
A table of contents for *Anvil* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_anvil_01.php

COLIN BUCHANAN

Surely we should Disestablish?

Colin Buchanan takes issue with Timothy Yates' defence of establishment in *Anvil* 19.1. He challenges the assumption that there was a significant twentieth-century evangelical strand of influence in favour of retaining the status quo. He goes on to advance his own arguments for disestablishment, focusing on the role of Parliament and the method of appointment of bishops.

Timothy Yates wrote in *Anvil*'s first issue this year that he thought Anglican Evangelicals were registering a 'sharp change' in their support of the establishment of the Church of England, and the editor put it even more sharply in the abtract at the head of the article: 'For many Evangelicals, the arguments for disestablishing the Church of England appear to be a compelling, open-and-shut case...' I write to say that I see little evidence of these bold assertions (would that I could); but that the case *is* very strong, and is not really addressed in Timothy Yates' article. In this he is typical of virtually all pro-establishment authors and advocates whom I have encountered: they tend to go on their way reasserting their old slogans, without attending closely to the arguments against establishment.

Anglican Evangelicals and Establishment

However, before I tackle issues of substance, I ought to pick up the history of Anglican evangelical attitudes on the issue, for it is that which Timothy Yates claims to report. The view of the establishment inherited by Evangelicals from the nineteenth century is not only easy to chart: it is, I find, still present in my own mind as my starting point when I was confirmed as an undergraduate in 1956, and took my place and became an ordinand in the beleaguered evangelical minority in the Church of England. I think my way back into that situation with considerable ease.

For history had taught Evangelicals that, from a defensive standpoint, they needed the Church of England to be established. In a Church with little concern for law – and less for the reformed basis of the legal formularies – the link with the state provided the safeguard of law for that minority who were true to the Reformation. In the nineteenth century, the courts were more trustworthy than the bishops; in the twentieth, Parliament was more trustworthy than the Church Assembly. The echoes of 1928 – triumphant echoes which nevertheless had a slightly Dunkirk feel to them – ran on strongly in the 1950s.[1] The patronage system,

1 I remember A. T. Houghton, first overseas missionary of BCMS, reporting around 1960 how in Upper Burma – yes, Upper Burma – a prayer meeting to give thanks was held when the news came through of the defeat of the 1928 Book.

the freehold and the voluntary societies (including new theological colleges) had kept evangelicalism in being in the darkest days between the wars, when, it was generally believed, evangelicalism would have been run out or snuffed out had the bishops had their way. If, in the 1950s, there was slightly more cause for optimism, there was also cause for continuing vigilance.[2] There was a strong mindset of being protected by the establishment, a mindset with four or more generations of defensiveness behind it.

I would not want to say that this was merely defensive or self-protective. Evangelicals had a strong positive doctrine of the parish, of the role of the parish church within it, and of the scope of the incumbent to minister freely within it. Visiting through the parish was basic to clerical life; and, if an eclectic congregation started to arrive from across the borders, Evangelicals were quite capable of incorporating that principle into their parish principles also. Occasional offices ran strong, and ran on a parish basis. There was still a lingering notion that all people knew in which parish they lived, and, even if not attending worship, knew to which church they not going, and could be ready to apologize to the vicar if they met him and could not evade the point. The 1662 Book alone was legal and was uniquely biblical. The establishment at parish level represented a charter to bring the gospel to every home and into every life. Evangelicals accepted the charter and lauded the establishment which guaranteed the charter to them.[3]

So much for background. How then does Timothy Yates address this history?

Firstly, he starts beyond Keele. But Keele shows an interesting, typically cautious but flexible view, peering into the future:

> **'Establishment**[4] 59. We recognize afresh that the National Church which we have inherited presents us with pastoral advantages and as such gives us opportunities to serve the nation. We judge that modifications in the establishment should be delayed until Synodical Government has given the laity a full and effective share in the government of the Church.'

I think this is worth recording; it reflects a residual notion that the laity in Parliament were the guardians of the Church of England (and its formularies) *until such time*

2 This is not a history of Anglican evangelicalism as such, but it is easy to demonstrate from the 1950s the 'green shoots' which started to create optimism about the future – and led to Keele and the post-Keele world.

