

# The Godly Prince and the National Church

Churchman 104/1 1990

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Those who might consider this discussion<sup>1</sup> to be somewhat outdated and to have little relevance to contemporary circumstances need only to have read *The Times* on 7 August 1989. That issue contained an extract from a recent Thomas More commemoration sermon preached at Chelsea Old Church. In it Bishop Santer, who holds a leading position in the Anglican delegation to the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (*ARCIC*) delegation spoke in praise of More's upholding of papal power. He observed that those working in the ecumenical field had necessarily to consider the authority of popes and councils. He claimed:

Whether we like it or not, we can't talk about unity without facing difficult questions about the relation of local to universal . . . about the instruments of unity, and the authority of councils and popes.

In the published extract, at least, there was no indication that Bishop Santer envisaged the need of any limitation on papal or conciliar authority. It is explicit in what he said that the civil power should not challenge any claim to ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and it is difficult to envisage what other checks and balances might exist. The only alternative limitation on ecclesiastical power would appear to be the existence of alternative religious bodies, a state of affairs which the ecumenical movement has as its ultimate object to bring to an end, so far (at least) as Christianity is concerned.

Such a check over ecclesiastical authority was recently exercised by the House of Commons in rejecting the recent Measure relating to the Ordination of divorced persons, an action deemed inappropriate by many ecclesiastics.

Very different views from those widely held today were expressed in the forty-two Articles of Religion promulgated in 1553 under Edward VI. The equivalent of what is now Article Thirty-seven read:

1. The King of England is supreme head in earth, under Christ, of the Church of England and Ireland. [This is more fully expressed in the first two paragraphs of Article Thirty-seven of the current Articles.]
2. The Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this realm of England.
3. The civil magistrate is ordained and allowed of God: wherefore we must obey him, not only for fear of punishment, but also for conscience sake. [This has no counterpart in Article Thirty-seven and should have been retained, particularly because it draws the connexion between obedience and conscience]

Paragraphs 4 and 5 deal with capital punishment and war:

4. The civil laws may punish Christian men with death for heinous and grievous offences.
5. It is lawful for Christians, at the commandment of the magistrate, to wear weapons and to serve in lawful wars.

4. and 5. are reproduced in Article Thirty-seven: note 'lawful' wars: lawfulness may relate to objects and motives and methods, and capacity to assume belligerent status.<sup>2</sup>

The comment of the *Tutorial Prayer Book*<sup>3</sup> on Article Thirty-seven lists the errors condemned as:

- i. The Roman theory of the supremacy of the Pope
- ii. The Erastian theory.

Erastianism is often used to refer to any system in which the Civil Power has some authority in ecclesiastical matters. This is inconsistent with the origin of the term. The issue raised by Erastus, a German Zwinglian (1524-1583), was not whether the civil power should exercise some oversight in ecclesiastical matters. He asserted a different proposition namely that excommunication was unscriptural and that the punishment of sin was solely a matter for the civil power and temporal penalties. He is also incidentally known for having rejected astrology and the transmutation of metals. It could be said that many churches, both established and free, are now Erastian in that church discipline is no longer practised.

### **The Concept of a National Church**

The first paragraph of King Edward's Article refers to 'the Church of England', and to the Bishop of Rome having no jurisdiction in this realm of England.

God does not deal with people solely as individuals, God's way is covenantal. He also therefore deals with people in various groups, although a righteous person, like Rahab, is not abandoned to the fate of the unrighteous community to which she belongs. The soul that sinneth, it shall die (Ezek. 18:4, 20), but God would spare the city [Sodom] for a small number of righteous men in it (Genesis 18:32).

Commenting on Jonah 3: 6-8, on the national character of Nineveh's repentance, Hugh Martin<sup>4</sup> asks:

' . . . how can religious obligations be upon the separate individuals of a nation, and yet the nation as a whole be exempted from it? It is certain that nations as a whole may please or provoke God: just as a family may do; just as an individual may do.

The prime example is the nation of Israel under the Old Testament. While Old Testament Israel is unique, in the Old Testament God does make it clear that he deals with nations and families ('houses'). He dealt with nations as such other than Israel: see Isaiah 13 (Babylon) and 16-19 (Moab, Syria, Ethiopia and Egypt) and 23 (Tyre). In Amos chapters 1 and 2 judgement is pronounced on several nations. In Jonah 3:7, 8 and 4:11, God's care is shown to extend to the animals in a nation as well as the people. God may deal with a ship's company as a whole, as the fellow passengers of Jonah (Jonah 1:17, 25) and Paul (Acts 27:24) discovered, and as the Prayer Book prayers for use at sea (dating from the Restoration: they are not Cranmer's) recognize.

The practice of infant baptism, sanctioned by the Articles, is associated with this notion. Although it is alien to modern Western notions, in tribal areas of Thailand the phenomenon occurs of whole villages turning from animism to Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

### **National Church recognized**

So the Article referred to the Church of England and indeed the Church of Ireland. The general concept of a national church receives recognition: Article Thirty-four states:

‘It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one and utterly alike; for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, [the word ‘times’ was added in 1563] and men’s manners, so that [provided that] nothing be ordained against God’s Word.’

The paragraph beginning ‘Every particular or national Church’ was added in 1563.

