each in his way revealed a radical streak - a readiness to challenge those traditions which have outlived their usefulness, a rooted confidence in the reality of Jesus Christ, and a quiet assurance that the Gospel is as necessary and relevant for every individual and society as it ever was.

Keene Lecture One
Church and State
The Rt Revd Colin Buchanan
Chelmsford Cathedral 8 November 2000

Introduction by Andrew Knowles, Canon Theologian:

Colin Buchanan is a graduate of the University of Oxford, who trained for the Anglican ministry at Tyndale Hall, Bristol. After serving his title at Cheadle in Cheshire, he became a tutor at the London College of Divinity, which moved, in 1970, to become St John's College Nottingham. He was Principal of St John's from 1979-85, when he became Bishop of Aston, since when, by a circuitous route, he became Bishop of Woolwich in 1996.

Bishop Colin is by far the longest-serving member of the Church of England's Liturgical Commission. He is also the world's busiest man. He is the founder of the much-praised Grove Books, which carry over 150 titles; but his own more substantial volume advocating the Disestablishment of the Church of England and entitled 'Cut the Connection', is unfortunately out of print. We are grateful to Bishop Colin for giving us this first of our Keene Lectures in this Millennial Year, in which he has agreed to address the future of Church and State.

Introduction

A large part of this is going to be a kind of historical and contemporary survey, and there may, in those areas, be some facts involved, while the future doesn't seem to offer very many facts at all. But if I can establish some trends, maybe the facts will come right in due course.

To this day the diocesan bishops of the Church of England are appointed under Henry VIII's legislation of 1534

If you want to understand the Reformation, then you have to visualise yourselves running a West African developing nation. You look around and find that the Coca-Cola Company is in fact in a prime position in your land. It is siphoning off the profits to New York and has thousands of servants, all of whom owe a prior allegiance to New York before their allegiance to your own country. Any self-respecting West African nation in that position takes one obvious step - it expropriates. That is Henry VIII's part of the Reformation. He expropriated the local branch of a trans-national company whose headquarters were in Rome. And he did so by cutting off the national management from Rome. Every bishop and clergyman had to swear loyalty to the King as supreme head on earth of the Church of England and, in certain situations, disavow any loyalty to the Pope. And it was done. And to this day the diocesan bishops of the Church of England are appointed under Henry VIII's legislation of 1534 which ensured that they acknowledged that they got their authority solely from him and they owed their loyalty solely to him.

A department of State

Your West African nation first of all changes the management. But when it's changed the management it has not actually changed the product on sale at the street-corner shop. The Coca-Cola recipe and the bottles remain exactly the same as when they came out of the factory before the nationalization. But you now have liberty locally to change the recipe if you have a bright idea; and that is Edward VI's reign, when the local management changed the recipe. Henry VIII had kept Latin services identical with those of the Pope. The only thing was, you prayed against the Pope instead of for him. Edward VI, with Cranmer at the helm, put through a radical Reformation of the worship of the church and indeed of the doctrinal Articles and so on. And although there were hiccups in Mary's reign and again in the Commonwealth and in James II's reign, that was the basic principle - that the nation of England now had a religious monopoly run by the State on its own lines. The Church of England was really a department of State.

The history of the last 450 years, which I will give you again in a hop-skip-and-a-jump way, which I hope will be memorable even if not accurate, goes something like this. In the first phase from Cranmer's time to 1689 you have a State monopoly. Everyone is to conform. If they will not conform they will be severely penalised. Some, as you know, went to prison; others were prohibited from meeting.

After 1689, when the Dissenters had actually helped the Church of England see off James II and had him replaced, then came the period of State privilege and of toleration of other groupings. It was still uncomfortable to be a Roman Catholic, but if you were a Dissenter, life was much better after 1689. However, you still had to be a member of the Church of England to hold office under the Crown or a variety of other posts. All the privilege was with the Church of England; but it was still run by Parliament, and indeed early in the 18th century the Convocations of the clergy ceased to meet. They could only meet when they were convened by the monarch, and the monarch didn't bother. The Convocations didn't meet for 150 years.

The next stage is when the enfranchising of Roman Catholics and the Reform Parliament of the 1830s meant that, for the first time, Parliament was not visibly and overtly Anglican. That is when the Reform Parliament united Irish bishoprics which needed uniting, because some of the Southern bishoprics in Ireland had very few worshippers, but enormous benefice income. To this day the uniting is there in bishops who hold three or four different titles and have three or four different cathedrals. The uniting was a sensible thing to do, but it was done by naked Parliamentary power without consulting what you might call the church. In fact, there wasn't a church that was viewed as being separate from the State to consult.

