

# The Church of England and Constitutional Reform: The Enabling Act in British Politics and English Religion, 1913–1928

*Philip Williamson* 

**Abstract** In 1919, a parliamentary act reconstructed the relations between the British state and the Church of England. The passage of this act had considerable constitutional, political, ecclesiastical, and religious significance, and it is best understood by considering all of these aspects together. The church obtained a new statutory status, a large degree of self-government, and a special legislative procedure that augmented the privileges of its ecclesiastical establishment. All this was achieved without the intense political struggles that had accompanied many church and state issues during the previous hundred years. The apparent ease of the Enabling Act's passage was symptomatic of transformations in the relationship between the Church of England and nonconformity, in public religion, and in the character of British politics. But it was also the outcome of an impressive feat of persuasion and organization. Although the act did not secure the intended degree of spiritual independence, as became painfully evident during the parliamentary prayer book crisis in 1927–28, it placed the church establishment in a more secure position, allowing it to reform its administration and finances and to gain further advantages and new forms of relevance in future years.

The 1910s were years of constitutional change in Britain. The Parliament Act of 1911, the Government of Ireland acts of 1914 and 1920, and the Representation of the People Act of 1918 are the most familiar outcomes. Disestablishment and disendowment of the Church of England's dioceses in Wales, in the Welsh Church Act of 1914 and Welsh Church Temporalities Act of 1919, were further much-contested issues, although these receive less historical prominence, except in specialist studies. Still less attention has been given to another constitutional reform of this period, the Church of England Assembly (Powers) Act of 1919, usually referred to as the Enabling Act.<sup>1</sup> Aside from an outline in Ian Machin's examination of politics and the churches,<sup>2</sup> it is almost entirely

**Philip Williamson** is an emeritus professor of the Department of History at Durham University. This article was prepared as part of the project Church, State, and Nation: The Journals of Herbert Hensley Henson, 1900–1939, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AH/P003958/1). The author is grateful for assistance and advice from Julia Stapleton and Hilary Ingram and for valuable comments on the draft by Matthew Grimley and the journal's two anonymous referees. Please address any correspondence to [p.a.williamson@durham.ac.uk](mailto:p.a.williamson@durham.ac.uk).

<sup>1</sup> Church of England Assembly (Powers) Act. 9 & 10 Geo. 5, c. 76.

<sup>2</sup> G. I. T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1869 to 1921* (Oxford, 1987), 317–20.

absent from political histories. It does appear in studies of the Church of England but receives only passing mention in general histories of British churches and religion.<sup>3</sup>

All this exemplifies a common separation of political history and religious history that has characterized studies of twentieth-century Britain,<sup>4</sup> and a focus of ecclesiastical historians on particular churches more than on relationships among the churches. Adequate understanding of the Enabling Act must reach across these artificial boundaries, as its passage had considerable constitutional, political, ecclesiastical, and religious significance. By means of the act, the Church of England, which since the Reformation of the 1530s had been under state control and entwined with statute law, obtained a large degree of self-government and delegated powers of legislation. Its lay institutions were adjusted to new democratic conditions, by an extension of voting rights and by representation of women. The act marked the effective end of more than a century in which denominational issues had been a central element in party politics, and more than seventy years of nonconformist campaigns for English Church disestablishment. If in these senses it was part of a “desacralisation” of political life after the First World War,<sup>5</sup> it gave the church the ability to adjust to further changes in religious and social conditions and assisted the development of a more irenic public religion. The act is an important part of the solution to a problem often unconsidered in general historical and sociological diagnoses of modern British religion: How has the Church of England retained substantial public prominence, despite the decline of church attendance and a secularization of social life and moral codes, particularly from the 1960s?<sup>6</sup> While there are cogent political and institutional explanations for its continued status and influence after 1920, the Enabling Act was fundamental for the preservation of the church’s establishment, reinforced by cooperation with other churches and, eventually, with other faiths.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Keith Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales: The Christian Church, 1900–2000* (Oxford, 2008), 186–87, gives a brief summary.

<sup>4</sup> See Matthew Grimley and Philip Williamson, “The Church of England, the British State and British Politics during the Twentieth Century,” in *The Church of England and British Politics since 1900*, ed. Tom Rodger, Philip Williamson, and Matthew Grimley (Woodbridge, 2020), 1–35, at 4–6.

<sup>5</sup> S. J. D. Green, *The Passing of Protestant England: Secularisation and Social Change, c. 1920–1960* (Cambridge, 2011), 33–60.

<sup>6</sup> For revised chronologies of British secularization, see Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800–2000*, 2nd ed. (London, 2009); Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford, 2007); Sam Brewitt-Taylor, *Christian Radicalism in the Church of England and the Invention of the British Sixties, 1957–1970: The Hope of a World Transformed* (Oxford, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> S. J. D. Green, “Survival and Autonomy: On the Strange Fortunes and Peculiar Legacy of Ecclesiastical Establishment in the Modern British State, c. 1920 to the Present Day,” in *The Boundaries of the State in Modern Britain*, ed. S. J. D. Green and Richard Whiting (Cambridge, 1996), 299–324; Matthew Grimley, *Citizenship, Community and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State between the Wars* (Oxford, 2004); Matthew Grimley, “The Dog That Didn’t Bark: The Failure of Disestablishment since 1927,” in *The Established Church: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Mark Chapman, Judith Maltby, and William Whyte (London, 2011), 39–55; Daniel S. Loss, “The Institutional Afterlife of Christian England,” *Journal of Modern History* 89, no. 2 (2017): 282–313; Daniel S. Loss, “Missionaries, the Monarchy, and the Emergence of Anglican Pluralism in the 1960s and 1970s,” *Journal of British Studies* 57, no. 3 (2018): 543–63; Philip Williamson, “Archbishops and the Monarchy: Leadership in British Religion, 1900–2012,” in Rodger, Williamson, and Grimley, *Church of England and British Politics*, 57–79. For varied examples of the church’s continued influence, see the introduction and chapters 5–14 in Roger, Williamson, and Grimley, *Church of England and British Politics*.

The boldness and ingenuity of what might seem to be a dull institutional reform deserve emphasis. A national church assembly obtained statutory recognition, with a constitution and electorate determined by the church itself, rather than by Parliament or the government. A special procedure for enacting this assembly's legislative proposals was created, through a joint ecclesiastical committee of the House of Lords and House of Commons. These proposals were guaranteed parliamentary attention, yet the normal opportunities for parliamentary scrutiny and amendment were abolished, with the effect of minimizing the possibilities for political obstruction that had long crippled the church's efforts to reform itself. The resulting "church measures"<sup>8</sup> were an entirely new type of parliamentary law, with the same authority as statutes and the same power to amend or repeal earlier acts of Parliament—measures or acts that could affect other institutions, members of other churches, or people with other faiths or none. All of this was obtained without loss of the church's advantages of property, income, legal status, precedence, and integration with the state and other national institutions. In effect, the privileges of the established church were buttressed by a privileged legislative procedure. These outcomes mattered a great deal for many of the church's clergy and laity: before the crucial debate in the House of Commons, the archbishop of Canterbury issued a special call for prayers for divine assistance, and the passage of the act was celebrated by a crowded thanksgiving service in Westminster Abbey.<sup>9</sup>

The Enabling Act was an extraordinary constitutional innovation; it contrasted markedly with the treatment of the church in Wales, and it was achieved by a private bill, not as government policy. In earlier decades, such a generous reconstruction of church-state relations would have provoked a national and parliamentary struggle, with fierce protests from nonconformist, radical, and liberal opinion and renewed attacks on the church's privileges.<sup>10</sup> Yet although the Enabling Bill was vigorously debated in national as well as religious newspapers,<sup>11</sup> it passed through Parliament with apparent ease, without serious political difficulties and with large majorities. This seemingly smooth passage partly explains the lack of interest among political historians. But difficulty is not the only measure of significance. In this case, it is the *absence* of great political controversy that defines the historical question.

Interest in the Enabling Act has largely been confined to historians of the Church of England and to biographers of its leading personalities, particularly Randall Davidson, the archbishop of Canterbury, and William Temple, a future archbishop of York and then of Canterbury.<sup>12</sup> In these studies, the act is treated as an episode

<sup>8</sup> *Church measures* is a technical and statutory term that, since the passage of the Enabling Act, has applied to both proposed and actual legislation for the Church of England.

<sup>9</sup> "The Enabling Bill," *Times*, 1 November 1919; "Building the Walls," *Church Times*, 5 March 1920. (Unless otherwise indicated, the *Times*, *Church Times*, and other newspapers cited are published in London).

<sup>10</sup> For the long political controversies over church issues, see G. I. T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1832–1868* (Oxford, 1977); Machin, *Politics and the Churches, 1869–1921*.

<sup>11</sup> See press cuttings in the following collections: Lambeth Palace Library, London, Davidson Papers, 256 (hereafter this repository is abbreviated LPL and the collection as DP); London Metropolitan Archives, Liberation Society papers, A/LIB/698.

<sup>12</sup> G. K. A. Bell, *Randall Davidson: Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1952), 956–80; Michael Hughes, *Archbishop Randall Davidson* (Abingdon, 2018), 149–53; F. A. Iremonger, *William Temple*,

in the organizational reform of the church,<sup>13</sup> or in revision of *The Book of Common Prayer*,<sup>14</sup> but among contemporary churchmen, the issues reached much deeper, to definitions of a national church and its relationship with the English people. Most of the credit for the act was formerly ascribed to a campaign within the church by the Life and Liberty movement, an interpretation shaped by the subsequent fame of its leader, Temple.<sup>15</sup> However, in 1975, David Thompson, a historian of English nonconformity, shifted the focus to Parliament and argued that the passage of the act “requires a political explanation.” He showed that Lloyd George’s coalition government initially opposed the bill and only allowed it to proceed in the expectation that it would be defeated in Parliament. He emphasized that its provisions were amended in both the Lords and the Commons. He was skeptical about the practical effects of Life and Liberty and instead attributed the achievement of church self-government largely to Davidson.<sup>16</sup>

Davidson’s parliamentary tactics were certainly important, but as the main archival evidence available to Thompson was the archbishop’s papers, he gave greater attention to proceedings in the Lords than in the Commons. He did, however, recognize that the bill’s passage through the Lords was “only half the battle” and that Viscount Wolmer, a Unionist MP and the bill’s chief manager in the Commons, made a substantial contribution.<sup>17</sup> The present article, with the advantage of access to further records, recasts understandings of the conception, design, passage, and significance of the Enabling Act. It shows that the bill’s progress beyond the House of Lords was actually the greatest part of the political battle: even getting it introduced into the Commons required considerable effort. The bill’s success was achieved by clever constitutional draftsmanship, by impressive feats of political organization and negotiation that reached into parishes, church assemblies, constituencies, newspapers, periodicals, election campaigns, and the government whips’ office, as well as the Lords and Commons, and by carefully calibrated amendments, initially for reasons of political tactics but broadening into an ecclesiastical strategy. This article also shows that neither Life and Liberty nor Archbishop Davidson was chiefly

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*Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1948), 220–81; John Kent, *William Temple: Church, State and Society in Britain, 1880–1950* (Cambridge, 1992), 74–93.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth A. Thompson, *Bureaucracy and Church Reform: The Organizational Response of the Church of England to Social Change, 1800–1965* (Oxford, 1970), 156–78; John D. Zimmerman, “A Chapter in English Church Reform: The Enabling Act of 1919,” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 46, no. 2 (1977): 215–25; Jeremy Morris, “Anglicanism in Britain and Ireland,” in *The Oxford History of Anglicanism*, vol. 4, *Global Western Anglicanism, c. 1910–Present*, ed. Jeremy Morris (Oxford, 2017), 398–435, at 413–14; Colin Podmore, “Self-Government without Disestablishment: From the Enabling Act to the General Synod,” *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 21, no. 3 (2019): 312–28, at 313–18.

<sup>14</sup> Gary W. Graber, “Reforming Ecclesiastical Self-Government within the Establishment: The Enabling Act, 1919,” in *Change and Transformation: Essays in Anglican History*, ed. Thomas Power (Eugene, 2013), 212–45.

<sup>15</sup> Roger Lloyd, *The Church of England, 1900–1965* (London, 1966), 234–35, 237–38; Thompson, *Bureaucracy and Church Reform*, 157–60, 162, 164, 169, 175. For persistence of this assumption, see Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow, 2006), 111.

<sup>16</sup> David M. Thompson, “The Politics of the Enabling Act,” in *Church, Society and Politics*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford, 1975), 383–92, an interpretation followed by Morris, “Anglicanism in Britain and Ireland,” 414 (on Life and Liberty’s “wholly misplaced reputation”), and by Podmore, “Self-Government,” 317–18.