3 It may be difficult to remember now how far from exercising or even influencing actual power in the Church of England's own circles Evangelicals then were. In the 1950s they might count the Bishop of Sodor and Man as one of theirs, and the Bishop of Rochester as not having entirely forgotten his background; they might scrape together enough elected proctors (out of a total of 350) to be counted on two hands; they had virtually no representation on any official commissions; and it was a matter of pride (as well as a matter of course) in the Bristol Colleges that none of their ex-students had ever become bishops. Revision of canon law loomed threateningly, but in general Evangelicals were both safe and active in their parishes.

4 This title is marked by an asterisk in *Keele '67: The National Evangelical Anglican Congress Statement*, ed. P. Crowe, CPAS, London 1967, which should mean the subject is treated in the preparatory book, *Guidelines: Anglican Evangelicals Face the Future*, ed J. I. Packer, CPAS, London 1967. I have failed to find it there!

as the Church of England should have its own proper organs. But synodical government was being created, and the Keele people were open to that more representative scenario.

Secondly, Timothy Yates takes as his starting point a quotation from the 1977 Nottingham Statement. Here I must put down another caution: the quotation is only from a section of those at Nottingham – there were 20 Section Statements, and they were not adopted (as Keele's had been) by the whole Congress of 2000 people. Section K from which he quotes, 'The Church as Institution', was led by Timothy Dudley-Smith, a dyed-in-the-wool (and, in a sympathetic gathering, by no means unconvincing) establishmentarian, and he no doubt had a good proportion of like-minded people with him. But they might have been only 5% (or even less) of the total Congress; and their Statement is *not* a 'Congress Statement'. Indeed, the next section, 'L The Unity of the Church' (in which I had a hand!), said in its own Statement, *inter alia*, 'We recognize that our historic constitutional links with the State, while valued by many of us, are a cause of concern to others and that we have often been insensitive to the offence they have caused...'[5]

Yates then says 'As a contrast to much talk of disestablishment, two alternative views rehearsed in the 1980s Latimer House studies are examined here'. I am unclear where that 'much talk' is to be found – is he locating it in the 1980s or to-day? I think he means to-day; but, if so, then quoting against it from twenty years ago is unlikely to meet the needs and thrusts of much-changed times. Furthermore, try as I will, I cannot find 'two alternative views' in what he writes – I find a single mind of Raymond Johnston, pressing that nationhood is a valuable, a theological, concept, and thus we owe it to the nation to remain established. In passing, I must ask whether that 'thus' is a *non sequitur*?

After that it is not clear who is being quoted as an Evangelical – probably simply Max Warren, whose lectures, *The Functions of a National Church*, Raymond Johnston had a hand in republishing as a Latimer Monograph in 1984 (years after Max Warren's death); but Max Warren had reached the zenith of his powers in the 1960s, was generally viewed (along with CMS) as broader than the resurgent party of Evangelicals, and in any case had his own line on the establishment. There is a telling last line in Timothy Yates's paragraph citing him, where Max Warren says: '...is it unreasonable to expect that it will be a church which is recognizably "of" the nation which will best reveal Christ to the nation?'[6]

This, I submit, is where the argument turns a corner and starts to roll up the road that brought it there. For, like all pro-establishment statements, it purports to provide a universal principle; but on inspection it is something near to special pleading which treats Britain – that is, England – as a unique outcropping of God's providence. As I wish to turn the corner, and this argument will help me, I begin with showing its self-defeating character and then move on to a consideration of other matters of substance.

5 Wonderfully, the briefings Timothy Dudley-Smith and I prepared in advance for our respective sections came out backing each other on the same sheet of paper, and caused some comment at the time.

6 Warren, *Functions*, p 36.

A Church 'of' the Nation?

It is clear that Warren's argument is based on a notion that for a church to be 'of' a nation it has to be structurally part of its constitution, ie to be established. But, if we accept that he is trying to propound a universal truth, the assertion fails at every point. I offer two alternative Christian affirmations which are both more biblical and more universalizable than Warren's. They are simple and obvious, and only a determination that the bottom line of an argument must be that the establishment is a good thing could make the Warren principle appear more plausible. Here are my alternatives:

(i) Is it unreasonable to expect that it will be a church which is single-minded for the gospel which will best reveal Christ to the nation?'

(ii) Is it unreasonable to expect that it will be the church with the greatest numbers of active members (and/or the widest geographical and sociological spread) which will best reveal Christ to the nation?