In the *Tutorial Prayer Book*<sup>6</sup> the editors state:

The principle of independence runs through every age of the English Church, and that without any desire to separate from the body of Christ. The Celtic Church was not more keenly resentful of the attempts by Augustine to introduce Roman customs as law, than was William the Conqueror chary of admitting the growing claims of the Papacy; the Saxon Church was as really opposed to the policy of Wilfrid, as any Norman or Plantagenet monarch to the ecclesiasticism of an Anselm or a Becket. The succession of Statutes in the fourteenth century, restraining the Papal hand in English affairs was but the concise and concrete expression of a feeling which animated all classes of Englishmen who were not identifying their own advancement with Papal aggression. The mean selfishness of a John or the political exigencies of a Henry IV, might postpone the final repudiation of the Pope’s claim to domination, but could not finally overcome a purpose which Wyclif had openly shown to be right and proper, and which the instinct of the nation ever held firm. When the breach at last came, whatever the immediate cause might happen to be, even if it were the matrimonial troubles of one man, the real cause was the indefeasible right of England to govern itself in matters of religion as well as of State. The Prayer Book is, therefore, the nation’s assertion of its own right to regulate its public worship.

### **Why national church**

Assuming that there is to be some association between congregations, something other than independency, why should it be national?

We may start from the position, agreed by the Reformed and Eastern Churches, that there is no individual or body of persons constituted as the head of the universal church. (I shall return to the concept of head of the church later.) The reformers rejected papal supremacy (what the A.R.C.I.C. Report calls Universal Primacy) and while believing in general councils (see Article Twenty-one) did not see them as a collective papacy or envisage that they would be a permanent standing body. It may be noted, however, as documented by Philip Edgcumbe Hughes (sometime editor of this journal) in his *Theology of the English Reformers*<sup>7</sup> that Cranmer proposed to Calvin the convening of a godly synod to consolidate the work of the Reformation, Calvin replied ‘I shall not shrink from crossing ten seas, if need be, for that object.’ Sadly this hope was never fulfilled.

The Reformers did not envisage the existence of denominations: they rejected the legitimacy of denominational divisions in their encounter with and their response to the phenomenon with the Anabaptists. See *A Warning against the Anabaptists* by John Knox<sup>8</sup>.

It may be noted that even the Church of Rome has national groupings, for example a hierarchy for England and another for Scotland and the various independent churches have national associations, for example the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches. Of the contemporary Anglican scene, one may ask how does this fit in with the concept of the Anglican Communion. If the Articles are correct in teaching of a national church and that forms of worship and ministry may legitimately vary from one nation to another, surely the counterpart of the Church of England in Scotland is the Church of Scotland, not the Episcopal Church? Again historically there are national churches in Europe, Lutheran churches in Scandinavia, the French Reformed Church and the Waldensian Church in Italy. Is there any justification in this context for the existence of the Anglican 'Diocese of Europe?'

In his talk to which reference has been made above, Bishop Santer refers to the significance of the European Economic Community in these words:

But as European institutions and identity develop and grow, and as the sense of belonging to Europe reasserts itself, there is a real danger that the Church of England may find itself the focus for all sorts of nostalgia about national identity and sovereignty which will no longer correspond with the social and political facts . . . As far as Europe is concerned, the Roman Catholic Church is the only Church with transnational structures in place, to equip it to respond to the new and re-emerging Europe.

### **The Authority of the Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Affairs**

*The Tutorial Prayer Book*<sup>9</sup>, states:

'The Church of Rome was and is a free Church, i.e. it makes its own rules, commonly known as the canon law, and with these rules no State or country interferes unless they clash with the temporal laws of the particular country. England was no exception to this. Up to the breach with Rome, the State never interfered with matters purely spiritual.

### **Contemporary Application**

When the House of Commons rejected the recent Clergy (Ordination) Measure proposing to permit the ordination of divorcees after remarriage, [sadly, since reversed: Ed.] it was suggested that this was a matter for the Church alone, Lord Hailsham, no doubt reflecting the views of many, contended in a radio interview, that the Church alone is capable of deciding whether a man has a vocation to the priesthood. This of course begs the question: who exercises the church's authority to decide, the General Synod, the Archbishops, the Bishops or the selectors of the Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry? In similar vein, the Bishop of Oxford has recently expressed his view that the selection of bishops should be in the hands of the Church. Thinking of this kind implies a contrast between the Church, meaning some ecclesiastical body or office bearer, and a body which is not the church. That is the distinction which is commonly perceived to be fundamental. This is not or at least should not be the basic distinction.

In practice the alternative to the magistrate having power is a hierarchical system, where an individual or body of persons exercise oversight, or a system of independency where every congregation does that which is right in its, or its leaders' or minister's, own eyes. If there is

to be such oversight, what check is there to be? The A.R.C.I.C. reports leave us in no doubt as to who is to be the 'Universal Primate.'

Talk is sometimes heard of taking back usurped power from Parliament. Such an analysis would surely be correct only if the hierarchy and the church are rightly identified, in other words if the hierarchy can properly be regarded as the embodiment of the church.

Only a small body in the church will in fact participate in ecclesiastical politics and it may be noted that elections to the House of Laity of the General Synod of the Church of England are indirect. The basic contrast, the life and words of Cranmer and the other Reformers and in particular the words of the Articles remind us is not between secular and ecclesiastical authorities but between the word of God and what is made by man. This in my opinion is the key to the whole question of church authority. Where an ecclesiastical body makes a decision which is not substantiated by scripture, it speaks the word of man and not of God: certainly not more, but equally not less than if a secular body did the same.

That a body is of professing Christians who are ordained makes no difference. Whether we are considering the Bishop of Rome, a General Council, the General Synod, the World Council of Churches, the Board of Social Responsibility, the Methodist Conference or whatever, or all these bodies in unison, the above point holds good.