A separate identity

The State governing bodies were the only Church government; but John Keble in his Assize Sermon and John Henry Newman and the Tracts seized upon this as the wicked Erastianism of a Parliament that was not committed to a theological basis, now laying hands upon the life of the church. From 1830 or 1833 onwards until 1920, my third phase, is when they were struggling to find a separate identify for the church. You get in that time the restoration of the Convocations, the creation of the House of lay people as well (lay men, of course), the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland and the disestablishment of the Church in Wales which was finally put through in 1920. You also get the Anglo-Catholic movement resisting every attempt to bring it into line by the power of the State. They would not recognise the court judgements. Some of them went to jail rather than obey secular courts, and they denounced the State power. That goes right back to the Assize Sermon and to the Tracts saying that Church authority stemmed from the apostolic succession and not from the mere accident of the State connection, which was going to be played down. Secular courts would not be recognised as having jurisdiction over the church.

In 1927 the proposed Prayer Book, having gone through the Church Assembly, and having gone to Parliament simply for a 'yes' or 'no' vote was rejected by the Commons.

This led to terrible rumpuses in Parliament which finally led to the next stage, from 1920 onwards, when the Church Assembly was set up and the preparation of legislation for the church was distanced a whisker more from the State. It was now prepared in the Church Assembly and only went to Parliament for what in effect were third readings. Immediately that had happened, a crisis occurred, because in 1927 the proposed Prayer Book, having gone through the Church Assembly, and having gone to Parliament simply for a 'yes' or 'no' vote beyond any stage when they could amend it, was rejected by the Commons.

It makes wonderful reading in *Hansard*. The debate lasted seven hours and they were debating transubstantiation, which you might not have thought Parliamentarians, or even churchmen, were very good at. Joynson-Hicks, the true-blue Home Secretary, a strong evangelical, went to Archbishop Davidson and said, 'Your policy, I realise, is to broaden the base of the Church of England liturgically and certainly people like me do not want to vote for it; but can you promise me that nothing beyond the limits of your new book will go on? Will Latin rites stop, and all that sort of thing?' And Davidson had to cough and say, 'Well, you know, we haven't actually got any real sanctions to stop people', so Joynson-Hicks said, 'Well in that case you ask me to buy a pig in a poke with an outcome that you yourself say probably won't happen, so I'm against it.'

Joynson-Hicks led off powerfully in the Commons; then the Free Presbyterian from Paisley in Glasgow came in saying, 'Why do they bow the knee? Why do they ring the bells? Why? Transubstantiation!' The whole place cheered and the book was lost. The Bishop of London, Winnington-Ingram, put his head in his hands and said, 'It's all my fault.' Within five minutes' walk of the Commons any member of Parliament could show Roman uses in their local parish churches. If the Commons had met on Merseyside, which was stoutly Protestant, you could never have convinced the Parliamentarians that the Church of England was in danger of collapsing Romewards; but in

London the Bishop of London had let it run. Following the failure of the 1928 Prayer Book, the bishops vowed in 1929 to get powers to create liturgy without going to Parliament, and so you get this devolving powers down to what is now the General Synod.

The present situation

Today we have powers over liturgy, we have powers to create new dioceses, we have powers under the Pastoral Measure to effect the union and changing of parishes. There's a very large number of things which traditionally would have had to go to Parliament where the powers are now devolved. But not everything is devolved. When the ordination of women came up, General Synod put it through by that tight two-thirds vote in the House of Laity and we had to wait a year before Parliament considered it. If in 1992 there had been a hung Parliament - (as it was John Major just scraped in) - they might never have got an Ecclesiastical Committee formed before they had to go to the country again and take another year. We are absolutely dependent not just upon Parliamentary approval but even the Parliamentary timetable: a quite astonishing situation.

You have to live by fantasy to believe in the Church of England's establishment.

The old Church Assembly ended in 1970, with the formation of the General Synod. Having got a church identity separate from the State, which is clearly what the Church Assembly started to produce, and what the House of Bishops' Statement in 1929 was in the last analysis asserting, the church has the power to create liturgy without reference to the secular arm. That separation of powers was creating a split that Henry VIII would never have allowed. A separate identity for the Church of England had been set up with electoral rolls and PCCs, so the idea that somehow the whole country is Christian, and the whole nation is Anglican by decree, has become more and more incredible. The post-1970 era is the era of total incredibility about the establishment. You have to live by fantasy to believe in the Church of England's establishment.

Now, what *is* the establishment? It is arguable that it is simply the existence of laws of any sort which separately touch our particular church. That's the nearest definition the Church and State Commissions have come to. If a religious body is governed by the same laws as any other religious body, or as a charitable voluntary body would be, then it is not 'established'. But if there are laws in Parliament which specifically identify us and say things to or about us, then we are established. That's the nearest to a definition you can get. It leaves an interesting question in relation to the Church of Scotland, which has freedom; and I want to say it is *not* an established church. Though it claims to be a national church, it is in fact a church by law disestablished. The last law to apply to the Church of Scotland was that which set it free, just as the last law to apply to an African colony (or to the dominion of Canada in the North America Act) is the one that actually says 'From now on you'll get no more legislation from us and this winds up all our legislation from us. You are free to govern yourself.'