<sup>17</sup> Thompson, “Politics of the Enabling Act,” 383, 389–90.

responsible for the Enabling Bill. Clergy-led groups and archbishops could no more have achieved church self-government at this time than they had by their efforts in earlier decades. As Colin Podmore has stated with pardonable exaggeration, Viscount Wolmer was at the center of a network of lay churchmen and Unionist politicians who had vital parts in the origin and drafting of the bill and its acceptance in the church and in Parliament.<sup>18</sup> It was the greatest achievement of an understudied Anglican element in early twentieth-century Conservative politics, exploiting their personal influence within the linkages between church and state and exercising hitherto unsuspected abilities in political mobilization.

The larger argument is that the bill's passage through the House of Commons was made possible by transformations in both party politics and ecclesiastical relationships. Thompson noted that political circumstances in autumn 1919 encouraged the government's reversion to neutrality toward the bill, as other issues made it prudent to be conciliatory toward Davidson and Unionist backbench politicians, the government's chief parliamentary supporters.<sup>19</sup> More basic was a depletion in the number of potential critics among MPs, after wartime divisions in the Liberal Party and the defeat of many opposition Liberal MPs in the 1918 general election.<sup>20</sup> But the main explanations for the relative absence of political controversy lie with wider changes. The most general was the effect of the First World War in accelerating a transposition in the dominant concerns of domestic politics, with economic and social issues—and the increased strength of the Labour movement—now eclipsing denominational and constitutional issues. The more particular explanations were a decline of partisan nonconformity and a new cooperation between leaders of the Church of England and the English free churches. These closer relations were chiefly concerned with ecclesiastical matters, including proposals for union between the English Protestant churches. But they also had political effects. The Enabling Act was passed with assistance from free churchmen, and amendments were conceded in the Commons not because of threats of defeat but as signals of Anglican goodwill. Disestablishment did not simply fade as political culture changed; it was also a result of decisions taken by church leaders.

The final section of the article considers the effects of the Enabling Act. Although it did not fulfil the larger aims of Life and Liberty, which wanted it to propel an Anglican religious revival, it achieved the purposes of most of its promoters: the church was now able to strengthen its establishment by reforming its structures, finances, and legal arrangements. But the House of Commons' double rejection of the revised Book of Common Prayer in 1927–28 exposed a serious shortcoming: the act had been insufficient to protect the Church in England from inveterate Protestant prejudices across the wider United Kingdom. It did, however, give the archbishops the confidence to contain this crisis in church-state relations by ignoring the parliamentary veto and asserting their own authority.

<sup>18</sup> A "project initiated and brought to fruition by Lord Salisbury's family": Podmore, "Self-Government," 315. Salisbury was the most titled of Wolmer's uncles.

<sup>19</sup> Thompson, "Politics of the Enabling Act," 391–92, referring to compromises over Welsh Church disendowment and the religious implications of the Education Act 1918, and to a transport bill, a rail strike, and Irish home rule.

<sup>20</sup> Hughes, *Davidson*, 152–53, largely follows Thompson but emphasizes these political circumstances over Davidson's personal contribution.



## ENGLISH CHURCH REFORM IN BRITISH POLITICS

The chief public justification for the Enabling Act was administrative and legislative efficiency. The Church of England's structure, property, income, discipline, doctrine, and worship were all sustained by a combination of statute law and the royal supremacy in ecclesiastical matters. If the church was to adjust to new conditions, some changes could be achieved by royal authority, but most required parliamentary legislation. Yet Parliament had long ceased to be just an English institution consisting wholly of members of the Church of England and had become a British assembly with religiously plural or secularized members. With British political parties and governments increasingly developing legislative programs from the 1880s onward, less parliamentary time was available for bills submitted by the Church of England. Parliamentary indifference or congestion of business resulted in most church bills being abandoned or simply not considered. The church could not reform itself, leading many churchmen to conclude that Parliament was "no longer fitted to legislate for the Church."<sup>21</sup> A further public justification, derived from Anglo-Catholic heirs of the Tractarian movement, was the principle of "spiritual independence"—that the church should function freely under "the sovereignty of its King, Jesus Christ and the guidance of His Holy Spirit" rather than be subjected to "Erastian" state control.<sup>22</sup>

Another strong but less overt purpose was political. Church self-government would circumvent both the hostility of nonconformist and radical MPs toward the church's privileges, and the resistance of strongly evangelical Protestants in all political parties toward the church's efforts to accommodate Anglo-Catholic practices. A particular concern was revision of *The Book of Common Prayer*, which was now being prepared by the church's convocations in accordance with the report of the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline in 1906 and subsequent royal ecclesiastical instructions, as qualified by a Liberal prime minister. Collectively these statements specified that the revision would require "enactment by Parliament," and that the government reserved the right to decide on whether or what legislation might be appropriate, "whatever view may be taken by the Convocations."<sup>23</sup> These requirements not only emphasized the church's continued dependence on civil authorities, even for the details of its worship, but also raised the prospect of revived political difficulties, similar to the fierce controversies over Anglo-Catholic ritualism from 1898 to 1904 that had obliged a Unionist government to appoint the Royal Commission.<sup>24</sup>

A recurrent element in the politics of the Church of England was wider British considerations, which at this point were negative from Wales and positive from Scotland. The movement for self-government began after the Liberal government of

<sup>21</sup> *The Archbishops' Committee on Church and State: Report, with Appendices* (London, 1916), 2–3, 23–27, 28–30 (hereafter this source is cited as the *Church and State Report*). Of 217 bills submitted to Parliament from 1880 to 1913, just 33 were passed; one was defeated, 183 had to be dropped, and 163 were not discussed.

<sup>22</sup> *Church and State Report*, 31–33, 67.

<sup>23</sup> Report of the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline, June 1906, Cd. 3040, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1906, 33, 1:77; *Convocations of Canterbury and York: Letters of Business* (including Campbell-Bannerman statement), November 1906, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1906, 85:805.

<sup>24</sup> Nigel Yates, *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain, 1830–1910* (Oxford, 1999), 314–32; Bethany Kilcrease, *The Great Church Crisis and the End of English Erastianism, 1898–1906* (New York, 2017).

1892–95 introduced bills to disestablish the Church of England's dioceses in Wales.<sup>25</sup> Church reform would reinforce Church defense, as self-government would make it easier to mitigate nonconformist and radical criticisms. But this early movement was frustrated by both nonconformist and Anglican evangelical suspicions toward the church authorities over religious education as well as ritualism,<sup>26</sup> and from 1905 by the repeated electoral successes of a Liberal government. Although in 1904 the church created a Representative Church Council, which periodically gathered the Canterbury and York convocations and their elected houses of laymen into a single body, this had only deliberative functions, lacking the legal authority that Parliament alone could confer. The movement for self-government was renewed in 1913, with the approaching enactment of Welsh Church disestablishment in the new conditions created by the Parliament Act of 1911, which emasculated the ability of bishops and Unionist peers to defend the church in the House of Lords. The church in England itself now appeared vulnerable, with Liberal taunts that it could only reform itself and obtain independence if it too accepted disestablishment.<sup>27</sup>

In refuting these assertions and obtaining the benefits of self-government, the first problem was how to persuade Parliament, which had obstructed far lesser church proposals, to devolve legislative powers to a reconstituted Representative Church Council. A useful new approach seemed to be the production of an authoritative report, explaining the difficulties and propounding remedies. This scheme is conventionally understood to have been initiated at the council gathering in July 1913 by Sir Alfred Cripps, a Unionist MP and chairman of the Canterbury house of laymen. However, his original motion simply affirmed the church's claim to spiritual independence. The real initiative came from Wolmer, acting on behalf of the mostly Unionist members of the backbench Church parliamentary committee and a wider group of lay churchmen.<sup>28</sup> Wolmer secured the vital support of Archbishop Davidson for more definite action, with two arguments: within the church, he asserted, there was now "extraordinary agreement" in favor of self-government, and an imminent statutory declaration of the Church of Scotland's spiritual independence (required by negotiations for its union with the United Free Church of Scotland) would assist the Church of England's own claim for a similar liberty.<sup>29</sup> With his uncle and a fellow Unionist MP, Lord Hugh Cecil, Wolmer had already drafted a self-government bill, but it was eventually agreed that the best course was to expand Cripps's motion into a request for a committee to prepare a justification and scheme for self-government.<sup>30</sup> Wolmer, Cecil, and Cripps all became members

<sup>25</sup> Thompson, *Bureaucracy and Church Reform*, 129–30, 140; Machin, *Politics and the Churches 1869–1921*, 224.

<sup>26</sup> Machin, *Politics and the Churches, 1869–1921*, 225–55, 260–73.

<sup>27</sup> Wolmer to Davidson, 25 June 1913, LPL, DP, 255/108–13; Alfred Cripps, "Representative Church Council," *Church Times*, 11 July 1913.

<sup>28</sup> The committee had been prominent since the 1890s in organizing resistance to successive Welsh Church bills and seeking increased support for Church of England schools: Arthur Griffith-Boscawen, *Memories* (London, 1925), 74–76.

<sup>29</sup> See Rolf Sjölander, *Presbyterian Reunion in Scotland, 1907–1921* (Edinburgh, 1962), esp. 236–51, 383, 386–87. The Scottish example was emphasized in *Church and State Report*, 35–37, 192–201.

<sup>30</sup> Cecil to Wolmer, 3 May, 14 and 23 June 1913, Bodleian Library, Oxford, 3rd Earl of Selborne [i.e., Wolmer] Papers, MSS Eng. Hist., c.980/36–38, 39–40, 41 (hereafter this repository is abbreviated as

of the resulting Archbishops' Committee on Church and State, which was chaired by Wolmer's father and Cecil's cousin, the Earl of Selborne.

The Cripps-Wolmer motion stated that "in principle" there was "no inconsistency between a national recognition of religion and the spiritual independence of the Church."<sup>31</sup> The Selborne committee's task was to produce a practical reconciliation of what had previously been incompatible within England. How could political interference with the church be prevented, while leaving sufficient state control to preserve the church establishment? The effect, for all the committee's bland appeals to administrative efficiency and spiritual integrity, was that its report and recommendations were highly political documents.

Davidson's predecessor as archbishop, Frederick Temple, had doubted that Parliament would devolve legislative powers to a church assembly without determining how its lay members were elected, which would compromise its autonomy.<sup>32</sup> The Selborne committee's solution was to avoid Parliament altogether by taking advantage of the royal supremacy. The state had no "right to impose a government upon the Church, nor even to share with the Church the task of building up such a government." Any "sacrifice of spiritual independence" would be "indefensible and offensive to the sentiments of churchmen," and any parliamentary discussion of the assembly's composition would cause "painful and difficult" debates with a "hostile" section of MPs. Instead, the Representative Church Council would reconstitute itself and define its own electorate through a constitution drafted by the committee, reviewed and approved by the two convocations (as the church bodies with legal status) and submitted as an address to the sovereign for royal assent. This procedure would provide sufficient legal authority for the new church assembly; its constitution would only be "laid on the table" of the two houses of Parliament, simply making it available for their information.<sup>33</sup> The Selborne committee also protected the assumed apostolic character and distinct authority of church government in spiritual matters by a clause in the assembly's constitution that excluded it from interfering with the "inherent" powers and functions of the episcopate.<sup>34</sup> As described by Cecil—the chief draftsman of the constitution, convocation addresses, and Enabling Bill—the assembly's house of laity would be concerned only with the church's "purely

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Bodl. and the collection as 3 Selborne); Wolmer to Davidson, 25 June 1913, and Davidson-Wolmer interview, 29 June 1913, LPL, DP, 255/108–13, 116; Wolmer memo and "Ecclesiastical Affairs Bill," LPL, DP, 521/3–10. For support from Viscount Halifax, president of the Anglo-Catholic English Church Union, and the motion at the Representative Church Council, see Bell, *Randall Davidson*, 956–57. Cecil drafted the crucial phrases; see [3rd] Earl of Selborne, "Memories of Lord Quickwood," *Church Times*, 28 December 1956.

<sup>31</sup> *Church and State Report*, 1. For the fundamental issues at stake, see Julia Stapleton, "Herbert Hensley Henson, J. N. Figgis and the Archbishops' Committee on Church and State: Two Competing Visions of the Church of England," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 73, no. 4 (2022): 814–36.

<sup>32</sup> *Memoirs of Archbishop Temple*, ed. Ernest Grey Sandford (London, 1906), 2: 668–69.

<sup>33</sup> *Church and State Report*, 61–62, 76, with draft constitution, 77–90. The final text of the constitution was contained in "Address Submitted to His Majesty by the Convocations of Canterbury and York Touching the Constitution of the Proposed National Assembly of the Church of England," 27 May 1919, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1919, 42:821.

