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The Relation of the Ministry to Church and State.¹

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THE aspect of this subject, which seems specially to require consideration at the present time, is the relation of the Christian Ministry to the State. Its relation to the authorities of the Church would seem plain enough to unprejudiced minds. The direction in the Preface "Concerning the Service of the Church" clearly lays it down that in points of doubt—that is, I suppose, points which cannot be directly determined by law—the Bishop of the diocese is the proper authority to "take order for the quieting and appeasing of the same"; and where the Bishop is in doubt, he may send for the resolution of the doubt to the Archbishop. If this be taken in conjunction with the promise given by the priest at his ordination, "reverently to obey your Ordinary and other chief Ministers, unto whom is committed the charge and chief government over you; following with a glad mind and will their godly admonitions, and submitting yourselves to their godly judgments," it should lead to a generous and liberal interpretation of canonical obedience. The failure to accept this duty of obedience in a generous spirit is, there is reason to fear, in great measure the origin of the disorder in the Church in the present day. Priests have quibbled about the exact definition of godly judgments, and Bishops have set an example of disregard for the opinions of Archbishops, until it has become almost painful to listen to that question and answer in the Ordination Service, from the sense of unreality which it awakens. I will only add, on this point, that Evangelical clergy will be following the examples set them by their best leaders in the past, by showing in their conduct that they, at all events, attach a full and real meaning to that promise.

But a question of still greater urgency has arisen of late respecting the obedience due from the clergy to the courts of

¹ Paper read at the Islington Clerical Meeting, January 11, 1910.

law, by which questions of ritual, and sometimes of doctrinal, controversy are determined. It is boldly asserted in some quarters that the clergy owe no allegiance to what are called secular courts, and that the decision of the Court of Arches and of the Privy Council involve no obligation of obedience. "The State," as the phrase goes, is spoken of as though it were a body to which the Church owes no deference—as a sort of alien authority; and the language of the old declaration against Papal authority is practically applied to it; as though a so-called "Catholic" priest had made a declaration that "no secular prince or potentate hath, or ought to have, any jurisdiction, power, pre-eminence, or authority within this Church of England, so help me God!" Just thirty-two years ago the then Bishop of Lincoln, the learned and venerable High Churchman, Bishop Wordsworth, was asked by the then Canon (afterwards Dean) Hole to express his opinion on a resolution, which was brought forward in the English Church Union, that "any sentence of suspension or prohibition pronounced by any court sitting under the Public Worship Regulation Act, is spiritually null and void," and that the Union would give its support to any priest who disregarded it. Bishop Wordsworth gave a very decided opinion against the propriety of such a resolution, and in the course of his answer remarked that "this resolution must, if carried, lead its supporters much farther. They who resist the decisions of the Court of Arches, on the ground alleged by them, must also, by parity of reasoning, proceed also to resist the decisions of the final court of appeal—namely, the Judicial Committee of Privy Council—which has succeeded the Court of Delegates, and has been constituted by legislative enactment, without the advice or assent of the Church. Indeed, this is already avowed by some. And who can foresee what will be the end of such a conflict as this?" What Bishop Wordsworth foresaw has been realized, and no words are now too contemptuous to be used by the organs of the Ritualistic party in repudiating the so-called "State courts."

Now, let us observe, in the first place, that there is some-

thing totally inconsistent with Christian principles in the disrespect thus shown to the authority of "the State." In the first place, "the State" is a Divinely instituted society, second only in its sacredness, to the Divine society of the Church. Even when not united with the Church, as in our own Constitution, it is the part of Christians to assert its Divine origin and functions, and to support its authority. I need do no more than refer to the striking testimony to this view of the State afforded by the admonitions of St. Peter and St. Paul to honour the constituted authorities of the Roman Empire of their day. But this points to a further misunderstanding of the subject. What Christian men and women are chiefly concerned with is not the State, but the governing authorities of the State. Those authorities, even in a non-Christian State, as St. Paul's language shows, are invested by God's ordinance with functions of the highest responsibility, and functions akin to those of the Church. "There is no power but of God: the powers, or authorities, that be are ordained of God." "Rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil." The essence of the function of government is the maintenance of truth and justice; and accordingly, it is a striking fact that no Government has ever been set up for the avowed purpose of promoting evil. However perverse and unrighteous in fact, it has always professed the maintenance of justice as its aim. But this is also one of the primary aims of the Church. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal. . . . Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." Here, then, are two societies existing side by side, with coincident objects, as far as this world is concerned. The consequence is that an instinct has always led great rulers and statesmen in the past to promote in every way co-operation and union between the two. The union of Church and State is not a special and peculiar form of policy, but the dictate of common sense to any statesman or Churchman who would combine the forces in human society which make for righteousness. A Churchman, therefore, who speaks disparagingly of the State is as foolish as a statesman who

speaks disparagingly of the Church ; and if a conflict of opinion or influence should unfortunately arise between the two, it should be contemplated with the deepest regret, and every possible sacrifice should be made to obviate it.