No 'religious' tests

But the Church of England has still got a whole series of laws which give us this distinct established position. I think it may be appropriate, therefore, if I touch upon the particular issues which, as it were, particularly may affect us. Parliament has now, remember, no religious tests. In fact, you couldn't, I think, be a Parliamentarian as an atheist in the 1830s, and that was Charles Bradlaugh, much later in that century, who fought the battles; and you do not now have to take an oath before God to be a member of the Commons. The only point now at which you have to cross your fingers behind your back, apparently, is when you swear loyalty to her Majesty if you are, in fact, really a Republican - and I have talked with Tony Benn about the degree of fantasy involved in that one!

In the last analysis the sovereignty of this country is exercised by a body with no religious tests or affiliation built into its nature at all, and probably most citizens think that's right.

There are no *religious* tests, and Parliament is sovereign. Therefore, whatever the Bishop of Winchester writes to the Press, as he has done recently, there is actually no ground-rule place of appeal in theology to touch the life of this nation. You cannot, for instance, if you are debating abortion, do other than simply go with the views of the majority, or the views the majority think they'll get away with with their constituents, or with their party manifesto. You have no sanctions at all in saying 'But we're Christians', for they are not. Or they may be, because you may get believers in the Commons, but, if so, you get them by a totally random process. It is sheer chance who got elected in this constituency and that one; and in this one a Christian was standing, but he was on the losing

side, and in that one, one was standing and he was on the winning side, but that was because of the way the votes went for other reasons. It is impossible to come into the Commons and say you've been chartered as a Christian to stand for anything. They still have prayers and a certain amount of ceremonial, but in the last analysis the sovereignty of this country is exercised by a body with no religious tests or affiliation built into its nature at all, and probably most citizens think that's right.

The monarchy

But in Parliament are rooted the laws by which those unbelievers, as for political purposes they must be regarded, govern the believers of the Church of England. And that, I put it to you, is Erastianism. And the main continuing links to which I was coming are these: first of all, is the monarchy. Prince Charles has gone on record recently saying he doesn't see why a Roman Catholic can't be a monarch in this country. I think one has to say he has not actually studied the institution if that is what he thinks. The monarch is the one person who by law *must* be C of E, and I do not see how the Pope can allow dual membership at that point, for he or she is the supreme governor of the Church of England as things are, and in that capacity signs canon law. It goes for Royal Assent like the laws of the land do. The monarch appoints diocesan bishops, and more or less convenes General Synod: you'll see a kind of *pas-de-deux* in which the Queen and the Archbishop circle round each other, neither sure who's host and who's guest. But she will have been at communion with us first. And the historic understanding is that the monarch is at communion at his or her coronation. It is arguably the one point where there is no religious liberty in this country, as the monarch must be C of E. You may say it doesn't bind them very far, and that's clearly a view many monarchs have taken, both in belief and practice. But they cannot be Roman Catholic - unless the times change.

We haven't necessarily got much time to plan this one. The Queen Mother is a hundred, which makes us forget that the Queen is seventy-four, and indeed Prince Philip is eighty next year. They've been around a long time and will not be here indefinitely. What happens if the Queen dies in the night? You don't then have a vote on Charles. He's in. 'The Queen is dead. Long live the King.' Immediately the Archbishop of Canterbury has a year and a bit tied up in planning an extremely difficult coronation. I've tabled a question for the General Synod next week, asking whether it is anticipated that the Archbishop of Canterbury would be asked to prepare the next coronation service. Of course, it might not be. The Privy Council has always asked the Archbishop to do it, and that is a kind of assumption about the establishment, but I suppose they might go secular and say, 'Well, we won't do it that way now', and have an event in Trafalgar Square. But Charles' remarks about wanting to be Defender of *Faiths* rather than *The Faith* raised very serious questions about his own beliefs, and the fact that the Prayer Book Society use him, as it were, in favour of stained glass window language without apparently his being interested in the content, doesn't seem to me to help the case for his Christian faith at all. And obviously there are issues about his matrimonial situation, though I suppose the death of Princess Diana, in one sense, eased some of those problems.

It is my own judgement that if the Church were to break free from the State, we would actually be saving Charles a lot of trouble.
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That's the monarchy. It is my own judgement that if the Church were to break free from the State, we would actually be saving Charles a lot of trouble. I do not think it's the reason for doing it. I do not think it is the primary problem we face, but if as a matter at this point of history we did it, I think we would actually help the next monarch. Now, there are those who say, on the contrary, it is being an established church and having all the religious trappings around the monarchy that keeps it kind of sacred, to which I say the monarch's writ runs in Wales, though the Church in Wales is disestablished. Or is it that we have to have a Church of England established to keep the monarchy right in England and then it's OK for the rest of the world? It all stems out from the special place we've given the monarch as God's representative in England which is what Henry VIII was, and which really has been an exercise in incredibility down the four hundred and fifty years since Henry VIII.