<sup>34</sup> *Church and State Report*, 52, 78; reworded by the Representative Church Council for "Address Submitted to His Majesty by the Convocations of Canterbury and York," 3.



secular” business, not with its doctrine and ministry. In this respect, the church would remain “theocratic, not democratic.”<sup>35</sup>

Conferment of statutory powers on the Church Assembly would require a parliamentary act, *enabling* it to legislate. However, according to the committee’s draft enabling bill, once this had been enacted, Parliament’s involvement would shrink to the barest minimum through an elaborate procedure that would insulate the church as far as possible from unwanted political pressures.<sup>36</sup> A legislative committee of the Church Assembly would submit its proposed church measures for scrutiny not by Parliament or government ministers but by a new ecclesiastical committee of the Privy Council. As warrant for this committee’s independence, the draft bill conceded that its members should be chosen for their legal, parliamentary, and official experience, irrespective of their religious attachments. But their role would be limited: the ecclesiastical committee would advise on the effects of proposed church measures for existing laws and the public interest. *Advise* was the crucial word; throughout, the church would retain maximum powers of decision.<sup>37</sup> The legislative and ecclesiastical committees were encouraged to consult, and the ecclesiastical committee would submit its reports only with the legislative committee’s consent; if a report on a particular measure seemed unfavorable, the legislative committee could withdraw it.<sup>38</sup> For Cecil, these provisions for “private negotiations” between the committees were vital: they would maximize the prospects of success for church measures while ensuring that unfavorable reports were handled as “quietly and unobtrusively” as possible, “without shock to the Establishment.”<sup>39</sup> The agreed report and the measure would be submitted directly to the sovereign, subject to being laid before both houses of Parliament for forty days. They would not be communicated officially to the cabinet, notwithstanding the constitutional convention that ministers were responsible for advice to the sovereign; nor would the measure be scrutinized or exposed to amendment by the full houses of Parliament. If neither house passed a critical address against the measure, it would receive royal assent and have “the force and effect of an Act of Parliament.”<sup>40</sup>

Provision for parliamentary inaction was not entirely new—it was borrowed from the procedure for administrative orders by government departments—but its extension to legislation was unprecedented. The purpose was evident: since the 1870s it had been included in several draft church bills as a device for minimizing political difficulties.<sup>41</sup> The Selborne committee’s explicit aim was that Parliament would give

<sup>35</sup> Cecil to Riley, 10 February 1917, LPL, MS 2350/62–3. For Cecil’s churchmanship, see Julia Stapleton, “Ecclesiastical Conservatism: Hensley Henson and Lord Hugh Cecil on Church, State and Nation, c. 1900–40,” in Rodger, Williamson, and Grimley, *Church of England and British Politics*, 80–101.

<sup>36</sup> See Cecil to Walter Phillimore, 23 March 1917, LPL, DP, 255/283–85, for a private statement of the rationale.

<sup>37</sup> For Selborne stating that the committee “might be composed of Dissenters, Jews, Infidels or Churchmen,” while emphasizing its limitation to an advisory function, see “Church and State,” *Church Times*, 3 November 1916.

<sup>38</sup> *Church and State Report*, 58–59, 92–93; “National Assembly of the Church of England (Powers) Bill” [the Enabling Bill], initial text, 13 May 1919, clauses 2–3, LPL, DP, 256/119–20.

<sup>39</sup> Cecil to Wolmer, 17 July 1919, Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.980/88–90.

<sup>40</sup> *Church and State Report*, 93.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Erskine May, *A Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament* (London, 1917), 567; “Prayer Book (Rubrics) Bill,” *Parliamentary Papers*, 1874, 6:122.

“tacit acquiescence without the burden of a discussion,” leaving just a potential veto.<sup>42</sup> Yet even with all these procedural advantages, the church had an escape clause: in the last resort, it could override the ecclesiastical committee. If its report was unfavorable but the church assembly judged that a measure still had some hope of parliamentary success, the assembly could try to have the report overturned by a decision of both the Lords and Commons.<sup>43</sup>

The Selborne committee asserted that this procedure “fully safeguarded” the state’s right to give or withhold consent to church measures.<sup>44</sup> This statement was hardly incontrovertible, given the committee’s extraordinary efforts to evade parliamentary scrutiny, debate, and decision. As Podmore noted, “To persuade Parliament to delegate the formulation of statute law to an external body whose composition it did not determine was a remarkable achievement.”<sup>45</sup> How was this done?

### THE PROMOTION OF CHURCH SELF-GOVERNMENT

The passage of the Enabling Act was as complex as most other large political changes. Wolmer’s claims in 1913 of agreement within the church proved to be mistaken, and differences emerged even among supporters of self-government. The Selborne committee’s recommendations had to be promoted and defended in local, regional, and national church assemblies and in the media; constitutional and free church objections had to be addressed, and almost until the end there was no assistance from government or party leaders. This is a rare instance of a constitutional reform achieved by Unionist backbenchers through a private bill. It reveals much about how influence was mobilized within the traditional linkages of church and state, even as the First World War accelerated processes of democratization.

The Selborne recommendations were promoted by several groups, with different purposes, though often working together through associations with overlapping memberships. They included clerical enthusiasts for a modernized and reenergized church, Anglo-Catholic advocates of a return to a (supposed) pre-Reformation ecclesiastical independence, churchwomen wanting greater participation in the church, and ecclesiastical lawyers and officials seeking judicial and administrative reforms. They included a coterie of churchmen-politicians, particularly the interrelated Cecil/Salisbury and Palmer/Selborne families, which provided five members of the Selborne committee,<sup>46</sup> and, in a striking instance of continued aristocratic influence, much of the lay leadership of the Church Assembly during the next four decades.<sup>47</sup> They also included the archbishops and most bishops, although the other groups frequently doubted Davidson’s commitment to the issue.

<sup>42</sup> *Church and State Report*, 60.

<sup>43</sup> *Church and State Report*, 59–60, 92–93; Enabling Bill, 13 May 1919, clauses 3–4, LPL, DP, 256/119–20.

<sup>44</sup> *Church and State Report*, 60.

<sup>45</sup> Podmore, “Self-Government,” 317.

<sup>46</sup> See the well-known derision in H. Hensley Henson, “Church and State in England,” *Edinburgh Review* 222, no. 458 (1916): 209–29, at 213, on the dominance “almost of a single family party,” with an atmosphere “not so much national as domestic.”

<sup>47</sup> Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920–1990* (London, 1991), 63–64, 252–53; David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven, 1990), 487–98.

Misunderstanding of Davidson's attitude generated much of the fractious church politics during 1917 and 1918. It arose because the Selborne report was published in July 1916, a week after the start of the Battle of the Somme. Davidson considered it "impossible" for Parliament to consider a church bill while the nation was preoccupied with the war, and "ridiculous" to expect assistance from wartime coalition governments whose Liberal and Unionist ministers would almost certainly disagree on the issue.<sup>48</sup> Even to raise the issue in such conditions might damage the church. Consequently, Davidson waited and delayed. Not until May 1917 did a meeting of the archbishops and bishops review the Selborne recommendations. Although they declared themselves "generally favourable" toward its "main features," and Davidson stated that "reform on these lines was absolutely essential," they did not commit themselves on specific matters, and they provided no timetable for further action.<sup>49</sup> The Representative Church Council was summoned only in November, simply to appoint a grand committee to consider the recommendations in detail. This committee did not report until October 1918. Nor would the archbishops comment on specific proposals while the church council deliberations proceeded, or publicly associate themselves with any of the groups campaigning for their adoption.<sup>50</sup> Until the armistice in November 1918, the pressure for implementing the report came from elsewhere.

William Temple himself did not claim that Life and Liberty was chiefly responsible for securing the Enabling Act; the credit, he said, was shared by a "triple alliance." This was a curious understatement, even aside from its silence about the archbishops and bishops.<sup>51</sup> The three movements he named—the Church Reform League, Church Self-Government Association, and Life and Liberty—had worked closely with the Church League for Women's Suffrage, and privately he paid handsome tribute to a fifth group, the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Church and State.<sup>52</sup> As the Church Reform League's chairman acidly remarked, Life and Liberty was not the first to campaign for church self-government, nor had it prepared the Enabling Bill or organized the parliamentary debates.<sup>53</sup>

The Church Reform League had been formed in 1895 to seek comprehensive reform of the church's structures and a "church parliament" with legislative powers under the royal supremacy.<sup>54</sup> It published a manifesto ("An appeal to Freedom") and endorsed volumes of essays and sermons, and its meetings were widely reported in both national and church newspapers.<sup>55</sup> It gained support from clergy and laity of

<sup>48</sup> Bell, *Randall Davidson*, 960; Sheppard [Davidson's secretary] to Macmillan, 6 July 1917, LPL, DP, 255/320; Davidson to Temple, 17 July, 7 December 1917, LPL, DP, 346–48, 256/13–14.

<sup>49</sup> "Church Work for Women," *Times*, 28 May 1917; "Convocation," *Church Times*, 6 July 1917.

<sup>50</sup> Bell [Davidson's chaplain] to Wolmer, 9 March 1917, LPL, DP, 255/274; Davidson to Temple, 25 October 1917, LPL, DP, 255/412–15; Bell to Temple, 10 November 1917 (two letters), LPL, DP, 256/3, 4; Davidson to Temple, 28 December 1917, LPL, DP, 256/19–20.

<sup>51</sup> Temple, over-tempted by an allusion to the contemporary triple alliance of leading trade unions, as quoted by W. F. de Winton in "Correspondence," *Church Times*, 21 November 1919.

<sup>52</sup> Temple to Wolmer, 7 November 1919, Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.989/139.

<sup>53</sup> De Winton letter, *Church Times*, 21 November 1919.

<sup>54</sup> See Thompson, *Bureaucracy and Church Reform*, 134–42; Machin, *Politics and the Churches 1869–1921*, 224–25, 231–33.

<sup>55</sup> Church Reform League statements in *Times*, 29 November 1895, 10 August 1896, 14 April and 25 October 1897; *Essays in Aid of the Reform of the Church*, ed. Charles Gore (London, 1898); *Advent Sermons on Church Reform*, [ed. A. Winnington-Ingram] (London, 1898).

all church parties, from diocesan conferences and numerous bishops, and from Unionist and Liberal politicians. With the church parliamentary committee, it promoted a convocations bill, which included a national church assembly. Approved by both convocations, the bill was introduced by the archbishops in the House of Lords in 1901 and again in 1905, only to suffer the same obstructions as other church bills. In these ways, the Church Reform League laid the foundations for self-government; as William Temple later wrote, the convocations bill was “gradually transformed into the Enabling Act of 1919.”<sup>56</sup> But by the 1910s, the league had become a standing reminder of the central problem: how to convert support within the church into votes in Parliament.

The Selborne committee included members of the Church Reform League, and Selborne and Wolmer had been among its vice presidents. From 1916 the League campaigned within the church for adoption of the committee’s report, but as early as October 1915, Wolmer proposed what he evidently intended to be a more politically professional and effective organization.<sup>57</sup> Two months after publication of the Selborne report, he became the founder, honorary secretary, chief funder, and most dynamic leader of the newly formed Church Self-Government Association. Charles Gore, the Anglo-Catholic bishop of Oxford, became president, and Temple was a committee member.<sup>58</sup> The association’s public launch in February 1917 was widely advertised through newspaper agencies, and accompanied by distribution of ten “Church Self Government Papers,” written by Wolmer, Gore, Temple, Cecil, and other members of the Selborne committee.<sup>59</sup> By 1919, the association had support from 399 ruridecanal conferences and chapters, many members of diocesan conferences, and around 500 subscribers, with numerous MPs and peers as patrons.<sup>60</sup> It also had a sophisticated media operation: it collected criticisms of the Selborne report and Enabling Bill to enable systematic and quick rebuttals, a substantial number of them written by Wolmer himself. Davidson was kept informed of the association’s activities and regarded it favorably; his chaplain and biographer described it as an “official” body, in pointed contrast to Life and Liberty.<sup>61</sup>

The Church League for Women’s Suffrage, founded in 1909, suspended its campaign for a female parliamentary franchise at the start of the war.<sup>62</sup> It remained active, however, in organizing services and processions in support of the war effort and, from October 1916, for the church’s wartime “National Mission of Repentance and Hope.”<sup>63</sup> It

<sup>56</sup> William Temple, *Life of Bishop Percival* (London, 1921), 171.

<sup>57</sup> Wolmer memo, 29 October 1915, Bodl., 2nd Earl of Selborne Papers, 89/131–33 (hereafter this collection is cited as 2 Selborne.)

<sup>58</sup> Wolmer to J. H. B. Masterman, 3 August 1916, and minutes of the founding meeting, 19 September 1916, Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.988/23–24, 28.