What is now numbered as Article Twenty-one 'Of the Authority of General Councils' (1553 wording):

And when they be gathered together (forasmuch as they be an assembly of men, whereof all be not governed with the Spirit and the Word of God) they may err, and sometimes have erred, not only in wordly matters but also even in things pertaining unto God. Wherefore things ordained by them as necessary for salvation have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be declared that they be taken out of holy Scripture.

Article Twenty-six begins: 'Although in the visible Church the evil be ever mingled with the good, and sometimes the evil have chief authority in the Ministration of the Word and Sacraments . . .' In other words we must accept that churches are not composed exclusively of regenerate men and in particular we deny that they are infallible, or, to use the favourite ecumenical term, indefectible.

### **Head of the Church**

The assumption by Henry VIII of the title Head of the Church of England is notorious. It must be asked what is meant by this. Are we to understand a sort of secular Archbishop? Perhaps this understanding of the term itself betrays a misconceived and hierarchical view of church office.

In a most interesting article in the *Churchman*<sup>10</sup> entitled 'Lambeth and Reunion' David Broughton Knox discusses what authority can legitimately be exercised outside the local congregation. He suggests teaching, encouragement and exhortation.

In Part Three of the Homily on Obedience, this comment is made on 1 Peter 2 'The King as Supreme':

St. Peter doth not say, Submit yourselves unto me as Supreme Head of the Church; neither saith he, Submit yourselves from time to time to my successors at Rome: but he saith, Submit yourselves unto your King, your Supreme Head and unto those that he appointeth in authority.<sup>11</sup>

An illustration of what Cranmer understood by headship appears from his interrogation before the Commissioners under Queen Mary.<sup>12</sup>

He was asked by Martin: 'Who say you then is supreme head?'

Cranmer: 'Christ.'

Martin: 'But whom hath Christ left here in earth his vicar and head of his church?'

Cranmer: 'Nobody.'

Martin: 'Ah! why told you not King Henry this when you made him supreme head? And now nobody is. This is treason against his own person, as you then made him.'

Cranmer: 'I mean not but every king in his own realm and dominion, is supreme head, and so was he supreme head of the church of Christ in England.'

Martin: 'Is this always true? and was it ever so in Christ's church?'

Cranmer: 'It was so.'

Martin: 'Then what say you by Nero? He was the mightiest prince of the earth after Christ was ascended. Was he head of Christ's church?'

Cranmer: 'Nero was Peter's head.'

Martin: 'I ask whether Nero was head of the church or no? If he were not, then it is false that you said before, that all princes be, and ever were, heads of the church within their realms.'

Cranmer: 'Nay, it is true, for Nero was head of the church, that is, in worldly respect of the temporal bodies of men, of who the church consisteth; for so he beheaded Peter and the apostles. And the Turk [meaning the Turkish Sultan] too is the head of the church in Turkey.'

Martin: 'Then he that beheaded the heads of the church, and crucified the apostles, was head of Christ's church; and he that was never member of the church is head of the church, by your new found understanding of God's word.'

It may be noted that the exemption from the authority of the civil power sought by the mediaeval church was for both persons and property, the latter giving rise to the concept of sanctuary.

### **Constitutional Factors**

It may be asked how as a matter of history the King became able to make good his claim to supremacy? In the *Law of the Constitution*<sup>13</sup> Dicey, a nineteenth century writer on the British Constitution, added a footnote to his chapter on the status of the Army:

The original difficulty, again, of putting the clergy on the same footing as laymen, was at least as great as that of establishing the supremacy of the civil power on all matters regarding the army. Each of these difficulties was met at an earlier date and has been overcome with more

completeness in England than in some other countries. We may plausibly conjecture that this triumph of law was due to the acknowledged supremacy of the King in Parliament, which itself was due to the mode in which the King, acting together with the two Houses, manifestly represented the nation, and therefore was able to wield the whole moral authority of the state.

### **The Authority and Functions of the Civil Power in Cranmer's Thought**

In 1533, according to Foxe<sup>14</sup>, matters were such that the Emperor and the German princes desired a general council, but were blocked by Rome. Cranmer's solution, which he expressed in about May of that year, to this *impasse* was that each ruler was entitled to reform the church within his own borders. He observed that the ancient church had condemned heresies and reformed abuses by means of a council representing the whole of the Roman world. Now Europe was divided into Kingdoms the same course should be taken within each of those kingdoms.

Between July and October 1533, Henry sought the opinion of the English bishops regarding councils. Cranmer held that the emperor had in past times had power to convene general councils on account of the universality of his jurisdiction. The emperor had been replaced by particular kings and princes. Canons of councils required the sanction of the ruler.<sup>15</sup> It was beyond their powers to adjudicate on the rights of princes. England was an empire of itself, by which he meant a sovereign entity, just as the Roman Empire had been. Cranmer added that the scripture should be the test of men's traditions and he pointed out to Henry that if papal authority were no longer to be recognized it was absurd to retain opinions or practices whose only foundation was in papal decrees.

### ***The Articles of Religion***

Cranmer's thought obtained expression in the Articles. The Article may be compared also with the present Article Twenty-one: 'General Councils may not be gathered together without the commandment and will of princes.'

Article Twenty-three makes a calling necessary for the exercise of ministry in the church but does not specify any particular mode of ordination as necessary to its validity.

Article Thirty-four (altered from 1553): Whoever breaks traditions

which be not repugnant to the Word of God and be ordained and approved by common authority . . . ought to be rebuked . . . as he that offendeth against the common order of the Church and hurteth the authority of the Magistrate . . .