The appointment of bishops

The next issue I want to come to, which is probably the most important at the moment, is the appointment of bishops. Very quickly, diocesan bishops are appointed in the following way. A bishop dies. By law the monarch chooses someone else, and writes to the dean and chapter of the cathedral of the vacant diocese and says, 'Because Brother Ambrose has died and you're without the solace of a chief pastor, you are to meet by Easter or whatever, and in free and open elections choose the best man for the task under the guidance solely of the Holy Spirit, and if you will open the other envelope I

will tell you who it's to be.' Not only that, but it's already been announced to the press. The dean and chapter then elect, and no dean and chapter has yet resisted Her Majesty or any monarch since Henry's day, though the penalties of hanging, drawing and quartering were removed about thirty years ago. I personally have five times been summoned to this exercise and have never yet voted for Her Majesty's nominee. That's the election, the *congé d'élire*.

Then you have an extraordinary ceremony called the Confirmation, which happens in the crypt of St Mary le Bow in the southern province. Several church lawyers get together and the man who has been elected is produced and is sworn to be the man he really is, and not an impersonator. He is then confirmed by lawyers as a bishop. If he is already a bishop, he ceases to be the bishop where he has been. My new bishop was Bishop of Leicester. On the day he was confirmed - not in public, but with perhaps about twenty-four people present, family and so on - in this crypt he became Bishop of Southwark. If the person in question is not already a bishop, the monarch makes him a bishop and the church has to catch up and consecrate him the next day. For twenty-four hours he is legally a bishop without being, as it were, ecclesiastically one, as the monarch comes first and ceremonies like ours come second.

It's a most astonishing business. The new bishop kisses hands with the monarch and swears that he gets all his authority, spiritual as well as temporal, from Her Majesty alone. In my book I publish the oath that he has to take, which until quite recently the Bishop was not shown until he got there, and some are said to have looked a bit white when they read it. And in my own time I asked the question in General Synod nine years ago: would the Secretary-General tell us what the oath was, because of this situation where nobody actually knew - and he said he couldn't because it wasn't his to reveal. The next time I asked the question, whose is it to reveal, and the answer was the Home Office. I wrote to him privately and asked to be put in touch with the good lady in a library somewhere, and she sent me the text and I published it. The thing is surrounded by fantasy!

The Prime Minister and Crown Appointments Commission

In recent years we've put a whole series of conventions in front of the law.

Well now, what's happened in recent years is we've put a whole series of conventions in front of the law. The law stands exactly the same still, but now we have these conventions. First of all we had 'vacancy-in-see' committees which the Prime Minister's appointments secretary would come and consult. The Prime Minister is going to produce the name really, ever since Prime Ministers arose and insisted that monarchs accept their advice on everything. Monarchs don't take personal decisions now; so the Prime Minister does it. His appointments secretary comes and sniffs around. There was one occasion on which Christopher Wansley said: 'I will lift up my eyes to the town hall whence cometh my bishop', because the Prime Minister's appointments secretary had been seen in Southend Town Hall. Then came the 'vacancy-in-see' committees and they wrote a description of what was needed, which went to the Prime Minister.

Then came the Crown Appointments Commission. The Crown Appointments Commission came out of the Church and State Report in 1970, the Chadwick Report. It led to the General Synod in 1974 saying that the decisive voice in the appointment of bishops should lie with the Church, and the Chadwick Commission had rather hoped, I think, that it would be possible for the Church to have a small, confidential body that found one name and sent it straight to Buckingham Palace without going through Downing Street. But when Donald Coggan and Norman Anderson went to see first of all Harold Wilson and then Jim Callaghan, these party leaders wouldn't wear it. The issue finally broke with a planted Parliamentary question in 1976, to which Jim Callaghan's response was this: Because bishops are going to the House of Lords, the Prime Minister must truly appoint them and must have discretion to choose at least between two. So the Crown Appointments Commission was set up always to send two names to the Prime Minister who would have the right, if he wanted to, to send them back and say let's have two more.

No one is interviewed. Names are submitted which mean nothing to some of the persons present. You must never know who was the one that got away.

The Crown Appointments Commission has two archbishops, three elected clergy from General Synod, three elected laity from General Synod and four representatives from the vacant diocese. Those twelve meet together for twenty-four hours and find two names. But it's totally confidential. You're not even supposed to know *when* they're meeting, or *where* they're meeting, let alone *how*

they're meeting. Because it's confidential, no one is interviewed. Names are submitted which mean nothing to some of the persons present, and we cannot tell how fair it is. But if the monarch is appointing, you must never know who was the one that got away. You are never given a list, when the Honours List comes out, of those who nearly made it but didn't quite. You only get the actual bestowal of the honour or the favour by the monarch, and the appointment of bishops is in that category.

We've had no more Church and State Commissions. For twenty-four years the Crown Appointments Commission has been choosing the names of bishops. The party leaders with whom Donald Coggan and Norman Anderson did the original deal - Jim Callaghan and Margaret Thatcher and Jeremy Thorpe - have long since gone, and no one has called it properly into question. It is actually appalling. I've been through the process in four different dioceses and although I'm pretty happy about some of the results, and the results are not really supposed to be under review, I have to say that if the results are good, it is comparable to a woman in Dublin who fell down a well and got converted - that is, you can rejoice at the results without commending the means. We need a method of appointing bishops in which, when they come into their dioceses, they *know* they are wanted. At best at the moment they know that four people may have put them second on their list. That's all. They come in, as it were, by dint of *force majeure*, not of popular call.