<sup>59</sup> “Self-Government in the Church,” *Times*, 22 February 1917, and other newspapers on this and later days; Self-Government Papers in LPL, DP, 255/234–69, and also Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.989/256–73.

<sup>60</sup> *Church Self-Government Association Report 1919* (London 1920), in Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.989/250–55.

<sup>61</sup> Bell, *Randall Davidson*, 961.

<sup>62</sup> See Brian Heeney, *The Women’s Movement in the Church of England, 1850–1930* (Oxford, 1988), 105–13; also Robert Saunders, “A Great and Holy War”: Religious Paths to Women’s Suffrage, 1909–1914,” *English Historical Review* 134, no. 571 (2019): 1471–1502.

<sup>63</sup> For this evangelistic campaign, see David M. Thompson, “War, the Nation, and the Kingdom of God: The Origins of the National Mission of Repentance and Hope, 1915–16,” in *The Church and War*, ed. W. J. Sheils (Oxford, 1983), 337–50.

also campaigned for church self-government, and especially for “perfect equality [of women] with laymen in relation to all Church synods, Councils or similar assemblies.”<sup>64</sup> It petitioned the Representative Church Council on the issue in early 1915,<sup>65</sup> obtained discussions on female participation at diocesan conferences, arranged study circles on the Selborne report, and had Wolmer as a regular speaker at its public meetings. Its eventual contribution was precise yet considerable. The Selborne committee had considered itself bound by the existing Representative Church Council constitution, with its house of *laymen* elected on a male franchise.<sup>66</sup> But the archbishops and most bishops sympathized with the league’s appeals for female representation (though not its further aim of female ordination); indeed, Gore and two other bishops were among its committee members. The bishops’ meeting that reviewed the Selborne report in May 1917 publicly expressed “dissatisfaction” with its provision for women and asked for “reconsideration” of the issue within the church.<sup>67</sup> This statement energized the support of large numbers of churchwomen, who were influential not only in parishes and church associations but also in parliamentary constituencies, especially after propertied or graduate women aged over thirty were included in the parliamentary franchise in 1918. Nonetheless, the issue was contentious. The Representative Church Council’s grand committee recommended women’s representation in ruridecanal and diocesan conferences, but it required a vote in the full council in February 1919 to allow women to become members as well as electors of a renamed house of *laity*.<sup>68</sup> These decisions were politically important, given that women had gained qualification for membership of the House of Commons three months earlier. Without these concessions, the Church Assembly’s constitution would probably have been challenged and debated in Parliament, with potentially damaging effects for the Enabling Bill’s prospects. The concessions almost certainly also helped to sustain the considerable voluntary work by churchwomen, which became increasingly valuable during the long decline of church adherence.

The Life and Liberty movement was a late arrival to the cause of church self-government. Formed in February 1917, it aimed initially to influence the continuation of the National Mission, the archbishops’ committees of enquiry on adjusting the Church of England to the postwar world.<sup>69</sup> With Temple as chairman and the ubiquitous Gore as a prominent supporter, it gathered clergy and laymen of “progressive” opinions—notably military chaplains, alarmed at religious indifference among conscripted servicemen—who wanted a “regenerated and rejuvenated” church, able to evangelize the nation and elevate political, social, and economic life. This, it asserted, required removal of the church’s own shortcomings, which disqualified it from effective Christian witness.<sup>70</sup> By July 1917, church self-government had become its main focus, as the prerequisite for wider reforms: if the church was to have new “life,” it

<sup>64</sup> Church League for Women’s Suffrage’s aims, published in its journal *Church Militant*, June 1918, 63.

<sup>65</sup> *Church League for Women’s Suffrage* [predecessor of *Church Militant*], April 1915, n.p.; Heeney, *Women’s Movement in the Church of England*, 108.

<sup>66</sup> *Church and State Report*, 41, 77–79, 81.

<sup>67</sup> Minutes of Bishops’ Meetings, LPL, BM 6/230, 23–26 May 1917; “Church Work for Women,” *Times*, 28 May 1917.

<sup>68</sup> Heeney, *Women’s Movement in the Church of England*, 110–11.

<sup>69</sup> For these committees, see Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (London, 1978), 80–88.

<sup>70</sup> Temple to Davidson, 4 February 1917, and Temple to Bell, 14 February 1917, LPL, DP, 255/220–22, 225–26; Life and Liberty council statement, *Times*, 20 June 1917; Life and Liberty Draft Programme



needed “liberty.” The movement regarded itself as “radical” in two respects. It pressed for self-government “even at the cost, if necessary, of disestablishment,”<sup>71</sup> and it wanted action on the issue “without delay.”<sup>72</sup> The references to disestablishment faded, but the call for immediate action became its distinguishing feature. When in November 1917 the Representative Church Council, instead of immediately endorsing the Selborne report, appointed a grand committee to consider its recommendations, Life and Liberty protested that it was “weary of perpetual deliberation”: “we have waited too long.” From June 1918, it tried to impose a deadline, insisting that an Enabling Bill should be presented to Parliament by Easter.<sup>73</sup> All this exasperated Davidson. He regarded Life and Liberty as duplicating the work of the Church Self-Government Association and the committees of enquiry. Temple claimed to be restraining “explosive” followers, yet refused to accept Davidson’s reassurances; he privately begged for the archbishop’s support while publicly questioning his desire for reform.<sup>74</sup> With Temple working full time for the cause in 1918–19, addressing large numbers of meetings and publishing many newspaper articles and letters, Life and Liberty gained far more publicity than the other advocates of self-government, exceeding its actual effects. It supplemented the existing work of the Church Reform League, Church Self-Government Association, and Church League for Women’s Suffrage in galvanizing support within the church, and to that extent assisted Davidson’s and Wolmer’s work in Parliament. It reinforced the women’s suffrage league calls for greater female participation in the church’s lay assemblies. Its chief success—at the expense of alienating Gore and other Anglo-Catholics—was in pressing for a wider franchise for the church’s lay bodies, with qualification by baptism rather than confirmation in the church.<sup>75</sup> But it failed in its immediate aim: it did not accelerate Davidson’s timetable for the Enabling Bill.

During 1918, the four public campaigns began to cooperate.<sup>76</sup> They drew closer after the publication of the Representative Church Council grand committee’s report in October produced no new commitments for action; Life and Liberty’s impatience now spread to the other movements. A joint deputation to the archbishops demanded a “definite pronouncement” of support for the Selborne report, a meeting that Temple’s biographers present as decisive. Yet Davidson still refused to be pushed.<sup>77</sup> It was another month before he issued a further public statement.

[October 1917], LPL, DP, 255/393–95; Iremonger, *William Temple*, 219–22; Kent, *William Temple*, 73–74, 77–78, 86–87.

<sup>71</sup> Life and Liberty council statement, “Liberty in the Church,” *Times*, 20 June 1917; Temple letter, *Times*, 28 June 1917; Iremonger, *William Temple*, 227–28.

<sup>72</sup> “Church Reform,” *Times*, 17 July 1917; Iremonger, *William Temple*, 233.

<sup>73</sup> Temple to Davidson, 1 June 1918, LPL, DP, 256/37–39. During the following month, Temple went further still, speaking of achieving the full “passage” of the bill by Easter; “Life and Liberty Movement,” *Church Times*, 19 July 1918.

<sup>74</sup> Davidson to Temple, 17 July, 25 October, 7 December 1917, LPL, DP, 255/346–48, 412–15, DP, 256/13–14; though see his model letter of Christian forgiveness in Iremonger, *William Temple*, 250–51.

<sup>75</sup> Iremonger, *William Temple*, 257–60; and for divisions within Life and Liberty, see Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England*, 18–20.

<sup>76</sup> Thompson, *Bureaucracy and Church Reform*, 175; Temple to Davidson, 1 June 1918, LPL, DP, 256/37–39.

<sup>77</sup> Temple and Wolmer to Davidson, 11 October 1918, Iremonger to Davidson, 17 October 1918, and Davidson to Iremonger, 19 October 1918, LPL, DP, 256/42, 44–47, 48–49; Bell, *Randall Davidson*, 966;

This was prompted in part by the Armistice: he had promised to act once the war had ended. But the more pressing reason was political. Parliament was dissolved on 25 November, which brought automatic dissolution of the convocations and Representative Church Council.<sup>78</sup> Now was the time for a decisive intervention, in anticipation of imminent parliamentary and church elections. Two days later, Davidson arranged a public exchange of letters with Selborne, which stated the archbishops' firm support for his committee's report.<sup>79</sup>

Wolmer was well prepared for the parliamentary elections. During autumn 1917, he had organized an all-party joint committee in the Lords and Commons to support the principles of the Selborne report, which by October 1918 included ninety-seven MPs.<sup>80</sup> The Church Self-Government Association sent its literature "systematically" to a further three hundred English MPs, and its secretary, Anne Gilchrist (who was also an activist for the Church League for Women's Suffrage), created an elaborate card-index system for quick communication with the association's twenty thousand members in the constituencies. These efforts enabled most English candidates in the 1918 general election to be canvassed for pledges in favor of church self-government,<sup>81</sup> with the effect that in the new Parliament it had support from hundreds of MPs.<sup>82</sup> By July 1919, a reconstituted Joint Parliamentary Committee on Church and State had a membership of 233 MPs and thirty-six peers, with Wolmer as its effective leader.<sup>83</sup>

There was, though, an early problem: the church's procedures were slow. Only in February 1919 did the Representative Church Council settle the constitution of the Church Assembly, and only in May did the two convocations finalize the addresses for its creation.<sup>84</sup> Wolmer feared that the delay risked "a fizzle and a fiasco," with pledged MPs losing enthusiasm.<sup>85</sup> With characteristic resourcefulness, he improvised ways to sustain their commitment and even to increase parliamentary support. Church newspapers and the Church League for Women's Suffrage journal, *Church Militant*, encouraged readers to ask their MPs if they had joined the parliamentary committee.<sup>86</sup> A joint committee of the Church Self-Government Association,

Davidson, reported in the Henson Journal, 29 October 1918, available on the H. H. Henson Journals website, <http://www.hensonjournals.org>; cf. Iremonger, *William Temple*, 257; Kent, *William Temple*, 93.

<sup>78</sup> Until the Church of England Convocations Act of 1966, the convocations (and therefore, until 1919, the Representative Church Council) were dissolved at the same time as Parliament.

<sup>79</sup> Davidson to Selborne, 27 November 1918, LPL, DP, 256/78–79; Selborne, Davidson, and Lang letters in the *Times*, 5 December 1918.

<sup>80</sup> Notice and minutes, 27 October and 21 November 1917, Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.988/120, 121.

<sup>81</sup> Wolmer to Davidson, 28 October 1918, LPL, DP, 256/60–69; Wolmer to Iremonger, 19 January 1920, and to Frank Partridge, 29 May 1924, Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.990/5–6, 166–67. For instances of vicars seeking pledges, see "Liberty for the Church," *Hampshire Telegraph*, 6 December 1918, and "Self-Government of the Church," *Daily Mail* (Hull), 13 December 1918.

<sup>82</sup> Wolmer to Davidson, 8 January 1919, LPL, DP, 256/82–84, and see a reported three hundred MPs in Henson Journals, 15 February 1919.

<sup>83</sup> Boscawen [chairman] and Wolmer, draft letter to MPs, 10 January 1919, minutes of first meeting, 4 March 1919, and membership list, ca. July 1919, Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.989/2, 33, 301–2.

<sup>84</sup> Wolmer, Selborne, and Cecil were again involved, as advisors to the convocations: see Bell to Lang, and Bell memo, 6 May 1919, LPL, DP, 256/115, 116–17.

<sup>85</sup> Wolmer to Davidson, 8 January 1919, LPL, DP, 256/82–84.

<sup>86</sup> Wolmer to James Penderel-Brodhurst, 15 February 1919, Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.989/19; "The Tasks Ahead of Churchpeople," *Church Militant*, 1 April 1919.

Church Reform League, Church League for Women's Suffrage, and Life and Liberty asked vicars to discuss the Enabling Bill with their parishioners at vestry meetings and sent copies of Davidson's speech to the Representative Church Council as guidance.<sup>87</sup> Wolmer organized a continuing stream of literature to all English MPs, with the four movements taking turns to send leaflets on successive Thursdays. He was again acutely aware that events in Scotland offered a "strategic" advantage, with the legislation to reaffirm the spiritual independence of its established church now in preparation.<sup>88</sup> The Joint Parliamentary Committee circulated an appeal to all Scottish MPs, presenting the Enabling Bill as giving the Church of England a position similar to that of the Church of Scotland, emphasizing that it was not a party issue, and inviting them to attend its meetings.<sup>89</sup> Wolmer himself produced an explanation of the "cause and justification" of the Enabling Bill "for the instruction of MPs & ministers."<sup>90</sup>

### THE CRITICS: CIRCUMVENTION AND ACCOMMODATION

Despite disagreements over the pace of implementing the Selborne report, the promoters of the Enabling Bill in the church and in Parliament were focused and well organized. In contrast, the critics were disparate and disconnected. They were also outmaneuvered, though at the cost of some dilution of the bill's tightly drafted devices for keeping Parliament at a distance.