### ***The Homilies***

Article Thirty-five approves the contents of the Homilies. We must be grateful that the Homilies have recently been reprinted.<sup>16</sup>

The first Book of Homilies is largely by Cranmer, the second by Jewel. The Homily number ten: 'Of Obedience' deals with the subject of civil authority comprehensively. Part One opens by referring to God's order in Creation, where we have angels and archangels; sky, clouds, birds, and heavenly bodies; vegetable and animal life; seasons; night and day; fish, waters and seas. So in human realm there are Kings and subjects; Priests and laymen; masters and servants; fathers and children; husbands and wives; rich and poor.

Especially the homily refers to the benefits of order and relates the subject to divine providence. ‘Through Me Kings reign,’ we learn from Proverbs 8.

The Homily asserts that Kings derive power immediately from God, not through the Pope. Private vengeance is forbidden (Deuteronomy 32). The duty to obey is a matter of conscience: Romans 13, and disobedience may incur the penalty of damnation. The Homily points out that there are inferior as well as superior officers, reminding us of the adage that the divine right of the King is the divine right of the constable.

Part Two of this Homily begins with a recapitulation. The duty of obedience is reiterated. Rulers are appointed by God and Magistrates are to learn to govern according to God’s laws. The Homily teaches that it is not lawful to resist wicked rulers, giving the example of Christ and the apostles. Peter, it says, counselled submission to evil masters (1 Peter 2). David would not destroy Saul when he had the opportunity, 1 Samuel 24, even when that opportunity appeared to Abigail to have been given by God. Similarly the Amalekite expecting a reward for killing Saul was punished by David: 2 Samuel 1.15.

Rulers are not to be obeyed if they command things contrary to God’s commandments: Acts 5. The next homily in the book, sermon eleven ‘Against Adultery Whoredom and Uncleanness’ approves of John the Baptist rebuking Herod.

Examples are given of punishment recorded in scripture for rebellion: Korah, Dathan and Abiram, Miriam and Absalom. In part three of this Homily it is observed that treason is liable to be discovered: Eccles. 6: 10. Obedience to the Bishop of Rome is not required because his power is usurped. The example is given of the Virgin Mary who submitted to the Emperor’s commandment to go to Bethlehem, a difficult journey, although she was one favoured by God, and in an advanced stage of pregnancy.

There is a helpful discussion of the duty to pray for rulers: 1 Tim. 2. That duty includes thankfulness for the institution of government, prayer for God’s favour and protection upon rulers, for them to be mindful of God (expressed as having God before their eyes), and prayer that they will follow the example of David, Hezekiah, Josiah and Moses.

### ***The Book of Common Prayer***

*The Tutorial Prayer Book* describes the *Book of Common Prayer* as ‘that product of England’s freedom from any but God’s authority.’

The basic principles of the Prayer Book are to be found set out in the Preface: ‘Of Ceremonies: why some are Abolished and Some Retained.’ There it is said:

Let all things be done among you, saith St. Paul, in a seemly and due order, the appointment of which pertaineth not to private men. Therefore no one ought to take in hand, nor presume to appoint or alter any public and common order in Christ’s church, except he be lawfully called and authorised thereto.

Later we read:

And in our doings we condemn not other nations . . . for we think that every country should use such ceremonies as they think best.

## **The Litany**

This work of Cranmer's compilation gives expression to Cranmer's view on government. It includes the petition:

That it may please thee to rule his heart in thy faith, fear and love, and that he may evermore have affiance with thee, and ever seek thy honour and glory.

The preceding petition in our books, however, was inserted in 1558 and so is not by Cranmer. Later on we pray: 'That it may please thee to bless and keep the magistrates, giving them grace to execute justice and to maintain truth': for Cranmer truth was not a secular quality.

Certain prayers for particular occasions, 'In time of War' [the words 'and Tumults' were added in 1662], 'In the Time of Dearth and Famine', 'For Fair Weather' and 'In the time of any common Plague or Sickness' reflect a conviction that the righteousness exalts a nation and brings blessings and that sin brings adversity.

## **The Communion Office**

Similarly in the prayer in the First Collect for the Queen, dating from 1549, we read the petition '. . . that she (knowing whose minister she is) may, above all things, seek thy honour and glory.'

The Second Collect for the Queen reads:

We are taught by thy holy Word, that the hearts of Kings are in thy rule and governance, and that thou dost dispose and turn them as it seemeth best to thy godly wisdom. We humbly beseech thee so to dispose and govern the heart of thy servant Elizabeth, thy Servant . . .

*The Tutorial Prayer Book* observes<sup>17</sup>:

The changes in regard to the authority exercised by kings seem to call for some recognition in the Book of Common Prayer which still retains the language suitable to the time of Absolute Monarchy. However, these Collects are more free from such unsuitable phrases than some others, though the second is markedly preferable to the first, as not presuming the King to be God's chosen servant (which reads queerly of a Charles II or James II) and as praying more definitely for grace for the King to fulfil his high office, instead of, as in the former of the two, for grace for his subjects to obey him. Yet the circumstances of 1548, under a boy king, may well have made the latter a more pressing need than the former. As Bishop Douden pointed out, the successive changes in political life call for suitable petitions, and rebuke that strange spirit of worship of the antique which opposes such improvements on the ground that the present forms are old.

In the prayer for the Church Militant it may be noted that, the petition for the Queen is that 'under her we may be *godly*' as well as '*quietly* governed,' and the prayer for those in authority under her is that: 'they may truly and indifferently, [that is, impartially] minister justice, to the punishment of wickedness and vice [not merely crime] and the maintenance of *thy true religion*' [as well as 'virtue'].

## **Illustrations from Cranmer's Life**

It is interesting to follow Cranmer's career. At the outset he only accepted the appointment of Archbishop because it was the King's will<sup>18</sup>.