But it should next be borne in mind that as ministers of the English Church we are not concerned with "the State" in the abstract, but with the governing authorities of a Christian State. The admission of those who are not Christians into the House of Commons does not alter the fact that the Government of England is a Christian Government ; that the King, who is the supreme governor, must be a Christian, and a Protestant Christian, and that the laws of England are based upon the laws of Christ. Without trespassing upon current political controversy, it may be permissible to observe that the House of Commons does not by itself constitute the Government of our country, and that its constitution may be varied without repudiating the essentially Christian character of the supreme authority in England. The King's courts, accordingly, are Christian courts, and the law which they have to administer is Christian law. Christians and Churchmen are not merely bound to recognize them in this character, but should be forward and thankful to do so, and to maintain their Christian authority in every possible way. To disparage them as merely secular courts is to weaken their highest and most beneficial characteristic, and every true Christian and Churchman will do his best to maintain their authority. Even if we should hold the private opinion that in any particular case they have decided erroneously, it would still be the part of a Christian and a Churchman to obey them, unless the decision involves clear disobedience to the revealed will of God.

But as ministers of an Established Church, we owe a peculiar deference to the King's courts. Whatever else may be involved in establishment, it is certainly by virtue of establishment by law that we all hold our respective places and privileges in the Church. By what authority is it, for instance, that no other body than the Reformed Church of

England can use Canterbury Cathedral for Divine service and for the ministry of God's Word and Sacraments? We may claim to have moral authority for that exclusive use; but the power which renders that moral authority effective is simply the power of the State, the power of the governing authority of the State, the Parliament of England, its laws, and the executive power which enforces those laws. Every parish clergyman holds his exclusive rights in his parish church, his special privileges as the parson of the parish, from the same authority. Does it become those who hold such privileges from "the State" and its courts to say that those courts have no right to a voice in the administration of the Church which they thus support? If the clergy held no rights or privileges from the State legislature or courts, they might claim independence of them. But when they hold positions of immense influence by the establishment of that legislature, and by the aid of those courts, there seems something peculiarly improper and ungrateful in refusing any deference to them.

The Church, of course, as a society owing its origin and its constitution to Christ alone, has an authority quite independent of the state, and must determine certain questions and points of duty by itself. Its ministers derive their privileges of order, and their spiritual duties and powers, solely from Christ; and all points of Christian, as distinct from merely natural, law, must be determined by the voice of the Church alone, in her proper assemblies. But two points have to be borne in mind in applying this principle. The first is that the English legislature has strictly respected it, and that the Prayer-Book and Articles, by which the clergy are bound, were settled, not by Parliament, but by the Church's own Synods, and accepted by Parliament as the basis of the establishment now existing. Disobedience to the Prayer-Book and the Articles is disobedience to the Church of England herself, in her last formal decisions on the subject. The other point to be borne in mind is that a particular Church, like the Church of England, cannot command that indefeasible authority which might be fairly

claimed for the whole Church, when acting as one body in the days of the great councils. The Legislature and the Courts of England have never shown any disrespect to that primary Church authority. But in case of a difference arising on a point of the marriage law between the Convocation of the Church of England and the Legislature, it cannot be expected that the Legislature should assume without question that the existing law of the Church of England is of Divine authority. No particular Church can claim that authority; and when other Churches differ from the Church of England on such a point, the Legislature cannot be expected to recognize an indefeasible claim in the existing Church law. In short, it should be sufficient to remember that neither authority—neither the Church of England nor the Legislature of England—can claim, or does claim, to be infallible, and consequently that neither can fairly claim the right to override the other. What we need to get rid of on this question is the assertion of absolute rights on either side. What the justice of the case requires is mutual deference, mutual patience, and a desire, or rather a determination, to adjust differences by mutual conciliation. The Ritualistic language and action in reference to the authority of the State is not only inconsistent with the principles of the English Church, it is un-Christian. The decisions of the Ecclesiastical Courts, including the Privy Council, may fairly be questioned, but they should be treated with respect, and if possible obeyed. The Legislature may have erred in altering the existing civil law of marriage without any due consultation with the Church, and very difficult questions of duty arise in consequence. But the case is not one in which it can be said to be inconceivable that the existing law of the Church is unalterable, and our difficulties cannot be settled by merely saying that the Church has settled the question for her ministers. Whether, as has been suggested, by dispensation, or by some other mode of mutual deference, the utmost effort should be made to settle the matter by conciliation.

Upon the whole it may be said that what is most needed at the moment on this subject is the enhancement, and not the diminution, of the authority of the Christian ruler in the Church, as well as in the State. If that authority is unduly impaired in Church affairs, it will become similarly impaired in State affairs; and those who are teaching the clergy to disregard it in the sphere of Church law are teaching others to disregard it in the sphere of ordinary life. A very experienced lawyer, the Chancellor of a diocese, when some clergymen were lamenting the illegality of Passive Resisters, observed to them that they had set the example. Another principle of vital importance in our present difficulties is that the promotion of true religion is a primary part of the functions of a Christian ruler. That principle lies at the root of controversies relating to education and the establishment of the Church. But the Royal authority, and the office of a Christian Government, cannot be called in to support religious education and the establishment of religion, if it is to be excluded from a voice in the settlement of religious difficulties. The true English method is to maintain both authorities, that of the State and that of the Church, in due balance and in mutual co-operation. The Papal and the Puritan method is to override the one by the other; and as the constitution of nature renders it impossible for either to be destroyed, such methods always end in a convulsion. Let us, at all events, stand by the methods of the Church of the English Reformation, and strive to preserve the wholesome co-operation and intimate union of Church and State.