The most prominent and persistent critic was Hensley Henson, first as dean of Durham and then as bishop of Hereford from 1918. He was a prolific controversialist who commanded wide attention not just on church issues but on public affairs in general, and a trenchant apologist for a "national" church integrated with other English institutions and available for all people, whether or not they worshipped in its churches.<sup>91</sup> For him, the Selborne committee represented an Anglo-Catholic and Cecilian faction intent on removing the state's constraints on sacerdotal and episcopal pretensions. Their scheme would turn the national church into a narrow denomination, cut off from the "mass of ordinary Englishmen" by a separate assembly and an electorate restricted to church members, and it would destroy the prospects for reunion with nonconformist churches. He denied their claims that the Selborne report had widespread support, asserting that the ruridecanal and vestry meetings were ill attended and unrepresentative, and he repudiated on historical and institutional grounds any meaningful comparison between English and Scottish

<sup>87</sup> Wolmer to Davidson, 4 March 1919; *Church Self-Government Association Report, 1919*, Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.989/96–98, 250–55.

<sup>88</sup> Wolmer to secretaries of the Church League for Women's Suffrage, Church Reform League, and Life and Liberty, 10 February 1919, and to Gilchrist, 24 February 1919, Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.989/12–15, 27–28.

<sup>89</sup> Wolmer to Davidson, 28 October 1918, LPL, DP, 256/60–69; "Appeal to Scottish Members," 26 March 1919, Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.989/52–56.

<sup>90</sup> *Explanation of the National Assembly of the Church of England (Powers) Bill* (with handwritten note of authorship and distribution), Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.989/295–300.

<sup>91</sup> Owen Chadwick, *Hensley Henson: A Study in the Fiction between Church and State* (Oxford, 1983); Matthew Grimley, "Herbert Hensley Henson," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/33825>; John Peart-Binns, *Herbert Hensley Henson: A Biography* (Cambridge, 2013).

conditions. The effect of church self-government would be “disestablishment without disendowment.” He was especially critical of Temple and Life and Liberty as “sectarian zealots,” wanting “unfair, irrational and indecent haste.” In contrast to them, he regarded Davidson as acting too hastily; the issue, he argued, was properly a matter for a royal commission, independent of particular church parties and able to consider the full range of national opinions and interests. In York and Canterbury convocations and the Representative Church Council, and in articles, sermons, and long letters in the *Times*, he attacked the Enabling Bill in principle and in detail, with impressive intellectual and verbal dexterity.<sup>92</sup>

Henson was a constant irritant for the bill’s promoters, and he bequeathed lively material for historical commentators.<sup>93</sup> But his argumentative powers were more destructive than constructive, and he was himself controversial: when appointed bishop in December 1917, he was publicly accused of heretical beliefs by Gore, the (Anglo-Catholic) English Church Union, and the Cecilians.<sup>94</sup> Nor, as an instinctive individualist, was he an organizer. He neither sought nor attracted followers, and his potential allies were unfortunate or disappointing. Editorial criticism of the bill by the *Times* could be dismissed as expressions of the eccentric political ambitions of its owner, Lord Northcliffe.<sup>95</sup> The *Daily News* and the *Westminster Gazette* argued that it was delusory for the church to seek independence while preserving the establishment—it could not be “at the same time free and unfree”<sup>96</sup>—but these Liberal newspapers had limited readerships and influence. The Churchmen’s Union, which circulated a statement to all MPs, opposed particular aspects of the Selborne scheme but not its main purposes,<sup>97</sup> and as a body espousing theological modernism, it lacked wide support. Other critics were also more concerned with details than with the principle, or were more opposed to Life and Liberty than the Enabling Bill as such.<sup>98</sup> Bishop Knox of Manchester, who agreed with Henson and was nearly as outspoken, was “generally disliked and distrusted.”<sup>99</sup> Few clerical critics persisted after the Representative Church Council had approved the Church Assembly’s constitution in February 1919. Henson regarded Davidson’s address at this meeting—presenting the Selborne report as a “prosaic” matter of efficiency, draining it of wider

<sup>92</sup> See his publications and speeches on these issues from October 1916 to December 1919, in lists on Henson Journals website; Herbert Hensley Henson, *Retrospect of an Unimportant Life*, 3 vols., (London, 1942–50), 1:303–6; and Stapleton, “Herbert Hensley Henson, J. N. Figgis and the Archbishops’ Committee on Church and State.”

<sup>93</sup> See especially his withering descriptions of Life and Liberty, in, for example, Edward Norman, *Church and Society in England, 1770–1970* (Oxford, 1976), 274–76.

<sup>94</sup> Bell, *Randall Davidson*, chap. 53; Philip Williamson, “Hensley Henson and the Appointment of Bishops: State, Church and Nation in England, 1917–1920 and Beyond,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (forthcoming).

<sup>95</sup> Henson Journals, 10 November 1919.

<sup>96</sup> Editorial, *Daily News*, and C. F. G. Masterman, “The Enabling Bill and Disestablishment,” in *Westminster Gazette*, both 4 June 1919.

<sup>97</sup> “Memorandum of the Council of the Churchmen’s Union,” February 1918, LPL, DP, 255/203; Churchmen’s Union minutes, 23 April and 11 July 1919, and printed letter to MPs, July 1919, LPL, MS 4459/194, 208, 213; “Report of the Archbishops’ Committee,” *Times*, 4 February 1918; “The Enabling Bill,” *Times*, 20 September 1919.

<sup>98</sup> For example, Bishop Wild of Newcastle, and Bishop Nickson of Bristol, letters to the *Times*, 24 June 1919.

<sup>99</sup> Henson Journals, 10 October 1917.

significance—as the “coup de grâce” to further opposition within the church.<sup>100</sup> An open letter in December by church people to the prime minister protesting against the bill’s parliamentary passage had just sixteen signatories, a bathetic number compared with the massed ranks that the Church Self-Government Association had gathered and publicized much earlier.<sup>101</sup>

Henson regarded Parliament as the true lay assembly of the national church, so he did not accept the decisions of the Representative Church Council and the convocations as binding. But he had few useful contacts in the Commons; nor, as he lamented, was he yet sufficiently senior to have a bishop’s place in the Lords.<sup>102</sup> During the Lords’ debates, Knox made a strong speech, and a few other bishops expressed reservations, but they asked only for particular amendments and none voted against the bill.<sup>103</sup> The more considerable opposition came from a different direction, that of constitutional law, and it was here that Henson had his most direct political influence.

Four lord chancellors, past and present, and both Liberal and Unionist, criticized what they considered to be inadequate parliamentary and ministerial oversight in the Enabling Bill’s provisions.<sup>104</sup> Haldane, a former Liberal lord chancellor, became its chief opponent in the Lords, inspired both as a Presbyterian (“full of conviction,” like his “forefathers”) and as a “Liberal constitutionalist.” He was soon “overwhelmed” with encouragement from free churchmen and some Anglican churchmen, supported by other independent Liberal peers.<sup>105</sup> As a Scot as well as a Presbyterian, Haldane needed advice on Church of England matters, and it was Henson, through meetings, letters, copies of his own publications, and provision of church documents, who shaped his general ecclesiastical arguments against the bill.<sup>106</sup> But if the bill could not be defeated outright, Haldane wanted amendments. In this, his source of advice was Sir Lewis Dibdin, a senior ecclesiastical judge and member of the Selborne committee, who in an addendum to its report had registered doubts that Parliament would accept the church’s legislative independence.<sup>107</sup> Haldane’s and Dibdin’s amendments would have undermined the central political purposes of the Enabling Bill: the Church Assembly’s constitution would be brought within statute law, the proposed ecclesiastical committee would be dropped, and church measures would be passed not as administrative orders but as orders of council, a well-established procedure that was supervised by a government minister and required a positive parliamentary vote.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Davidson memo, 2 March 1919, LPL, DP, 13/387–87; Henson Journal, 25 February 1919.

<sup>101</sup> “The Enabling Bill,” *Times*, 9 December 1919.

<sup>102</sup> Henson Journals, 7 May 1919. He joined the Lords on becoming bishop of Durham in 1920.

<sup>103</sup> Knox abstained. Graber, “Reforming Ecclesiastical Self-Government,” 223–33, summarizes the Lords debates.

<sup>104</sup> The four were Haldane, Buckmaster, Finlay, and Birkenhead. Buckmaster did not speak in the House of Lords’ debates, but see Thomas Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, vol. 1, 1916–1925, ed. Keith Middlemas (Oxford, 1969), 86.

<sup>105</sup> Haldane to Mary Haldane, 16, 23, 28 May, 2, 3 June 1919, National Library of Scotland, Haldane Papers, MS 6001/170, 182, 188, MS 6002/1, 3.

<sup>106</sup> Henson Journals, 4–7, 13, 16, 21, 26, 31 May, 10, 16 June 1919.

<sup>107</sup> Dibdin to Haldane, 8 June 1919, copy in LPL, DP, 256/173–77; *Church and State Report*, 291–92; see also Thompson, *Bureaucracy and Church Reform*, 168–69.

<sup>108</sup> “Amendments to be moved in committee by Viscount Haldane,” July 1919, LPL, DP, 256/212–14; Erskine May, *Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usages of Parliament*, 567–68.



Davidson submitted the Enabling Bill to the House of Lords on 13 May 1919, almost three years after the publication of the Selborne report. He handled the critics with great skill, not to say unclerical deviousness. He kept clear of all controversial matters, focused on practicalities, and carefully avoided being “forced into an attitude of opposition, still less angry opposition, towards Haldane etc.”<sup>109</sup> Privately, he exuded friendliness, discussed the issues with Dibdin, and even gave Haldane the impression that he was “unhappy” with the bill and had been bullied into it by “zealots.”<sup>110</sup> However, it was not Haldane’s opposition that Davidson most wanted to placate but that of the government. He did not consult any minister before introducing the bill, because he expected pressure to prevent its even being debated. As Thompson observed, it was Haldane who alerted the government to the bill, and the cabinet’s home affairs committee had to request further information from the archbishop’s office.<sup>111</sup> Even though the committee was also sent Wolmer’s explanation of the bill and the impressive list of its parliamentary supporters, its members, especially the chairman, Herbert Fisher, and other Liberal ministers, were hostile to the bill both in principle and because they considered it far too controversial. Their criticisms included terms that could well have been taken from Henson’s letters in the *Times*. Fisher disliked how it gave the church “all the advantages of disestablishment without any of the disadvantages.” The law officers were disturbed by the proposed ability of church measures to amend or repeal statutes. The current lord chancellor, Birkenhead, privately offered government support for Haldane. Ministers also argued that recent reforms of Parliament’s standing committees would address the church’s complaints about legislative congestion, and tried to deflect the issue by assisting the passage of another church bill, on benefices.<sup>112</sup>

Yet the full cabinet stopped short of outright obstruction. The reason, as Thompson argued, was that ministers expected the bill to fail without their intervention, either by amendments in the Lords that were unacceptable to its sponsors, or by defeat in the Commons. It seemed unnecessary to embarrass or antagonize Unionist peers who normally supported the government but wanted to vote for the bill. Lord Curzon, the government leader in the Lords, persuaded Birkenhead—the government’s chief manager for the bill in the Lords—to change his speech from “strong condemnation” to milder disapproval and a call for amendments, while Lloyd George saw no advantage in the government taking sides between squabbling parts of the church. The government whip was not exercised, allowing its supporters a free vote.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Davidson memo, 6 July 1919, LPL, DP, 13/403–4, 411–14; see also Thompson, “Politics of the Enabling Act,” 388.

<sup>110</sup> Davidson to Haldane, 22 May 1919, Davidson to Dibdin, 13 June 1919, LPL, DP, 256/139, 183; Haldane to Mary Haldane, 23, 24 May, 18, 21 June, 4, 8, 22 July 1919, National Library of Scotland, Haldane Papers, MS 6001/182, 183, MS 6002/12, 16, 37, 41, 60.

<sup>111</sup> Jones, *Whitehall Diary*, 1:86; Thompson, “Politics of the Enabling Act,” 385–86.