These two assertions (in the Warren form of rhetorical questions) may not always be compatible with each other, but both are preferable to the Warren answer. I wish, of course, to test them against his answer in other parts of the world, but it is interesting and relevant to ask in passing how the Church of England looks when measured by these two questions. For, I would submit, our strength (such as it is) derives from our theological convictions on the one hand and our national 'spread' on the other; and we are fools if we tell ourselves it comes from our legal connection to the state.

But the tests outside England are the determinative ones. Was a German Church, subverted by Nazis, in better position to 'reveal Christ' than the Confessing Church – for all that the former were 'of' the nation and the latter not? Would an apartheid regime in South Africa with powers to appoint Anglican bishops, ever have appointed black bishops – let alone Desmond Tutu? Would Daniel Arap Moi have appointed David Gitari in Kenya? There is simply no principle that can be universalized here. And, interestingly, disestablishment came in Ireland and Wales because, in each case, a church which was constitutionally 'of' the nation was not perceived to be organically 'of' the nation in its actual life. Great man though Max Warren was, I submit that he was here into special pleading and was then reprinted by others for special pleading purposes also.

After this Timothy Yates gives some brief 'General Thinking since 1900'. It is not clear that this has any bearing upon evangelical thought, for he quotes a random set of members of Church and State Commissions, and then gives vignettes from S. L. Greenslade, John Habgood, and Adrian Hastings. Of these, while Greenslade is a 'defender of so-called "Caesaro-papalism"' and Habgood is certainly the stoutest prop of establishment available, Hastings is surely being misrepresented by being grouped with them. His 1990 Prideaux lectures, which of course were roughly contemporary in their preparation with his *A History of English Christianity 1920-1990* from which Timothy Yates quotes, depend upon the distinction between a 'monist' understanding of church and state (where the two are interwoven or

even merged) and a 'dualist' one, where the two are distinct and separate entities. He is totally opposed to monist theories, but he has an instinct for 'a Scottish solution' – ie, you 'cut away the surviving elements of Parliamentary control over church order and Prime Ministerial control over the election of bishops' and remove 'the traces of Erastianism'[7] – and so he must count as a very thin witness when summoned 'on the side of retaining the establishment'.[8] I would suggest that the Hastings' lectures point all the time towards a total severance of church and state, but that, at a late stage (and thinking like an Anglican!), he cannot quite accept the logic of what he has said, and so he does a small jump off the path and says that, with enough changes, the establishment might yet have some mileage in it.

The curious theologizing which has marked recent defences of the establishment is typified in Timothy Yates' closing paragraph. The great cry is that establishment is not privilege, is not social superiority, is not a subjugation of the means to an end, but is simply the vocation of the Church of England to provide a true service of the people of England, and to the structures of our national society. That closing paragraph has a typical rephrasing of this: 'Our concern should not be with the church, which would survive were the state to dispense with establishment. Our concern should be with the state.'[9]

There it is: we embrace the establishment, as that is the way we can give spiritual life or direction to the state. We are humbly renouncing any self-serving motives; instead we know we can do good this way to 40 million others. We may even put up with inconveniences for the sake of this good end; for we are are moved by a God-given altruism. Our country needs us, and we are gallantly responding.

A Church in Captivity

Now I think this is dangerous nonsense, and betrays an ecclesiastical megalomania masquerading as 'service'. On reflection, I should not have titled my book, *Cut the Connection.*[10] Why not? Well, because the word 'connection' is too neutral, and allows for unreal talk about 'partnership' (it is there in Yates's article). What the 'we are here to serve' school of thought is saying *au fond* is that we can influence the state for good, and for that we will pay the occasional price. My contention is the opposite, and I should have called my book *Strike off the Shackles.* It is the captivity of the Church of England to the political apparatus of the state which is the dominant feature of the establishment today. Our service to the state, our influence upon its policies, spring not from our legal subordination to the state apparatus, but simply from our strength on the ground. There is no substitute for theological creativity, prophetic engagement with the state and its ways, ability to

7 Adrian Hastings, *Church and State: The English Experience*, University of Exeter Press, 1991, p 76.

8 Timothy Yates, 'Should we disestablish?', *Anvil* 19.1, 2000, p 48.

9 Yates, 'Should we disestablish?', pp 49f.

10 Colin Buchanan, *Cut the Connection: The Church of England and Disestablishment*, DLT, London 1994; a book which DLT, presumably not realizing the subject would still be a live one for many years ahead, pulped without telling the author, and which is therefore out of print.

demonstrate a strong 'card-vote', and sheer care and prayer by the members.[11] A church thus characterized is serving its community, as it is chartered by God to do, no less than one which claims its influence comes from its place in the constitution, and much more than one which, without these strengths, simply relies upon its place in the constitution. We do well to look to our 'card-vote' in particular.