When consecrated Archbishop, Cranmer added a rider to his oath of obedience to the Papacy, stating that he did not undertake anything that infringed his duty to God, his king or his country. His protest was:

That he did not admit the pope's authority any further than it agreed with the express word of God, and that it might be lawful for him at all times to speak against him and to impugn his errors, when there should be occasion.

Cranmer's view on what is called Henry's first divorce, strictly an annulment, was founded on the correct principle that the bishop of Rome had no authority to dispense with the word of God. The issue was not far removed from that which animated the Reformation in Germany, that of indulgences.

When the *Six Articles* were passed, which affirmed a number of traditional unreformed doctrines and required adherence to them on pain of death, Cranmer declined the King's request to absent himself from the debates. Henry was at the time displeased with the Reforming Bishops, Cranmer and the bishops 'of the new learning.' This was because they did not want Parliament to appropriate all of the monastic lands to the King, but thought that part should be devoted to hospitals and schools. The opponents of reformation seized on this to discredit the reforming bishops in Henry's eyes. This sheds interesting light on attempts made to identify the Reformation with the misapplication of monastic property. Cranmer argued against them over three days (presumably in the House of Lords)<sup>19</sup>, and Henry asked for a copy of his arguments, which were unfortunately no longer extant by the time of Foxe.

Cranmer himself claimed, in his answer in 1549 to the rebels of Devon, 'that if the King's majesty had not come himself to the Parliament House, those laws had never been passed.' He also maintained that Henry himself relaxed the law after a year.

An insight into Henry's method of decision-making on religious issues is given in a letter written by Cranmer, probably in about 1537<sup>20</sup>. Cranmer understands that where Henry was unable to consider a question personally, his method was to show a new treatise to a courtier to peruse, and give Henry his opinion on the contents. Henry would then give the same book to a courtier of the opposite opinion, and repeat the process with him. At length, Henry would give his own opinion on the points raised.

Cranmer's adherence to rulers was not slavish: he wrote earnestly to the King in favour of Cromwell when he had fallen from the King's favour. Similarly he interceded for Anne Boleyn, although he pronounced her marriage invalid on account of a pre-contract in accordance with her own admission. Of course if the marriage was void the charge of treason against her was not properly maintainable. When Anne Boleyn was committed to custody, Cranmer was ordered to confine himself to Lambeth.

Equally significantly he urged to the Council that More and Fisher should be excused subscribing the Oath of Supremacy, which they refused to do, in spite of Cranmer's entreaties to More. Cranmer urged that it should suffice for them to subscribe the Act of Succession. Henry would not agree to this. It is sometimes asked whether Cranmer should have dissociated himself more from the acts of monarchs. In reply to this a recent issue of *The Reformer*<sup>21</sup> quotes Professor Arthur Pollard who says of Cranmer:

the constitutional view of his age offered a justification that cannot be pleaded today by private persons. Voluntary resignation of an office on the ground that the holder's conscience could not put up with its duties was then a thing unknown. Men believed with a fervour never since equalled that next to the service of God they were created to serve the State, while the claims of individual conscience were as dust in the balance. Unless the king desired to relieve a minister of office, that minister was bound to retain it; he had little voice in the matter himself.

Giving full weight to those considerations, the value of the Reformers lies in those points wherein their views were timeless, universally valid and not a reiteration of the opinions of their age. When, as under Queen Mary and as was repeated in the experience of the Covenanters in Scotland in the next century, the state became the hangman of the church, abuse of the State's authority was also shown to require curtailment.

The balance was well expressed by Bishop Ryle in his *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*<sup>22</sup> on the text 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's' on Mt. 22:15:

The *civil* power, on the one side, has often encroached terribly on the rights of conscience, as the English Puritains found to their cost in the unhappy times of the Stuarts: the *spiritual* power, on the other hand, has often pushed its claims to an extravagant extent so as to take Caesar's sceptre out of his hands, as it did when the Church of Rome trampled on our own English King John.

On the corresponding passage in Luke's gospel Ryle adds (Luke 20:25):

So long as we have liberty to worship God in Christ according to our conscience, and to serve Him in the way of His commandments, we may safely submit to many of the requirements of the State, which in our private opinion we do not thoroughly approve . . . If every subject is to be excused paying the tax to which he feels an objection, common sense tells us that all government must soon come to a standstill. One will object to one tax, and another to another, until the whole state is thrown into confusion.

### **Edward: the Godly Prince**

When Edward succeeded to the throne, Cranmer sought a new commission from him. He was described in official documents as 'The Commissary of our dread sovereign lord King Edward.'

He preached at Edward's coronation when he referred to Edward as a successor to Josiah, who should see to it that God was truly worshipped and idolatry destroyed. Cranmer disclaimed any power to declare him deposed if he misgoverned, but reminded him how God both blessed and judged the Jewish Kings of old. He told him that this ancestors had acted unlawfully and in breach of the Coronation Oath in resigning their crowns to the bishop of Rome. Under Edward the work of reformation flourished.

Cranmer persuaded a reluctant Edward to sign the death warrant for heresy of Joan of Kent, for her denial of the incarnation. He said to Edward that:

'subversions of the apostles' creed were impieties against the Almighty, which the Prince, as God's substitute, ought to extirpate, in the same manner as the King's servants were bound to punish offences against the King's person.

Edward insisted that if the execution took place, Cranmer's conscience must bear the responsibility. This execution took place under a pre-reformation statute (2 Henry IV c.15).

The story that the King's hand had to be guided by Cranmer's as he signed the warrant is unhistorical.