<sup>112</sup> Bell to Fisher, with enclosures, 26 May 1919, GT 7349, The National Archives, London, CAB 24/80 (hereafter this repository is abbreviated as TNA); home affairs committee minutes, 28 May, 26 June 1919, TNA, CAB 26/1; Thompson, “Politics of the Enabling Act,” 386–87; law officers’ memo, 2 June 1919, TNA, GT 7387, CAB 24/80/88; Haldane to Mary Haldane, 21 June 1919, National Library of Scotland, Haldane Papers, MS 6002/16.

<sup>113</sup> Cabinet minutes, 30 June 1919, TNA, CAB 23/10/34; Thompson, “Politics of the Enabling Act,” 387; Birkenhead speech, 2 July 1919, *Parliamentary Debates*, Lords, 5th series (1909–) vol. 35, cols. 92–107.

The government's neutrality allowed the second reading of the bill to obtain a large majority of 130 votes to 33, a testimony to the Church Self-Government Association's and Joint Parliamentary Committee's persuasive efforts among peers as well as MPs. With such support, Davidson might have resisted all amendments. But he had to prepare for the next hurdle: the bill might pass the Lords only for the government to deny time for its introduction in the Commons. Accordingly, he was accommodating, in carefully calculated ways. Privately he allowed Haldane to conclude that he "welcomed" his numerous amendments; but in consultation with Selborne and other peers in the Joint Parliamentary Committee,<sup>114</sup> he successfully resisted all of them.

Instead, Davidson accepted two different and less damaging amendments. These were moved by Viscount Finlay, another ex-chancellor and Scottish Presbyterian but also a Unionist whose opinions were more agreeable to the government. The most striking amendment replaced the presumption that church measures approved by the ecclesiastical committee would be enacted unless either house of Parliament exercised a veto. By its terms, both houses would now have to approve an address in favor of each measure: church measures would pass not by parliamentary abstention but by "express sanction" of both the Lords and the Commons, after debates and affirmative votes. Without restoring the ministerial responsibility wanted by Haldane, this procedure strengthened the guarantee of ultimate parliamentary authority, although at the risk of restoring some of the church's exposure to obstruction. The other amendment was nearly as important, in principle as a constitutional safeguard, and in practice as political assurance for other churches and for other organizations and individuals outside the Church of England. The ecclesiastical committee would advise not just on whether a church measure should be passed, but on its nature, legal effect, and expediency, "especially with relation to the constitutional rights of all His Majesty's subjects." Better information would be available for the debates on the parliamentary addresses that would now be needed for each church measure.<sup>115</sup>

Birkenhead declared these amendments sufficient to remove the government's chief objections to the bill, but without giving any indication of whether ministers would allow it to be considered in the Commons.<sup>116</sup> Wolmer was, however, as well prepared for this next stage as he had been for the general election. As the bill proceeded through the Lords, the Church Self-Government Association published a series of "Church Enabling Papers," containing extracts from favorable speeches by peers and bishops and aimed toward particular types of members of Parliament, including Liberals, lawyers, evangelicals, and free churchmen.<sup>117</sup> The association's twenty thousand index cards were again deployed, to ask supporters in the constituencies to remind members of their election pledges to support the bill.<sup>118</sup> Then, on

<sup>114</sup> Haldane to Mary Haldane, 4 July 1919, National Library of Scotland, Haldane Papers, MS 6002/37; Davidson memo, 6 July 1919, LPL, DP, 13/411–12.

<sup>115</sup> Committee proceedings, 10 July 1919, *Parliamentary Debates*, Lords, 5th series (1909–) vol. 35, cols. 466–67, 470–72; Thompson, "Politics of the Enabling Act," 389. Davidson also accepted various verbal amendments.

<sup>116</sup> Birkenhead speech, 10 July 1919, *Parliamentary Debates*, Lords, 5th series (1909–) vol. 35, col. 472.

<sup>117</sup> Samples are in Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.989/67–72.

<sup>118</sup> Wolmer to Partridge, 29 May 1924, Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.990/166–67.

the day after the bill passed through the Lords, Wolmer sent Bonar Law, the leader of both the Commons and the Unionist party, a package of documents: the Selborne report, his own explanatory pamphlet, a statement declaring support from “the vast majority of members of the Church of England,” and, most persuasively, a memorial asking the government to allow time and “facilities” for the bill’s passage, which was signed by 287 English MPs of “all parties and all denominations” and had the sympathy, Wolmer claimed, of “many others.”<sup>119</sup>

Bonar Law was evasive. There was no time before the end of the current parliamentary session, and as the autumn session approached, he insisted that the amount of government business made it impossible to promise any early debate. Davidson and Wolmer feared that the bill was being smothered and that continued delay would erode support among MPs. Davidson now regarded the bill’s success as depending wholly on pressure from Wolmer and his allies.<sup>120</sup> To members of the Church Self-Government Association, Wolmer presented the problem in sectarian terms, of resistance by a Baptist prime minister, a Presbyterian leader of the Commons, and a Roman Catholic chief whip, and declared that the government risked appearing to treat “the National Church with a contempt that would not be suffered by a solitary trade union.”<sup>121</sup> To Davidson, he wrote that if the government really was hostile, he would urge the Joint Parliamentary Committee to enter into wholesale opposition to the government, both in the House of Commons and in by-elections.<sup>122</sup>

This was rhetorical drama; other methods were available. Here Wolmer’s political and social connections were again telling. The government and Unionist chief whip, Lord Edmund Talbot, may have belonged to a different church but he was a friend of the Cecils and Palmers; and with long experience in his post, he was sensitive toward Anglican opinion, especially as some Unionist churchmen-politicians were becoming critics of the government on other issues.<sup>123</sup> Talbot tried in various ways to help the Joint Parliamentary Committee and suggested that a second reading of the bill might be squeezed into a Friday, normally a short and ill-attended sitting. It now turned out that Lloyd George and Bonar Law were not so much anxious about the criticisms of Henson and free churchmen as preoccupied with a transport strike and other problems. They eventually heeded Talbot’s warnings about the strength of feeling among government supporters, and once Birkenhead had confirmed that he had no further legal objections, the cabinet accepted Talbot’s proposal.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Wolmer to Davidson, 1 March 1919, LPL, DP, 256/89–92, and Wolmer to Law, 22 July 1919, Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.989/74–79. The signatories were 216 Unionist, 29 Independent and Coalition Liberals, 16 Labour, and various independent MPs. Wolmer also reminded Bonar Law of his earlier support for church freedom in spiritual matters during the Welsh Church disestablishment debates in 1913.

<sup>120</sup> Bonar Law to Wolmer, 28 July 1919, Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.989/89; Davidson-Wolmer letters, 26 September, 3, 7, 16 October 1919, LPL, DP, 256/232, 233–38, 239, 246; Davidson in Henson Journals, 21, 22 October 1919.

<sup>121</sup> Wolmer, “The Crux,” *Church Self-Government Occasional Report*, Michaelmas 1919, Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.989/105.

<sup>122</sup> Wolmer to Davidson, 3 October 1919, LPL, DP, 256/233–38.

<sup>123</sup> For the Anglican elements among the Unionist critics who eventually brought down the Coalition in 1922, see Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Labour, 1920–1924* (Cambridge, 1971), chaps. 3 and 4.

<sup>124</sup> Wolmer to Davidson, 3, 14, 23, 28 October 1919, Talbot-Wolmer letters (copies), 12, 14 October 1919, LPL, DP, 256/233–38, 240, 241, 243–45, 247–48, 250–52; Talbot to Wolmer, 19 October 1919,

It was in the Commons, not the Lords, that the greatest parliamentary difficulties might have been expected. From letters, articles, and editorials in newspapers, there seemed to be considerable public criticism by free churchmen and Liberals as well as Henson and other Anglican opponents. Numerous provincial free church associations and councils passed hostile resolutions.<sup>125</sup> The Congregational Union, national bodies of various Methodist connexions, the Protestant Dissenting Deputies, the National Free Church Council, and the National Liberal Federation declared their opposition.<sup>126</sup> So, too, in letters to the *Times* as impressive as those of Henson, did the eminent free church theologian P. T. Forsyth, and the revered leader of free church political causes before 1914, John Clifford.<sup>127</sup> The chief anti-church establishment body, the Liberation Society, which had campaigned against the Selborne report during the 1918 general election, circulated a protest to MPs.<sup>128</sup> All argued that as the Enabling Bill excluded “nonconformists” from any influence on the church, the church’s claim to be the national church was being forfeited and the cause of church unity undermined. If the church wanted self-government, it should be disestablished; if it was to remain established and retain its privileges and property, there should be close parliamentary control. Some, including A. T. Guttery, president of the National Free Church Council, alluded to the Anglo-Catholic part in formulating the bill and hinted darkly at “a secret conspiracy against our Protestant faith.”<sup>129</sup> Political nonconformity was, it seemed, poised for another great struggle.

Yet all this was swept aside in the Commons on 7 November. While the government again remained officially neutral and allowed a free vote, Wolmer and the Joint Parliamentary Committee were very active. A three-line whip was circulated to committee members, and a roster was organized to police the divisions, in order to maximize the number of favorable votes.<sup>130</sup> Bonar Law, stating that he was speaking personally and not for the government, was now unexpectedly helpful. In a speech neatly pitched toward doubtful and non-English MPs, he restated a basic criticism of the original bill—“you cannot have a State Church and yet have the absolute freedom which applies to a non-State Church”—before declaring that the Lords’ amendments had produced a “very different” scheme, which provided assurances that the Church of England could be entrusted with a similar degree of self-government to that of the Church of Scotland.<sup>131</sup> All Wolmer’s efforts since

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Wolmer to Williams, 23 October 1919, Birkenhead to Wolmer, 21 November 1919, Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.989/115–16, 118, 177–79; Cabinet minutes and draft minutes, 14, 24 October 1919, TNA, CAB 23/12/15, CAB 23/15/33.

<sup>125</sup> For example, reports in *Nottingham Journal*, 28 May 1919; *Kent and Sussex Courier* and *Northampton Mercury*, 30 May 1919; *Yorkshire Post*, 19 June 1919, 20 October 1919; *Western Daily Express*, 26 June 1919; *Daily Mail* (Hull), 17 July 1919.

<sup>126</sup> Reports in *Times*, 17, 20 June, 3 July, 21 November 1919, and *Manchester Guardian*, 6 June 1919; Free Church Council resolution, 24 June 1919, LPL, DP, 256/196; *Daily Chronicle* (Newcastle), 21 July 1919.

<sup>127</sup> Letters to editor, *Times*, 28 May, 5, 6, 16 June 1919.

<sup>128</sup> Liberation Society, executive committee minutes, 26 July 1916, 25 June 1919, and annual reports, 1917, 1919, 1920, London Metropolitan Archives, A/LIB/011, 023, 024, 031.

<sup>129</sup> “The Enabling Bill,” *Times*, 9 June 1919.

<sup>130</sup> Notice, 5 November 1919, and undated “Whips roster,” 3 Selborne, c.989/135, 291.

<sup>131</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series (1909–81) vol. 120, cols. 1878–81 (7 November 1919).

1913 were now amply rewarded. A motion against the bill was defeated by 304 to just 16 votes.

Like Davidson in the House of Lords, with such an enormous majority, Wolmer and his allies could easily have resisted further amendments to the bill, without fear of government obstruction. Nevertheless, they too committed themselves to give “sympathetic consideration” to amendments during the committee stage.<sup>132</sup> Why were the number of critical MPs so few, and why were further changes conceded?

## TRANSFORMATION OF ECCLESIASTICAL RELATIONS

During the late Victorian and early Edwardian years, the nonconformist churches had been a distinct political force, reenergizing the Liberal party and challenging the status of the Church of England. This movement was sustained in Wales for another decade, given the deep-rooted campaign for disestablishment of the church’s Welsh dioceses. After the 1906 general election, however, political mobilization in England waned. The Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline and the church’s prolonged consideration of prayer book revision stilled, for the time being, alarms over Anglo-Catholic ritualism. The Liberal government’s failure to overturn the religious clauses of the 1902 Education Act and its slowness in addressing other nonconformist grievances created disillusionment not just with the Liberal Party but with party politics in general as a means to fulfil their churches’ institutional purposes. Growing numbers of individual nonconformists transferred their allegiance to the Unionist or Labour parties, and their ministers increasingly distanced their denominations from associations with any parties. By 1914, partisan nonconformity in England was dissolving, while for social and religious reasons, membership of the nonconformist churches began to fall. The First World War had further serious effects, as support for the war effort compromised some of the churches’ traditional values and diluted their dissent, as the war’s human, moral, and spiritual costs overshadowed denominational concerns, as new social and economic pressures redefined politics, and as the Liberal Party splintered.<sup>133</sup> From this perspective, the weak resistance to the Enabling Bill in the Commons seems easy to explain: nonconformists no longer had the will or parliamentary numbers to mount an effective opposition.