Most people, I suppose, think that any system that produced *them* must be a good system. The House of Bishops is not itching for reform.

Now, people will tell you that things that happen overseas are terrible. You get seventeen rounds of voting with elimination and character assassination in between, and the survival of the one that's still on his feet may not be a terribly good method either. But the Church of England has a secret weapon, and that's the confidential, single transferable vote. If only the Speaker of the House of Commons had known about that! I'm the Vice President of the Electoral Reform Society, and I think this is a justice issue. One confidential single transferable vote solves problems because you let any number of persons be candidates. They can't hurt each other's chances, they can't split a vote, and you find out unemotionally who has the broad gathering behind them. I commend it very strongly. Unfortunately, the present House of Bishops doesn't quite see it that way. Most people, I suppose, think that any system that produced *them* must be a good system. certainly you'll find Members of Parliament take that view, and the House of Bishops is not itching for reform.

Parliamentary reform

But Parliament has a reform coming up. This is the Wakeham Report on the reform of the House of Lords, *A House for the Future*. I don't know how much you are acquainted with the details of this, but the highly paradoxical features are, first of all, that it cuts the Church of England's representation down from twenty-six to sixteen, which of itself would mean many bishops never get to the Lords. Secondly, it says the sixteen haven't even got to be bishops anyway. The Archbishop's Council or some other body can decide, so maybe *no* bishops would go to the Lords. But thirdly, it takes away all prime ministerial patronage. The Second Chamber is not to be appointed by the Prime Minister. It's to be appointed by an independent Appointments Commission in part and elected by regions in part. Yet no one has thought to suggest a reform in the appointment of bishops. So if this went through as it stands, you'd have the doubly paradoxical situation that the *only* appointments the Prime Minister could make would be bishops, although the reason would be because they were going to the Lords (which is the terms of the Callaghan argument). Under Wakeham, when the Prime Minister has appointed the bishops, they may then *not* go to the Lords. It is fatuous from beginning to end. It would be very like the Church of England to say, 'Yes, of course the Prime Minister must appoint bishops because they're going to the Lords, and then if they don't go to the Lords we'd still like him to'. There's no straight logic in it anywhere.

It is my conviction that we ought ourselves to produce the Measure, to draft the legislation in Synod to free us from the State and send it to Parliament.

Now the other major feature of establishment is this control of legislation by Parliament. I've mentioned that quite a lot of Parliamentary legislation has been devolving: the Worship and Doctrine Measure and the Pastoral Measure both devolve powers, and the Synodical Government Measure controls the shape of our Synod. But we can't change it much without going back to Parliament. The Measure devolves powers to Synod and the Dioceses Measure devolves powers, but many things are not devolved. The ordination of women, and perhaps even women as bishops, can't happen

without it going through Parliament, where not only do the members of English constituencies look pretty puzzled by theological questions, but in fact the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish Members of Parliament also will vote on our future. It is a most absurd, wildly unbelievable system, and it is my conviction that we ought ourselves to produce the Measure to end all Measures, to draft the legislation in Synod to free us from the State and send it to Parliament. The problem I find is that my church friends want to wait until Tony Benn or somebody like that kicks them out, or the Liberal Democrats put it in their manifesto. Quite extraordinary. It's up to those who are colonised to take steps themselves to seek decolonisation, and I'm astonished the Church of England can't see it.

The arguments for Establishment

Now, are there any counterbalancing advantages? I talk to the Bishop of Winchester and see him in the press and he says that the things that look like privileges are really a calling to duty and service, and all our clergy are open to all the inhabitants of the land. As a matter of fact, it is Jehovah's Witnesses and people like that who are actually going to the inhabitants of the land, but apparently we've got some special opening that others have not got. I cannot see it. I believe we deceive ourselves. We have quite a lot of strengths that run on from the establishment of the past, but they are atmospheric and conventional, not legal. We have vast historic resources like buildings and quite a lot of historic resources that help provide the clergy in situations where the parishioners couldn't. We have prime sites in every major town and in the countryside up and down the land, and we have access to many, many homes because funeral directors, for instance, still deal with us. There's a lot of folk religion that means that those that give birth still want babies baptized. But none of that is secured by law. It is secured by a run-on from a past when we had a very strong say. I fear that the Anglicans will, as it were, rest upon anything rather than the actual card-vote strength of today's Christians. *That's* the real test, and you cannot prop up a church that's weak in other respects by the ramparts of law and hope to get anywhere. It's only a vigorous marching force that will really do it.