Shortly before Edward's death, an instrument was prepared purporting to make Jane Grey Edward's successor. Jane was the next person in line of succession to the Crown supposing Mary and Elizabeth to be illegitimate, and it was hardly felt politic to exclude Mary without excluding Elizabeth. Cranmer initially refused to subscribe it, citing his oath of obedience to Henry, although he must have known that the accession of Mary would mean the loss of his own life and the cause which he held so dear.

He relented only at the bidding of the dying Edward, who said 'that he hoped he himself would not stand out and be more repugnant to his will, than all the rest of the council were,': a dilemma to which any theory of absolute monarchy or legitimism can provide no solution. In the Evangelical Library's Annual Lecture for 1988<sup>23</sup>, the Revd. Roger Beckwith observed that it was implicit in the Reformation Settlement that the monarch must be a Protestant. A person could not at the same time be supreme Governor and recognize Papal Supremacy over himself. The law of 1689 securing the Protestant Succession therefore gave explicit enactment to what was inherent in the concept of Royal Supremacy.

### **Cranmer's attitude to Queen Mary**

It has been said that Queen Mary owed to Cranmer's intercession her life, as she had incurred the wrath of Henry for defying his will.

Although it may have been possible for him to escape after her accession, he said<sup>24</sup>

If we are persecuted in one city, we are authorised to flee into another. But I am the only person who cannot do it with decency. I have had the principal hand in all the changes of the last reign, and I cannot without great impropriety avoid appearing in their defence.

His conviction for treason in supporting Jane Grey was a severe blow to him; he was willing to suffer death for his faith, but not as a wrongdoer. He eventually received a pardon. He was falsely rumoured to have celebrated mass at Canterbury. He publicly denied the rumour, no doubt at the cost of increasing the risks which he already ran; the celebration had been by a clergyman without his authority.

Consistently with the views expressed by him in previous reigns, he acknowledged the authority over him of Queen Mary. After her coronation he pointed out in a letter to her the difficulty of reconciling her oath of obedience to the Pope and her other oath to maintain the laws and customs of the realm.

When facing his inquisitors, he did obeisance to the commissioners of Queen Mary but none to those of Rome. He expressed pain that the Queen did not feel confident of obtaining justice against one of her own subjects from her own officers so that she felt obliged to have recourse to those of the Pope. In his last speech before his death he counselled as follows:

Next unto God you obey your King and Queen willingly and gladly without murmuring or grumbling: not for fear of them only but much more for the fear of God: knowing that they be God's ministers, appointed by God to rule and govern you: and therefore whosoever resisteth them, resisteth the ordinance of God.

## **Church and State Generally**

This subject was very helpfully considered in the address of Mr. Hugh Craig to the Church Society Spring Conference of 1988 on 'The Word and Discipline in the Church'.<sup>25</sup> Discipline in the Church, a Church which he reminds us is a predominantly lay church. Not to recognize civil rulers as God's agents and to value vocations outside the Christian ministry was in the speaker's view tantamount to depicting God as a clergyman.

## **The Reformed tradition**

It is important to realize that Cranmer's position is not exclusively English or Anglican, but is in harmony with the general reformed tradition. It is the view that favours complete ecclesiastical autonomy that has broken with that tradition.

This was well illustrated when the early Puritans whose attempts to undertake further church reformation were made through Parliament. They were blocked by Queen Elizabeth, who wished to confine decisions on such matters to herself and Convocation.

## **Calvin's *Institutes***

These recognise as the first duty the promotion of the true religion:<sup>26</sup>

That it [the authority of the Magistrate] extends to both tables of the law [the first referring to duty to God and the second to duty to man], did scripture not teach, we might learn from profane writers . . . Thus all have confessed that no polity can be successfully established unless piety be its first care, and those laws are absurd which disregard the rights of God, and consult only for men. Seeing then that among philosophers religion holds the first place, and that the same thing has always been observed with the universal consent of nations, Christian princes may be ashamed of their heartlessness if they make it not their care . . . Hence in Scripture holy kings are especially praised for restoring the worship of God when corrupted or overthrown, or for taking care that religion flourished under them in purity and safety.

Calvin rebukes the 'folly' of those who act:

as if God had appointed rulers in his own name to decide earthly controversies, and omitted what was of far greater moment, his own pure worship as prescribed by his law.<sup>27</sup>

## **History**

Charles Hodge, who favoured the separation of church and state, considered the history in Chapter VII (Relation of the Church and State) of his book *The Church and its Polity* written in 1879.<sup>28</sup> He complains that 'the actual relation between Church and State is determined historically, i.e., by the course of events, and then a theory invented to explain and justify it.' One may ask why this should be applicable to a theory of union of church and state more than one of separation, which as an American Hodge had before his eyes. Hodge informs us that after the Emperor Constantine professed Christianity, he said: 'God has made you the bishops of the internal affairs of the Church, and me the bishop of its external affairs.'

Hodge explained how this operated in practice: The church chose her officers, regulated all matters of doctrine and administered the word and sacraments, ordered public worship and maintained discipline. The state provided for the support of clergy, determined the sources and the amount of their incomes, fixed the limits of parishes and dioceses, provided places of worship, called together the clergy, presided over their meetings and gave the force of law to their decisions and ensured that external obedience was rendered to the decrees and acts of discipline. Hodge pointed out that the papal church sought exemption for ecclesiastical

persons from any civil jurisdiction. As the decisions of the church were supposed to be infallible, they did not require the sanction of the civil authority, while the church could pronounce judgment on the secular authority and its acts. If the sovereign failed to submit, the ecclesiastical authority could depose him.