Yet there was no simple decline of nonconformity. Many of its leaders remained confident about the prospects for their churches. Since the 1890s, they had sought greater recognition of their constructive participation and numerical weight in national life, expressed in their new self-description as “free” rather than “nonconformist” churches, and in the formation of the National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches, drawing together individuals from the various denominations. Retreat from party politics was a change of strategy, toward pursuing the churches’ religious, moral, and social purposes by other means, while proposals by

<sup>132</sup> Sir Edward Beauchamp and Lord Robert Cecil, in *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series (1909–81) vol. 120, cols. 1822, 1833. (Wolmer, waiting for the committee stages, did not speak.)

<sup>133</sup> Stephen Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics* (London, 1975), chaps. 1–7; David Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics, 1870–1914* (London, 1982); Alan Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform? War, Peace and the English Churches, 1900–1945* (London, 1986), chaps. 1–3.



J. H. Shakespeare, the Baptist Union secretary and National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches president, 1916–17, for a “United Free Church of England” led to further consolidation in the Federal Free Church Council, formed corporately by the denominations in 1919.<sup>134</sup> Nor did Church of England bishops treat nonconformity as a defeated rival; rather, they increasingly regarded the free churches as allies.

From 1906, Davidson aimed to subdue criticisms of the church and preserve its public influence by cooperation with other churches on shared moral and social concerns. In a widening range of joint statements and deputations, free church leaders appeared alongside the archbishops. The war brought the free churches gains as well as losses, including an increase in their public status. Their religious ministry received official endorsement, with the formation of a free church chaplaincy service for the armed forces. Lloyd George’s premiership opened the center of government to free church influences. In consultation with Davidson, the free churches had prominent parts in national days of prayer, publicly endorsed by the king. United intercession and remembrance services, conducted by free church and Anglican clergy together, became common. After the Armistice, the free churches’ part in the war effort was recognized by the accolade of royal attendance at their national thanksgiving service, the first participation of a sovereign in a “nonconformist” act of worship.<sup>135</sup> As W. B. Selbie, a leading Congregationalist and in 1917–18 president of the National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches, wrote, the “negative witness” of the free churches was being superseded by their positive contributions to religious life, and the “dissidence of their dissent” displaced by acceptance of common ground with the Church of England.<sup>136</sup> On the suggestion of J. S. Lidgett, a leading Wesleyan Methodist and a secretary of the National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches, an advisory council of bishops and free church leaders met from 1917 to consider cooperation on a range of religious, social, and educational questions.<sup>137</sup> “Again and again” during the war, Davidson asked to meet free churchmen “for prayer and counsel.”<sup>138</sup> Free church leaders were now at ease in Lambeth Palace.

Above all, the war accelerated Protestant ecumenism. As is well established, this was developed by various international movements and given focus by the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 and plans for a world conference on faith and order.<sup>139</sup> But it also had a strong impetus among English churches.

<sup>134</sup> J. H. Shakespeare, *The Churches at the Cross-Roads: A Study in Church Unity* (London, 1918); E. K. H. Jordan, *Free Church Unity: History of the Free Church Council Movement, 1896–1941* (London, 1956), chaps. 2–3, 7; cf. Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics*, 138, who presents unity schemes as “an indication of weakness.”

<sup>135</sup> Peter Shepherd, *The Making of a Modern Denomination: John Howard Shakespeare and the English Baptists, 1898–1924* (Carlisle, 2001), 93–103; J. H. Thompson, “The Nonconformist Chaplain in the First World War: The Importance of a New Phenomenon,” in *The Clergy in Khaki: New Perspectives on British Army Chaplaincy in the First World War*, ed. Michael Snape and Edward Madigan (Farnham, 2013), 17–39; Philip Williamson, “National Days of Prayer: The Churches, the State and Public Worship in Britain, 1899–1957,” *English Historical Review* 128, no. 531 (2013): 323–66.

<sup>136</sup> W. B. Selbie, “The Problem of the English Free Churches,” in *The War and Unity*, ed. D. H. S. Cranage (Cambridge, 1918), 51–71, at 52.

<sup>137</sup> Alan Turberfield, *John Scott Lidgett* (Peterborough, 2003), 229–31.

<sup>138</sup> Shakespeare, *Churches at the Cross-Roads*, 170.

<sup>139</sup> See esp. Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids, 2009).

Shakespeare presented his proposed United Free Church as a step toward union with the Church of England. A committee of bishops and free church representatives reached agreement in 1916 on “matters of faith” and, during 1918, on proposals for church order: the free churchmen were even prepared to accept a constitutional (elected) form of episcopacy. In January 1919, thirty leading figures from various free church denominations and the National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches joined a similar number of Anglican clergymen in calling for an interchange of pulpits and intercommunion between their churches. Church reunion became the subject of conferences, books, articles, and letters in national newspapers.<sup>140</sup> Some tensions remained: during July 1919, proposals by the bishops for “co-operation in Christian teaching and prayer” were obstructed in Canterbury convocation, and F. B. Meyer, another National Council secretary, publicly complained that free church ministers had no active parts in the national thanksgiving service for the peace treaty.<sup>141</sup> But these incidents were treated as passing irritations, not serious setbacks.

Greater national recognition, closer connections with the state, and developing ecclesiastical cooperation: these, more than any perceived “decline” of their churches, changed the attitudes of leading free churchmen toward the Church of England. Many ceased to consider disestablishment as a useful aim; it continued as a principle but was now regarded as a matter for decision by the Church of England itself, not for free church pressure and government imposition.<sup>142</sup> In these terms, the national church’s proposals for self-government could be welcomed: it was a “vindication” of the free church cause, and created a firmer basis for church unity.<sup>143</sup> But the effect was to divide free church opinion. While denominational and National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches assemblies and some of their leaders persisted with traditional nonconformist opposition to the church’s privileges, a substantial number of free churchmen kept an open mind toward the Selborne report and the Enabling Bill. Lidgett urged free churchmen to give the report “generous and sympathetic consideration.” In the *Times*, Selbie and Shakespeare supported the bill in terms of free church values, with Shakespeare seeking only “reasonable amendment” in order to increase parliamentary control.<sup>144</sup>

Free church opinion was yet another target for Wolmer’s efforts. Even in 1913, when seconding the resolution for what became the Selborne committee, he argued that church independence from Parliament could be made acceptable among the free churches, and shortly afterward he had the experience of carrying a

<sup>140</sup> Turberfield, *John Scott Lidgett*, 239–52; Shakespeare, *Churches at the Cross-Roads*, 166–87; *Documents Bearing on the Problem of Christian Unity and Fellowship, 1916–20*, ed. G. K. A. Bell (London, 1920), 5–14, 54–56, 65–72; *Towards Reunion, Being Contributions to Mutual Understanding by Church of England and Free Church Writers*, ed. Alexander James Carlyle et al. (London, 1919); Arthur Black et al., *Pathways to Christian Unity: A Free Church View* (London, 1919).

<sup>141</sup> *The Chronicle* [. . .] of the Convocation of Canterbury, 1919 (London, 1920), 161–77, 201–22, 465–76, 522–33, 548–64; “The Share of the Free Churches,” *Times*, 2 July 1919. Free church leaders were invited to join the congregation.

<sup>142</sup> For example, Lidgett and Shakespeare in Turberfield, *John Scott Lidgett*, 222, 225, and in Wolmer to Selborne, 27 June 1918, 2 Selborne, 89/236–38.

<sup>143</sup> Selbie, “Problem of the English Free Churches,” 66.

<sup>144</sup> *Free Church Chronicle*, August 1916, and Turberfield, *John Scott Lidgett*, 227–28; “The Enabling Bill” and “Parliament and the Church,” *Times*, 2 June 1919, 3 July 1919.

church bill through the Commons by negotiation with free church MPs.<sup>145</sup> After Lidgett published a favorable review of the Selborne report, they established a friendship that brought Wolmer valuable connections with further free churchmen.<sup>146</sup> With Lidgett's assistance, during 1918 Wolmer organized an informal committee of Anglican and free church MPs on matters of mutual concern. In June, he persuaded Selborne and Cecil to consider proposals from Lidgett and Shakespeare for redrafting the Enabling Bill in ways that would "meet the legitimate concerns of Free Churchmen."<sup>147</sup> These included a parallel procedure for legislation affecting the free churches, and submission of all national church measures to parliamentary debates and votes. Cecil rejected the first as too difficult and the second as destroying half the value of the bill. But Wolmer persisted in seeking "rapprochement," especially as Lidgett and Shakespeare remained "exceedingly helpful" and ready to "do anything in their power to help."<sup>148</sup> Further discussions were eased by Davidson's concession of parliamentary votes on church measures, which drew Meyer's thanks for "greatly" meeting free church objections to the bill.<sup>149</sup>

Wolmer connected Church of England self-government with wider aims. In the *Contemporary Review*, which Lidgett edited, he wrote in November 1916 of a longing to "end the bitternesses" that had divided the church and the free churches, and a hope that both could pursue "their full development with mutual sympathy and regard."<sup>150</sup> These and similar statements during the next three years were partly political calculation, to ease passage of the Enabling Bill and promote a "spirit of charity" toward future church measures. But they also expressed Wolmer's share in the wartime desire for church unity, and his own Christian Conservative idealism: he initiated Davidson's issue of a special prayer during the Commons' debate on the bill, because "none can have taken part in this question without being acutely aware of God's guidance."<sup>151</sup> Accordingly, he was prepared to accept substantial revisions of the bill. He favored Lidgett's and Shakespeare's proposals "as a means of uniting Churchmen and Free Churchmen in a common demand for greater ecclesiastical liberty." He even had "a vision" of including "all the Presbyterians of Scotland in the demand for one composite bill" to expedite legislation for all the churches.<sup>152</sup> This proposal was too ambitious and complicated to be feasible. But once it became clear in October 1919 that the cabinet would not obstruct the Enabling Bill, Wolmer resumed his overtures to free churchmen. He and other members of the Joint Parliamentary Committee undertook "friendly conference" with representatives of a "non-conformist parliamentary committee," and Lidgett and Shakespeare visited the

<sup>145</sup> "Representative Church Council," *Church Times*, 11 July 1913; Bell, *Randall Davidson*, 644–46.

<sup>146</sup> Wolmer to Selborne, 27 June 1918, Bodl., 2 Selborne, 89/236–38; Turberfield, *John Scott Lidgett*, 228. As a leading member of the London County Council, Lidgett had his own sphere of political influence, and contacts with MPs.

<sup>147</sup> Wolmer-Lidgett correspondence, 15–27 February 1918, Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.988/152–61; Wolmer memo, undated, Wolmer to Selborne, 27 June 1918, Selborne-Cecil letters, Bodl., 2 Selborne, 89/227–30.

<sup>148</sup> Wolmer to Selborne, 27 June 1918, and Selborne-Cecil letters, 15, 17 July 1918, Bodl., 2 Selborne, 89/236–38, 243–45, 246–47; Wolmer to Davidson, 28 October 1918, LPL, DP, 256/60–69.

<sup>149</sup> Meyer to Davidson, 11 July 1919, LPL, DP, 6/41.

<sup>150</sup> Wolmer, "The Rights of Citizens and the Rights of the Church," *Contemporary Review*, November 1916, 574–83, at 583.

<sup>151</sup> Wolmer to Davidson, 28 October 1919, LPL, DP, 256/250–52.

<sup>152</sup> Wolmer to Selborne, 27 June 1918, Bodl., 2 Selborne, 89/236–38.

Commons to urge free church MPs not to oppose the bill, on the grounds that it “would greatly aid the spiritual work of the Church.”<sup>153</sup>

Free church MPs<sup>154</sup> divided into three groups. The first supported a critical motion against the bill, moved by Thomas Broad, a retired Congregationalist minister. Its terms were so radical, calling for church disestablishment, that it was probably counterproductive, repelling MPs who were skeptical toward the bill on other grounds. But even Broad spoke of having no “hostile feeling” toward the church, urging voluntary disestablishment as the means to achieve life and liberty. The second group consisted of Wesleyan MPs who had joined the Joint Parliamentary Committee. Sir John Randles, who spoke first against Broad’s motion, contradicted him by declaring that the bill would help the free churches and the cause of true religion. The third group was the majority of the nonconformist parliamentary committee, led by Sir Ryland Adkins, a member of the Congregational Union executive. After discussions with Wolmer and his allies, this committee decided not to oppose the bill in principle but to seek amendments in committee,<sup>155</sup> resulting in Adkins and several others voting against Broad’s motion and for the second reading. Even Lloyd George voted in favor of the bill, evidently calculating from the free church divisions that a gesture toward the government’s Unionist supporters would not seriously damage his reputation as a champion of the free churches.