The need for separation

So what is the future of the Church and State? It seems to me that we need to be separated. We really do need to cut the connection and become a voluntary, charitable body. I don't think we would lose our historic assets in the process. Parliament in theory could take them away from us; they removed some from Wales and Ireland; but nowadays such a large part of such things as clergy pensions and the Church Commissioners themselves are now much more detached from Parliament than they were a few years ago under the National Instruments Measure. I think they'd just let us go. And many of them would be very relieved; the incredible legal tangles we've had between us and Parliament would be over, and you wouldn't have these extraordinary situations of Parliamentarians, as it were, voting thirty-one to seventeen in the middle of the night for some church legislation and occasionally even being ambushed. There have been two occasions in the last twenty years when the Commons has defeated measures from the General Synod and there have been other ones recently about the Churchwardens' Measure when the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament advised the Synod not to persist with it, saying it is 'not convenient' to go to the Commons.

'Well', my friends have said, 'But if you said you were being disestablished, it would advertise the country was receding from Christianity and we were giving up our rôle.' Do you know, I don't think anybody would notice? When the powers were given from Parliament to create the Church Assembly, or when the powers were given to create our own liturgy, were the tabloids screaming, 'Churches are going into rebellion'? No, we don't actually figure that strongly. If we ourselves made a virtue of it, that we were now going to take responsibility for our own lives before God and find our own leaders before God, and not leave it to the secular arm, it seems to me it would be very good publicity. Though I don't think, in fact, when the chips are down, that any of this ought to depend upon what 'spin' it will get in the way that politicians have to worry about what image something will create.

Do you know that we cannot currently unite with another church? I'm involved in conversations with Methodists and the United Reformed Church on behalf of the Church of England, but no uniting proposals in the last fifty years have touched the position of Church and State of the Church of England. They've only been about adjusting relationships, about making Methodists episcopalian, and about having parallel churches. No other self-respecting church would ever get into the position we're in in relation to the State, and we apparently would rather not unravel our secular relationship with the State in order to unite with them. We put the State connection above the call to Christian unity which is scriptural and revealed and is there in the Creed. The Establishment is not in the Creed. And if we had our freedom, then it seems to me we would be better placed to fulfil the rôle

which I *do* want us to fulfil. I'm not talking about a church that recedes into being a pious, inward-turning sect. We have a prophetic rôle in the nation. A church that is truly independent of the nation is in a position to address the organs of government and rebuke them and confront them. It is not half as easy if in fact you owe your jobs to them. And indeed, one of the things that I picked up when I was writing my book was that when before the War an Anglican deputation met the German Christians (who had been corrupted by Hitler) and said to them: 'You have come under the thumb of an atheist ruler, with a distorted ideology in relation to Jews', they came back and said, 'Who appointed *you*?' And they were speechless. If the South African regime had appointed archbishops in Cape Town, or Daniel Arap Moi had appointed archbishops in Kenya, in the last two or three decades, what rôle would the Church have played over against the State in those very difficult situations? Would Christians have been so very courageous, from Archbishop downwards, if they had owed their appointment to that secular arm?

Now we are going to face a lot of very severe problems in the State in future, which here I can only just outline. We have already seen the end of Sunday. I mean, we may not have seen the end of the end of Sunday, but we've certainly seen the beginning of the end of Sunday. I sometimes address congregations on Sunday saying to myself, 'I suspect you're the privileged few, all those who haven't yet got round to the shops.' The whole pattern, not only of shopping but of shiftwork and sport, really means that we have lost Sunday. Morality itself is not really on a Christian basis now in this country. Worship in schools is supposed to be mainly Christian, but there will be an exception to that when other religions are stronger. It is extraordinarily difficult to find the point at which the supposed leverage we have, in the fact that the Church of England being established means the State is somehow confessing Christ, actually has an effect. It is difficult to find the actual practical points of leverage. These things will be resolved in the future by our actual strength, as they are in the States, where the Christian voice is incredibly strong but is not built in concrete in the structures of government. There it is in the actual power that comes from the people towards the Senators or the House of Representatives or the President. We ought to be looking for our strength to be in the vigour of our thinking, the consistent discipleship of our numbers, and playing our part as Christians in local and national government. A church fronting up to all those secular authorities and looking for a way forward that is a hint of the Kingdom of God, but not pretending the State is the first part of God's revelation to us. We have this task, a prophetic task, to fulfil in relation to the State.

Questions

Pat Dean: *I am not a member of your church, but my observation has always been that it's very overdue for being disestablished, and I'm very grateful to you for giving us a historical resumé of your thinking on this matter and your suggestions for a prophetic way forward. Certainly, at times when the church to which I subscribe as a member of the Methodist Society looked towards more close links. I certainly thought we were going to get near to it. But since then the established church seems to have blocked itself back into the State in a way which is not easy for other churches as voluntary organisations to join.*

Bishop of Woolwich: Well, of course, I very much agree with you, and I think you've illustrated my point. Perhaps I could press you a fraction further, though, that the Anglican-Methodist scheme of the 1960s, of which I was an opponent, and the Covenanting scheme of the late 1970s, of which I was a supporter, and the Conversations that go on now between your church and mine, of which I am a close observer, because I'm on the Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England, and I'm actually leading the team in the informal tri-laterals, none of those has faced the State issue. The Church of England's usual answer is, 'Well, all of us are going to have to pay a cost if we're going to be united. Will the other church please pay us the cost now? We'll pay the other one later.' We will address that sort of question at Stage 2, which is not dated, and really I think is a deceit. I am trying to get my Free Church friends to ask us to face the difficult questions at the same time as they have to.