What then of the captivity? It currently has two main manifestations. First, there is the ultimate control of the Church of England from Parliament. It is ludicrous to have to send a Measure to Parliament if women are to be ordained as presbyters (let alone as bishops); and it is equally ludicrous that Parliament should handle issues about the appointing and suspending of churchwardens. It is not only that Lords or Commons might say 'no' (they did twice in the 1980s, but not as far as I know since); it is not only that the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament might deem a Measure 'inexpedient' (which is what has held up the Churchwardens Measure); nor is it only that the Church of England is then tied to the Parliamentary timetable (it took twelve months for the ordination of women to pass from Synod to Westminster); these are practical disadvantages, but the real basis for objection is simply that Parliament is not competent to have that sort of control of the rules and life of the Church of England. The Commons is composed of men and women, each elected because of their party manifesto or (occasionally) their local perceived persona; and the Christian faith, let alone the theological acumen, of the successful candidates is a matter of the sheerest chance of the party caucuses and the actual polls.[12] A brief inspection of average voting in the Commons on Church of England business reveals the lack of involvement with Church of England Measures of around 90% of the MPs; while a quick reading of the *Hansard* record of the debates will show the theological incompetence (and frequent secular basis) of the contributions from the last 10% who do exhibit an interest. Yet the shadow of this incompetent and arbitrary master lies across the General Synod, where we are regularly advised from the platform that Parliament would not like this or that which we believe to be for the good of the Church – and nation.

Second, there is the shameful matter of the appointment of bishops by the Prime Minister of the day. It is this which was under debate in July this year – the issue which Timothy Yates foresaw would be an establishment issue. I need not do more than outline the procedure – the monarch has absolute rights in the appointment of diocesan bishops; she acts on the advice of the Prime Minister of the day; he or she acts by choosing between one of two names submitted by the Crown Appointments Commission. The CAC functions in complete seclusion from the

11 I should perhaps add that the locating of bishops in cities, with a permanence of office and an independence of outlook, is a real strength, and cities without bishops lose out by comparison. However, this is not really an establishment benefit, though it may be helped by historical expectations of bishops in some cities. It can be paralleled, and at times is paralleled, by Roman Catholic bishops in England, whose Church is not established – and by Church of Ireland bishops, who are also not in an established Church.

12 I do not stay on the unrepresentative character of the Commons – but any would-be electoral reformer has plenty of ammunition to work with.

church around it – people being considered are neither notified nor interviewed;[13] the Commission members are sworn to secrecy for life; no-one therefore ever knows whether the Prime Minister chose the first preference of the CAC, or the runner-up, or even whether the Prime Minister had sent for more names (which the agreed convention permits). The Prime Minister may indulge whatever whims or prejudices he or she has in relation to the two names sent, and, among the other sad results of this discretion, can thus resolve that this or that particular person shall never be a diocesan bishop.

This was not what a Synod bolder than today's asked for in 1974, when debating the Chadwick Report. Then, by a vote of 270 to 70, the Synod called for 'the decisive voice' to be that of the Church. Off went Donald Coggan and Norman Anderson to negotiate this with the Prime Minister – and they came back without it. The Prime Minister was going to have the final say, and would have no truck with just receiving one name from the Church body, for that one name to be forwarded to the Queen. The reasons given in the Parliamentary answer to a planted question were that diocesan bishops were on the way to the Lords, so, as with Life Peers, the appointment must be a political one, and the Prime Minister, as the purveyor of political patronage, must have discretion at least between two names.[14] So it was accepted, and so it still runs.