The historic position of the Reformed Churches of Europe was summarized by Turretin,<sup>29</sup> taken from Hodge,

- (a) The magistrate cannot introduce new articles of faith or new rites or modes of worship.
- (b) He cannot administer the Word and Sacraments.
- (c) He does not possess the power of the keys.
- (d) He cannot prescribe to pastors the form of preaching or administration of the sacraments.
- (e) He cannot decide on ecclesiastical affairs or on controversies of faith without consulting the pastors.

On the other hand:

- (a) He ought to establish the true religion, and when established, faithfully to uphold it, and if corrupted, restore and reform it.
- (b) He should, to the utmost, protect the Church by restraining heretics and disturbers of its peace, by propagating and defending the true religion, and hindering the confession of false religions.
- (c) Provide proper ministers and sustain them in the administration of the word and sacraments, according to the Word of God, and found schools as well for the Church as for the State.
- (d) See that ministers do their duty faithfully according to the canons of the church and the laws of the land.
- (e) Cause that confessions of faith and ecclesiastical constitutions, agreeable to the Scriptures, be sanctioned, and when sanctioned, adhered to.
- (f) To call ordinary and extraordinary synods, to moderate in them, and to sanction their decisions with his authority.

### *The Westminster Confession*

The relation between Church and State was systematically defined in the *Westminster Confession*<sup>30</sup> as follows:

#### Chapter 23: Of the Civil Magistrate

III. The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven (2 Chron. 26:18; Mt. 18:18; 16:19; 1 Cor. 12:28, 29; Eph. 4: 11.12; 1 Cor. 4: 1,2; Rom. 10: 15; Heb. 5: 4) yet he hath authority and it is his duty, to take order that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered and observed (Is. 49:23; Ps. 122:9; Ezra 7:23-28; Lev. 24:16; Dt. 13: 5, 6, 12; 2 Kings 18:4; 1 Chron. 13:1-9, 2 Kings 24: 1-26; 2 Chron. 34: 33; 2 Chron. 15: 12, 13) For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.

## Chapter 31: Of Synods

III. As magistrates may lawfully call a synod of ministers, and other fit persons, to consult and advise with, about matters of religion (Is. 49:23; 1 Tim. 2: 1-2; 2 Chron. 19:8 to end; 2 Chron. 29 and 30; Mt. 2: 4-5; Prov. 11: 14); so, if magistrates be open enemies to the church, the ministers of Christ, of themselves, by virtue of their office, or they, with other fit persons upon delegation from their Churches, may meet together in such assemblies (Acts 15: 2, 4, 22-25).

V. Synods and councils are to handle and conclude nothing, but that which is ecclesiastical, and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition in cases extraordinary; or by way of advice, for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate (Lk. 12: 13, 14; Jn. 18:36).

The passages in the *Westminster Confession* inconsistent with the separation of Church and State were deleted in 1786 from the Confession in use in the American Presbyterian Church, according to A.A. Hodge.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Cambridge Platform**

It may occasion more surprise to learn that this was also the primitive position of Congregational or Independent Churches in New England, as is shown by the 'Cambridge Platform', a Confession<sup>32</sup> adopted in 1648 by the General Court, or legislature, of Massachusetts for the Congregational Churches, of that territory. Chapter 11, paragraph 4, provides that if in spite of exhortations and church censures, church members fail to maintain the ministry:

the magistrate is to see that the ministry is duly provided for, as appears from the commended example of Nehemiah (Neh. 13:11). The magistrates are nursing fathers, and nursing mothers and stand charged with the custody of both tables (Is. 49:23).

Chapter 16 provides that magistrates may summon synods, but churches may do so even where civil magistrates are their enemies.

Chapter 17 is headed: 'Of the Civil Magistrate's Power in Matters Ecclesiastical'.

Paragraph 4 begins:

It is not within the power of the magistrates to compel their subjects to become church members, and to partake of the Lord's table: for the priests are rebuked that brought unworthy ones into the sanctuary . . .

6. It is the duty of the magistrate to take care of matters of religion, and to improve his civil authority for the observing of the duties commanded in the first, as well as the second table. They are called gods (Ps. 82:1) The end of the magistrate's office, is not only the quiet and peaceable life . . . but also godliness . . . Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah are much commended by the authority of the Holy Ghost for putting forth their authority in matters of religion . . . and not only the Kings of Judah, but also Job, Nehemiah, the King of Nineveh, Darius, Artaxerxes, Nebuchadnezzar whom none looked at as types of Christ . . . are commended in the book of God for exercising their authority in this way (I Kings 15: 14; 22:43; 2 Kings 12:3; 14:4; 15:35; 1 Kings 20:42; Job 29:25; 31:26, 28; Neh. 13; Jon. 3:7; Dan. 3:29).

7. The object of the powers of the magistrate are not things merely inward, and so not subject to his cognizance and view, as unbelief, hardness of heart, erroneous opinions not vented; but only

such things as are acted upon by the outward man; neither is their power to be executed in commanding such acts of the outward man as are mere inventions and devices of man (1 Kings 20:28, 42); but about such acts as are commanded and forbidden in the Word; yea such as the Word doth clearly determine. . .

8. Idolatry, blasphemy, heresy, venting corrupt and pernicious opinions that destroy the foundation, open contempt of the Word preached, profanation of the Lord's day, disturbing the peaceable administration and exercise of the worship and holy things of God, and the like, are to be restrained and punished by civil authority [Dt. 13; 1 Kings 20:28, 42; Dan. 3:29; Zech. 13:3; Neh. 13:21; 1 Tim. 2:2; Rom. 13:4].