One of the difficulties is that sometimes the Free Churches are not so convinced they want the Church of England to disestablish. Some of them rather like the idea there's a kind of bulwark, and the other faiths are quite keen on the Church of England being established. They think anything that gives any kind of recognition, any kind of religion of the State, is better than secularism and atheism.

I could just wish the Methodists were univocally saying we can't talk to you until you've got women bishops, which they are graciously prepared to do in an interim way at the moment. They ought also to be saying we can't talk to you until we can find a joint way of appointing bishops.

Malcolm Harrison: *By going in the direction of having Eucharist as the central act of worship, the Church of England has in fact made itself a 'gathered' church and therefore it should drop its status as the national church. It cannot claim the church-State relationship if in fact Holy Communion is its central act.*

Bishop of Woolwich: I think there's a lot of sense in that. The whole coming of the Parish Communion from the 1940s onwards with phrases like 'Let the Church be the Church' and this sort of thing has really had this kind of double-think in it. The very people who've been trying to create a body that loves each other and shares the Peace and is grounded by a credible pattern of baptism and so on is a different thing from the whole country being Christian in some vague way. But Anglicans, being Anglicans, are capable of thinking two exclusive thoughts simultaneously. That's my problem.

Malcolm Harrison: *Yes, it's become exclusive, and therefore excluding others. The bulk of the population is being neglected by the Church by having the Parish Communion at the heart of its worship, whereas at least Morning Prayer did allow for the interest of outsiders.*

Bishop of Woolwich: Let me respond by saying it isn't that having non-sacramental services will of itself bring people in. I take your point that you say we are more open to them than, but I think the actual alienation of the nation from the Christian religion is such that not only is Communion strange, but prayers, scriptures and hymns are all very odd. I'm on your side in the sense that I don't want us to be established and I don't want us to engage in pretence.

John Swallow: *I think you've made the point, Bishop, that no principle is involved in an established church, but the present Church of England establishment bolsters a still-powerful and over-influential British establishment, and is quite unwilling to accept the multi-racial, multi-religious nature of British society. One example you quoted is of the religious education curriculum at schools, and many schools might be, indeed are, set in local societies in which Christianity is hardly visible at all. Do you agree with me that this is not only an unrealistic position, but a dangerously remote position from the society in which the Church is set?*

Bishop of Woolwich: Well, I wasn't involved in the battles over the Education Act in 1988, and obviously it was very much softer than the Act of 1944; but it did provide, I think, for a main diet of Christian worship where that was appropriate, or something like that. It wasn't in any sense an establishment question in that it was not establishment or Church of England at all. The favouring of the Christian religion in this country is not of itself strictly an establishment question, and I think a similar law would apply in Northern Ireland, for instance, where no church is established but churches are strong, and you have to take that into account. Obviously, I've seen church schools whose kids are 98% Muslim, and there's a highly paradoxical situation to run. But the Church of England is nearer to being over-tolerant than it is to being over-intolerant. Our fear when they ask for Islamic schools is that they would be very tightly clone-like and controlled in their outlook and beliefs.

John Swallow: *I would want to go further and suggest that the Church, if it is to maintain its establishment as a whole, apart from the school question, is going to become ever more remote from the society that we all belong to.*

Bishop of Woolwich: Well, the issue of remoteness is a somewhat intangible and subjective one. I minister in an area twelve miles by seven, with a million people in it, with vast high-rise flats, thousands and thousands of people from different countries in the world, cheek-by-jowl, with heavy unemployment and you would often need a microscope to find anybody who was an Anglican Christian at all. We've got an Anglican parish church with forty or forty-five ageing persons in it. So remoteness is there independently of the law, and it isn't the law that is making the remoteness, it is just our decline.

Simon Garwood: *I'm a curate in Chelmsford here. I'm going to cheat and ask you three questions. Firstly, the Church of England has a lot of schools, and if we were disestablished the State might say, you shouldn't have patronage of those schools any more, and take that away. Secondly, what do you respond to those people of other denominations and other faiths who actually value you? I*

remember a Muslim saying that he was relieved that there was an established church in this country, and would be sorry to see it go. And thirdly, what's in a name? Names are very important, as we know from the scriptures. If we are disestablished, surely we must go the way of Wales and become the Church in England and not the Church of England.

Bishop of Woolwich: Having church schools is not an establishment factor, though the strength of them arises out of the strength and concern for church schools and the Church of England in the past. Roman Catholics and even some free churches have schools, and we are seeing the first hint of Islamic schools, so they are separate issues. I must say that in South London our schools are oases of excellence in many places which are otherwise suffering and squalid. That isn't of itself a justification for particular legal provision, but it would make it much harder, I think, to say let us abolish it.