In those days there was a strong sense that the captivity of the Church to the organs of state needed to be considerably weakened. It is clear that many establishmentarians were to be found among the 270 noble synodspeople who voted for the change: they could then look for changes *within* the relationship of Church to state. But today it is not so. By a retrogressive (and, I submit, purblind) move, in the General Synod debate in July this year the establishmentarians took on a totally different stance. The motion was to devise a Church procedure (of a 'more participatory and open' sort) for the appointment of diocesan bishops without the participation of Downing Street or the Crown. This kind of devolution of powers, from a procedure of the Queen acting on the advice of the Prime Minister, to canons made by General Synod, under a Measure which would amend the still current legislation of Henry VIII, is wholly in line with the patterns of general devolution of powers over liturgy, parish and diocesan reorganization, exercise of patronage, and a host of other matters. Each has been dealt with *seriatim*, and handled on its own merits. But handling in its own merits was not the treatment given to this proposed change in the appointment of diocesan bishops. The Bishops of Durham and St Albans, the Dean of Southwark, and what felt like a stream of others, rose to say that the establishment is all one seamless robe: touch a thread anywhere and the whole lot will unravel. The stakes were being upped in an

13 Under the 'Perry' proposals, which at the time of writing it is thought might be adopted by General Synod in November 2002, they would be notified, though still not interviewed.

14 It is difficult to know whether other negotiators might have done better, though it is clear that Donald Coggan and Norman Anderson were both pro-establishment people, and may have been a bit too quick to give ground. Their surrender is wonderfully whitewashed by Timothy Yates as a 'situation refined' (Yates, *Should we disestablish?*, p 48).

astonishing way. Somehow the establishment had been revealed from heaven and was endangered by this vote about appointing bishops; and the Synod voted the proposal down.[15]

Analysing the Arguments for Establishment

If we stand back, it is clear that there are two views of establishment around, not well distinguished in people's minds, and therefore liable to muddy counsel whenever such questions come up.

First, there is the view of the Chadwick Commission, and of Michael Ramsey, that the establishment is a series of separable links between Church and state, each of which can be addressed on its own theological and prudential merits. The issue of a total sundering, a once-for-all disestablishment, does not really arise on this view, as the General Synod will simply address issues one-by-one. Presumably, somewhere down the line, the last link with any substance to it might come up on the agenda, but it is a long way off.[16]

The other view, as outlined above, is the seamless robe one. It has an intriguing defect at the outset, as it cannot be applied retrospectively. George Carey or Michael Turnbull or whoever, will, on inspection, prove to be glad about the *seriatim* loosening of ties to the state achieved in the past. The instance which most appeals to me has now been long forgotten, but it gives a glaring illustration of how this school of establishmentarians differs between past and future, between the achieved and the proposed. Until 1964 the Convocations of the Clergy were summoned and dissolved with Parliament.[17] Nothing could have illustrated better the 'partnership of Church and state' – the synchronized dual elections were both substantial as elections but also highly symbolic in their linkage. If today the synchronizing of the two elections were still in force, one can visualize the speeches that would be made by bishops resisting any proposed change. To seek to split the two elections, and run the clergy ones every five years, would obviously be to declare the Church a separate entity, and to remove the Royal Prerogative of dissolving the Convocations would be to undermine the Supreme Governorship, and endanger

15 I found this all the more paradoxical because, whatever persons the Church of England has in the new Second Chamber, it is virtually certain they will be fewer than the present number of bishops, and may not be exclusively diocesan bishops anyway. This would mean that the Callaghan argument that appointing bishops is appointing peers would be devoid of content, but no report on the House of Lords has drawn the implication that the reform would pull the rug out from under the Prime Minister's feet, and that the present method of appointment should be abandoned.

16 Those of this ilk used to speak of a 'Scottish solution'. By this they meant a Church with a special (if somewhat undefined) status in the country, but with total freedom to run its own affairs. It is indeed an interesting question as to whether the Church of Scotland has been, since 1921, a Church 'by law established', or whether it would be better described as 'by law disestablished'. What is clear is that the notion, quite strong in 1970s and 1980s, has largely dropped out of sight.

17 Famously, the canons of 1641, propounded by a Convocation that had continued to sit when Parliament had been dissolved, were washed from the record in 1661 simply on those grounds, that Convocation had no legal existence after the dissolution of Parliament.

the whole establishment. Because of the seamless robe theory, the cutting of this one thread would mean the whole Church and state connection would come apart – and, presumably, the Church of England would become a sect (the usual alarm that is raised), and the whole constitution of the United Kingdom might unravel as well. Even if having a meretriciously attractive appeal, the proposal to change the election of Proctors was obviously fraught with enormous consequent dangers, and should on no account be risked.[18]