9. If any church, one or more, shall grow schismatical rending itself from the communion of other churches, or shall walk incorrigibly or obstinately in any corrupt way of their own, contrary to the rule of the Word; in such case the magistrate is to put forth his coercive power as the matter shall require. The tribes on this side Jordan intended to make war against the other tribes, for building an altar of witness, whom they suspected of having turned away therein from following of the Lord (Josh. 22).

In an article entitled 'The State and the Apostate' in the *Evangelical Times* for June 1989, Paul Helm argues, as a non-conformist, in favour of church establishment, pointing out the advantages that flow from it and the way in which it helps to promote a Christian, rather than a syncretistic, ethos in society. He maintains that this policy is in harmony with a strand of non-conformity, of which John Owen was a representative, and adds that the establishment gives non-conformity its identity.

### **Martin on Jonah**

That the State should officially acknowledge God is well brought out in his commentary on the book of Jonah by a writer, Hugh Martin, who did nevertheless believe that the civil power should not participate in Church Government. With regard to the government of families he says: 'The father of a family is not merely to be a pious man himself, but is to see that . . . there be a household piety, a family recognition of God.'<sup>33</sup> He adds that those who are quite prepared to exercise their authority for their own ends should also exercise that authority for securing obedience to God. Without this there could be no fulfilment of the promise that 'the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of Jehovah and of His anointed one.'

Martin accepts that no law can make men religious, not even God's law; only the grace of the Holy Spirit can do that. But God has promised grace and power to accompany his commandments. Martin concludes:

So far forth as a monarch's authority goes, it goes all the length of authorising him to enjoin a fast, and a solemn assembly—a public, universal, national recognition of God . . . It rises up to view in its own native reasonableness in the hour of solemn thoughtfulness, the hour of sad national calamity. All sophistical objections about the impossibility of making men religious by Act of Parliament then disappear . . . Well was it for Nineveh that its King was not imbued with certain modern notions about magistrates and kings having nothing to do with religion. The city's doom had been sealed by them!<sup>34</sup>

### **A Prayer from the Homily of Obedience**

Let us pray they [rulers] may have wisdom, strength, justice, clemency, zeal to God's glory, to God's verity, to Christian souls and to the Commonwealth. Let us pray that they may rightly use their sword and authority for the maintenance and defence of the Catholic faith

contained in Holy Scripture, and of their good and honest subjects, and for the fear and punishment of evil and vicious people.<sup>35</sup>

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Endnotes:

- 1) This article is taken from a paper read at the 1989 Autumn Conference of the Protestant Reformation Society held at Royal Holloway and Bedford College, Egham, Surrey.
- 2) See T. Marton's *Commentary on James 4:1*, Banner of Truth, Edinburgh 1983, p. 329.
- 3) *The Tutorial Prayer Book*, edd. C. Neil and J.M. Willoughby, The Harrison Trust, London 1912, p. 572.
- 4) *Commentary on Jonah*, Banner of Truth, Edinburgh 1982, p. 278.
- 5) 'Thailand's Prayer Fellowship', April 1986 (Published by Overseas Missionary Fellowship) records two Akha villages turning to Christianity.
- 6) *Ibid.*, p. xiv f.
- 7) P.E. Hughes, *The Theology of the English Reformers*, Hodder & Stoughton, London 1965, pp. 260-261.
- 8) J. Knox, *A Warning against the Anabaptists* (ed. K. Reed, Presbyterian Heritage Publications), p. 25 f.
- 9) *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.
- 10) Volume 102 No. 4, 1988, p. 344.
- 11) *The Homilies*, Focus Christian Ministries Trust, Lewes 1986, p. 79.
- 12) J.E. Cox, *Works of Thomas Cranmer 1846 Vol II*, pp. 212-221.
- 13) *Law of the Constitution 10th Ed.*, pp. 310-311.
- 14) Foxe's Book of Martyrs. Milner and Co. Ltd., London, p. 328.
- 15) The identification of 'all the world' (Luke 2:1) with the Roman world, was of course spurious. These were 'realms that Caesar never knew'.
- 16) See Note 11.
- 17) *Ibid.*, p. 300.
- 18) Strype, *Memorial to Thomas Cranmer*, ed. P.E. Baines, Routledge, London 1853 Vol 1, p. 23.
- 19) *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- 20) J.E. Cox, *loc. cit.* Vol II, p. 340.

- 21) *The Reformer*, May/June 1989, p. 7.
- 22) J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, James Clarke, Cambridge.
- 23) *Reflections on the Glorious Revolution of 1688*, Testimony Books, Lewes 1989, p. 1.
- 24) Sargant, *Life of Cranmer*, Hurst Chance & Co., London 1829. p. 222.
- 25) H.R.M. Craig, 'The Word and Discipline in the Church', *Churchman* 1989 Vol. 103 No. 2 pp. 150-165, *passim*.
- 26) *Institutes* Book IV Chapter 20, para 9. Beveridge Edition, James Clarke, London 1949.
- 27) See also T. Morton's Commentary on Jude, Kregel, Grand Rapids 1988 p. 245 ff., is on verse 8.
- 28) C. Hodge, *The Church and its Polity*, Thomas Nelson & Sons, London 1879.
- 29) *Ibid.*, Turretin, Lecture 28, Question 34.
- 30) *The Confession of Faith: Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland*, Applecross, Rossshire 1966, p. 19 ff.
- 31) A.A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, 1958 pp. 22-23.
- 32) Iain Murray, *The Reformation of the Church*, Banner of Truth, London 1968, p. 234 ff.
- 33) *Op. cit.*, p. 278.
- 34) *Ibid.*, p. 281.
- 35) *Op. cit.*, p. 80.