The State and the Church have reached a kind of partnership here, I think, which is true of Roman Catholics as well, which has actually been a pretty beneficial thing. We are not coercive in our handling of our own religious topics in our schools, but we give an atmosphere and a general outlook which is very often one better than the State school next door.

On your second point, if you are living in India, and you are told that England is a Christian country, then you are in for some shocks when you get here, or you get a different idea of what being Christian is. I'm not at all sure that some of the people of other faiths I talk with actually really understand this one. They know we've got money, and they may think that stems from the State. We're very often accused of being paid by the State and so on, having our buildings kept by the State, very little of which is true in terms of the present day. So I think there are some serious misunderstandings around. But basically they are looking for any sense that the State is concerned for faiths, and I think there are maybe other ways in which the position of several faiths may be protected in law, which are recognitions of the realities rather than what I believe to be the unreality of our establishment.

On the question of names, the Church of Ireland is the Church of Ireland, somewhat incredibly, the Church of Scotland is the Church of Scotland, the Church of Sweden, which is to be disestablished, is the Church of Sweden, and the Church of Uganda is the Church of Uganda. But others, the Episcopal Church, the Anglican Church, the Welsh Church are 'in' their respective countries. I guess you sort it out on the spot. It wouldn't make that much difference, though it would be faintly surprising.

Revd Canon David Knight: *How many times have you sworn the oath of allegiance? How do you justify it? And would you have a substitute for bishops and church leaders in demonstrating their patriotism?*

Bishop of Woolwich: I've sworn allegiance to Her Majesty about seven or eight times, I suppose, but I can answer the underlying question you are asking me. The State has freed the national of any other state who is in Orders from making an oath of loyalty to Her Majesty. In other words, my oath of loyalty to her is as a citizen to my sovereign, not as a churchman to my supreme governor. I think it is unnecessary, but it is not immoral, inconsistent or deceitful.

At the moment clergy and bishops, on being licensed, make a declaration of assent and an oath of canonical obedience to their bishop or, in the case of bishops, to their archbishop as well. That brings them within the structures going in the right direction, as far as I can see it. In future, of course, we might yet be employed, in which case there will be contracts of employment which presumably would set out doctrinal tests or whatever else. But a test of allegiance to Her Majesty, which my Nigerian friend doesn't have to make, doesn't tell us anything about the Church of England at all.

Brian Whitelaw: *I am a member of the British Humanist Association, therefore Humanist with a capital 'H', unlike the majority of people in the country, I think, who might be described as humanists with a small 'h'. I was very glad to come along and hear you this evening, Bishop, and I'm glad to be here because your views, as you probably know, are similar to those in the British Humanist Association. You are speaking from the point of view of the benefits to the Church that disestablishment might bring about, whereas Humanists probably see it in wider social terms. I'd like to make one observation about Humanism and morality before asking my question. A couple of weeks ago the Daily Telegraph reported that the Archbishop of Canterbury described the society as now one of atheists and warned about the loss of morality. It does irritate Humanists to be told that, because they are non-believers, they lack morality. That's my general observation about that,*

because I guess that most people in this country are pretty law-abiding and pretty moral, despite the tabloid press.

My question is about secular states, because the British Humanist Association would like to see schools become secular as well. As you know, in America and in India, the schools are secular. They might, in American schools, take the oath to the country, but there is no prayer at the beginning of each day. This does not stop the American society from being highly religious, contentiously religious, one might say. My question, therefore: looking ahead to what you think is the future of this country, do you envisage that situation coming about? As Humanists in our society, we would like to see schools being secular and not being concerned with indoctrination, and that religion is a matter for families, for churches, for mosques, for synagogues, and so on. We deplore and see as divisive the establishment of schools which cater exclusively for one particular sect or another.

Bishop of Woolwich: I obviously can't answer in one line your point about Humanists being moral, though I do think the point of origins of your morality and the testing and the sustaining of it is open to a lot of questions; but then I'm the one here to be questioned tonight and not you. On the question of schools, I think that virtually all church schools will say we do not indoctrinate, but obviously they have an atmosphere, yes, and we are very pleased when we have believers as teachers. But you do not see young children coming out of church primary schools as it were cloned into a form of religious belief. You may even, being yourself, believe that it's not actually possible because something deep-down won't take it. Who knows? What I also point out, though, is that I've actually debated with Barbara Smoker and with Brian Sedgemoor and I do not want to be heard, when I call for disestablishment, as simply having bought your agenda. We may have some points of, as it were, temporary co-belligerence to engage in, but I am not necessarily your ally!

Andrew Knowles: *Bishop Colin, sitting listening to you makes me realise that you've been involved in the councils of the Church at a very strategic level for some thirty-five years. We were talking in a group at Oak Hill College last night about the qualities of a prophet, and you fulfil so many of them: reading the signs of the times, speaking out courageously, and indeed enduring a certain amount of opposition and personal cost. You bring to your ministry a formidable intellect and energy and it's been a great privilege to follow your thoughts this evening and to share your inspiration. So thank you very much indeed.*