In fact, of course, the change was supported by the platform, because in the 1960s not only was Michael Ramsey open in any case to loosening ties with the state, but the leadership of the Church of England had no 'seamless robe' ideology of those ties. My point now is that George Carey or Michael Turnbull are perfectly content to accept all the changes made in the past; retrospectively one can see that the piecemeal character of the establishment can be addressed in a piecemeal way, and that changes to one link do not in fact corrupt or distort other links. But the seamless robe ideology still stands true for the future. Establishmentarians of this school of thought have to argue both ideologies at once – they have to be glad and accepting of all the loosening of links in the past, and totally opposed to all that are proposed for the future. In effect they are saying 'there is a proper balance to be observed between Church and state: and we have got it exactly right right now, indeed we have got it to perfection, to a relationship unrivalled for its exactness throughout all the preceding centuries, so now nothing more must be altered.'

This approach does much to encourage an all-or-nothing view of the establishment. It responds to slogans like 'the establishment is in danger'; it identifies establishment as a concept with the way things currently are;[19] and it loses the plot not only in terms of failing to look at individual proposals on their theological merits, but also of seeing the full historical context in which the argument is conducted.

Conclusions

So, when all these chips are down, what is Timothy Yates trying to salvage? I think the answer is that he fears lest we become a secular state. Somehow, the establishment of the Church of England is a form of Christian confession by the body politic; and that in turn gives a direction or a slant to public policy. I have to

18 My own interest in this derives originally from being a candidate in London diocese in 1964 – an unsuccessful one.

19 I once asked Archbishop George a synodical question about reforming the method of apppointing bishops. He replied he was open to reviewing the process 'so long as it took place within the framework agreed... in 1976'. I then asked a supplementary and got a reply:

Q: Why is the Archbishop so content with the 1976 framework?
A: In short, we are the Established Church... (Report of Proceedings, 10 Feb 1998, pp 132f).
I hope the point is taken. The Archbishop was saying (a) being established of itself is the warrant for doing things the way we do; (b) we do not therefore need to consider any other merits or demerits of a particular process; and (c) it is impossible to consider better ways.

reply that I think this lies near to fantasy – and that a large measure of establishment rhetoric is in fact founded on fantasy. I offer the following considerations to replace the fantasy.

First, we live in a state where Parliament is sovereign. There are no theological tests for election to Parliament; there are no entrenched theological principles in a written constitution which could obstruct legislation which was in breach of it; and there is no answerability for any steps taken by Parliament except to the electorate. The theological convictions of the electorate are extremely hard to determine, but it appears that not many more than one citizen in ten worships regularly as a Christian.

Second, it is in fact possible for Parliament to favour Christianity (if it so wishes) without that implying or necessitating the establishment of the Church of England. The issue of non-denominational Christian worship in schools under the current Education Act is an illustration of this. The issue of faith-based schools has similarities. And any protection of the place of Sunday in the life of the nation (a protection which has certainly become minimal) is also similar.

Third, the existing establishment offers no kind of rampart against reform of legislation. The Church of England cannot appeal to God's laws in relation to, say, abortion, and find that that appeal has any force whatsoever, save in relation to the random presence of Christians (not necessarily Anglicans) in Parliament. Any residual Christian loading of the laws of this land has little more chance of survival when threatened than has an area of natural beauty when a motorway is planned to go through it.

Fourth, it was noticeable in the July debate in General Synod that there remains a strong sentiment in favour of the monarchy. This has been enhanced by the Queen Mother's funeral and the Queen's Golden Jubilee. The hardly-articulated notion (and perhaps fantasy) is that the monarch upholds the Church of England, and the establishment of the Church of England sustains the throne (though the Queen does perfectly well as Queen of Wales...). I submit that much public sentiment is now so used to the present Queen as our monarch, and her own person is so respected, that the person and institution are identified totally in people's minds. The future might not be the same, and the Church of England would be prudent as well as principled to be safely distanced from the throne.

There has been a clever bit of propaganda around that says that, detached from the state, the Church of England would be a 'sect'. This is obviously absurd, for the Church in Wales is no such 'sect'. The propaganda has been equally clever in hiding the word 'Erastian'. But Erastianism is a heresy, and we are guilty of it. Instead of owing our appointments and our internal laws to the pleasure of a secular Parliament, we ought to be taking responsibility for them ourselves, and then punching our true weight, act prophetically towards the state and its structures in the name of our God.

The Rt Revd Colin Buchanan is the Bishop of Woolwich.