Wolmer’s negotiations with the nonconformist committee were not entirely smooth. It was annoyed that the Speaker upheld the Selborne committee’s exclusion of the church assembly’s constitution from the bill. Adkins described the proposed inability of Parliament to amend church measures as “outrageous and intolerable” and moved unsuccessfully for scrutiny of the bill by a committee of the whole house, which might have increased support for changes in its terms.<sup>156</sup> Instead, the bill went to a standing committee, where once again Wolmer’s management was meticulous. A list of its seventy-four members survives in his papers, marked as “hostile,” “doubtful” (to be “tackled”), and “favourable” (either “stalwarts” or “requires whipping”).<sup>157</sup> These “favourable” MPs defeated two free church amendments, which would have precluded the application of church measures to burials, marriage, divorce, and existing rights of parishioners.<sup>158</sup> Otherwise, the proceedings were harmonious. Wolmer was “very anxious” to achieve a compromise, and Lidgett and Shakespeare had advised him on how “to make amendments in the Bill to meet

<sup>153</sup> “The Enabling Bill” and “Our London Correspondence,” *Manchester Guardian*, 4, 8 November 1919; Adkins in *Commons Debates*, vol. 120, col. 1861 (7 November 1919); Sir Howell Davies to Wolmer, 15 December 1919, Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.989/238.

<sup>154</sup> See Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics*, 151, for these MPs, now numbering eighty-eight with a majority (fifty-nine) consisting of general supporters of the government, mostly as Coalition Liberals.

<sup>155</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series (1909–81) vol. 120, cols. 1823–32 (Broad), 1839–43 (Randles), 1858–64 (Adkins).

<sup>156</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series (1909–81) cols. 1823, 1860, 1864, 1896–97.

<sup>157</sup> Undated note in Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.989/289–90.

<sup>158</sup> *Report from Standing Committee E on the National Assembly of the Church of England (Powers) Bill*, 26 November 1919, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1919 (215) 5:609, 10; *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series (1909–81) vol. 122, cols. 862–64 (5 December 1919).

the fears” of the nonconformist committee.<sup>159</sup> His main problem was elsewhere, in persuading Cecil, Selborne, and Davidson to accept the amendments most wanted by the committee, as “increased guarantees” that the Church Assembly’s powers could not be “abused.” Wolmer prevailed, partly by arguing that these amendments would make little practical difference, as it would always be prudent for the assembly to be sensitive toward interests outside the church, but chiefly by appeals to longer-term ecclesiastical and political strategies: it was important “to conciliate moderate Non-conformist opinion in the country.”<sup>160</sup>

As tokens of their goodwill, the bill’s managers themselves proposed the chief concessions. On Cecil’s and Wolmer’s motion, a parliamentary check was introduced against different and perhaps controversial subjects being bundled together in one church measure. Wolmer moved the most important amendment, which gave Parliament a still greater part: the ecclesiastical committee became a committee not of the Privy Council but of the Lords and Commons, with fifteen members from each house selected by the lord chancellor and the speaker. The unstated effect was that free church and other non-Anglican MPs and peers might now participate in the scrutiny of church measures. In further gestures toward parliamentary oversight, it was also agreed that the ecclesiastical committee should report not to the king but to the Lords and Commons, and that the Enabling Act could not be used to amend its own provisions.<sup>161</sup>

During the report stage, the nonconformist committee tried to obtain still further safeguards for those outside the Church of England, but it did so without ill feelings. The bill was finally passed on 5 December amid mutual statements of friendliness and congratulation. Wolmer’s closing words summarized the motives of both the churchmen and free churchmen responsible for the final negotiations: he hoped that “we have now inaugurated a new era of Christian co-operation in this country.”<sup>162</sup>

## THE LEGACY

The Enabling Act and the Church Assembly’s constitution had similarities with other constitutional, institutional, and ecclesiastical changes of the 1910s and early 1920s. They were instances of parliamentary devolution, like the Government of Ireland acts, though on a functional rather than territorial basis. The Church Assembly’s house of laity was shaped by the same social shifts that produced the Representation of the People Act and the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act in 1918, and the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919. Ecclesiastical self-government now became general, and if the Church of England did not secure the same spiritual independence as that recognized by the Church of Scotland Act of 1921, it did not have self-government imposed upon it by disestablishment, as the Church in Wales did in

<sup>159</sup> Wolmer to Birkenhead, 21 November 1919, Wolmer to Lidgett, 24 [December; incorrectly dated and filed as September] 1919, Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.989/180–84, 100.

<sup>160</sup> Wolmer, “Nunc Dimittis,” in *Church Self-Government Occasional Report*, January 1920, 3 Selborne, c.990/61; Salisbury to Wolmer, 22 and 28 November 1919, 3 Selborne, d.45/25–27, 30–32; Wolmer-Cecil letters, 21, 28 November 1919, 3 Selborne, c.980/91–93, 94–95; Wolmer-Davidson letters, 27, 28 November 1919, LPL, DP, 256/278, 279.

<sup>161</sup> *Report from Standing Committee E*, 6, 8, 10–11.

<sup>162</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 5th series (1909–81) vol. 122, cols. 865–66.



1920. Although it was not among the original intentions of the architects of the Enabling Act, the English Church establishment had been adjusted to more democratic and secularized conditions in national life. It preserved a position from which it gradually gained new forms of national relevance, through leadership among British churches, by the terms of the Education Act and the welfare state in the 1940s and, from the 1970s, in a function of easing interfaith relations.<sup>163</sup> The Enabling Act had a long legacy.

For most purposes, the act produced a “vast improvement” in the church’s legislative machinery,<sup>164</sup> allowing it to undertake much-needed administrative and financial reforms. From 1920 to 1939, seventy-six church measures passed into law, averaging four a year, compared to an average of one church bill a year in the three decades before 1914. This steady flow of church measures and the act’s elaborate procedure had the effect of magnifying the intended outcome. Many peers and MPs, particularly those who were neither English nor Anglican or who had no religious attachments, were uncertain what was expected of them, given the earlier scrutinies by the ecclesiastical committee and their own inability to move amendments. Embarrassment or indifference meant that the larger role that had been conceded to Parliament made little difference in practice. With very few exceptions, passage of church measures became a formality, resulting from the 1940s in a withering of the residual parliamentary control.<sup>165</sup> In these respects, church self-government was indeed compatible with church establishment. The act remains in force, adjusted in 1969 by the reconstitution of the Church Assembly as the General Synod, with further devolved powers.

Yet the Enabling Act did not enable another purpose, church independence in matters of worship. Not the least of its promoters’ successes had been avoidance of this issue; their own silence was matched by parliamentary confidence in or indifference toward the church’s deliberations on prayer book revision. The church’s clerical and lay leaders expected that the new parliamentary procedure and respect for the principle of self-government would ensure that the revisions would be confirmed without much difficulty. But they had not reckoned on how allowances for liturgical flexibility would connect with the visceral sensitivities of large numbers of Protestant and non-religious laymen toward Roman Catholicism, and their ingrained historical understandings about national identity. Amid enormous public attention, church measures to authorize the revised prayer book were twice defeated in the House of Commons in 1927 and 1928.

John Maiden has explained the main reasons for these defeats: an uprising of British Protestant opinion against what critics considered to be Romish practices, with the decisive votes supplied by MPs who were neither English nor Anglican.<sup>166</sup> But further observations can be made from the perspective of the Enabling Act. First,

<sup>163</sup> See Loss, “Institutional Afterlife”; Daniel S. Loss, “The Church of England, Minority Religions and the Making of Communal Pluralism,” in Rodger, Williamson, and Grimley, *Church of England and British Politics*, 298–315; Williamson, “Archbishops and Monarchy.”

<sup>164</sup> *Church and State: Report of the Archbishops’ Commission on the Relations between Church and State*, 2 vols. (London, 1935), 1:34.

<sup>165</sup> Peter Webster, “Parliament and the Law of the Church of England,” in Rodger, Williamson, and Grimley, *Church of England and British Politics*, 181–98.

<sup>166</sup> John Maiden, *National Religion and the Prayer Book Crisis, 1927–1928* (Woodbridge, 2009).

in this case, the new legislative procedure hindered rather than helped. The need for Church Assembly approval for the details of the revised prayer book delayed its submission by several years and resulted in more accommodations of Anglo-Catholic opinion.<sup>167</sup> Given the large number of critical MPs, the revision would have been as vulnerable under the original scheme of a *possible* parliamentary vote as it was under the amended procedure of a *required* vote. But the provision of just a blunt vote for or against church measures, which had been designed to ease their passage, in practice assisted determined and numerous opponents: without the possibility of amendments, less committed opponents could not be mollified by parliamentary compromises. Second, in contrast to the passage of the Enabling Bill, there was poor political management. The expectation of parliamentary success had deleterious effects. Davidson was reluctant to reassure evangelical Anglicans and free churchmen with guarantees of tight episcopal oversight.<sup>168</sup> Wolmer noticed during 1924 a failure “to organize and marshal Church influence” in the Commons as compared to his own efforts in 1918–19 and feared that this would imperil the chances for liturgical revision.<sup>169</sup> The shortcomings remained three years later. Supporters of the measure did form a League of Loyalty and Order and circulated a whip to MPs, but they were slower to act and less well organized than their opponents.<sup>170</sup> Wolmer contributed to newspaper and pamphlet debates, but nothing was created comparable to the Church Self-Government Association or the Joint Parliamentary Committee. Scottish MPs were not neutralized as they had been in 1919. Although free church leaders were again divided, Lidgett and others who favored the measure were not recruited as allies and advisors for influencing free church members of Parliament.

The discussions of English bishops with free churchmen from 1916 to 1919 were important precursors of the ecumenical Appeal to all Christian People by the Lambeth Conference in 1920.<sup>171</sup> But the subsequent conversations on reunion of their churches faltered in 1925, and the political cooperation promoted by Wolmer was insufficient to assist the prayer book measure. Nevertheless, a permanent improvement in ecclesiastical relations had been achieved. As Matthew Grimley has observed, the free churches did not treat the crisis over the prayer book, any more than the debates over the Enabling Bill, as an opportunity to revive calls for disestablishment. Instead, they now regarded themselves as allies of the Church of England in a shared defense of Christian values.<sup>172</sup>

Nor did parliamentary defeat of the revised prayer book provoke a disestablishment movement within the Church of England. Bishop Henson, paradoxically as it seemed for a once-committed establishmentarian, was the only prominent

<sup>167</sup> Bell, *Randall Davidson*, 1327–36.

<sup>168</sup> Bell, *Randall Davidson*, 1336–39, 1341–42, 1357; “Free Churches and the Prayer-Book,” *Times*, 21 September 1927, Carnegie Simpson letter, *Times*, 17 October 1927; A. E. Garvie letter, *Times*, 12 December 1927.

<sup>169</sup> Wolmer to Partridge, 29 May 1924, Bodl., 3 Selborne, c.990/166–67.

<sup>170</sup> Maiden, *National Religion*, 46, 141–42; “The Lords’ Vote,” *Times*, 15 December 1927.

<sup>171</sup> This element is often overlooked in studies of the appeal, but see David Thompson, “The Unity of the Church in Twentieth-Century England: Pleasing Dream or Common Calling?” in *Unity and Diversity in the Church*, ed. R. N. Swanson (Oxford, 1996), 514–20.

<sup>172</sup> Grimley, *Citizenship, Community*, 161–62.

churchman to apply such inexorable logic.<sup>173</sup> Instead, other devices were sought to square church establishment with spiritual independence. The archbishops took a stand on what they claimed to be the church's "inalienable right" to determine its own worship and publicly permitted the use of the revised prayer book<sup>174</sup>—and were able to do so with impunity, as critics of the revision were not so uncharitable as to raise legal objections. But illegality was hardly satisfactory for an established church. Wolmer now started a new campaign for independence on the model of the Church of Scotland, merging the Church Reform League and the residual Church Self-Government Association into a Church Self-Government League.<sup>175</sup> Archbishops Lang and Temple appointed another enquiry on church and state relations, which in 1935 proposed yet another alternative procedure, for securing "spiritual measures" by authority of the royal supremacy alone, without parliamentary participation.<sup>176</sup> But then and for many years thereafter, the church and Parliament both had other pressing business and more immediate priorities. It took another four decades before the intentions of the Enabling Act were fully realized, in the Worship and Doctrine measure of 1974.<sup>177</sup>

<sup>173</sup> For his reasoning, see S. J. D. Green, "Hensley Henson, the Prayer Book Controversy and the Conservative Case for Disestablishment," in Rodger, Williamson, and Grimley, *Church of England and British Politics*, 102–19.

<sup>174</sup> Bell, *Randall Davidson*, 1347, 1351, 1358–59.

<sup>175</sup> Wolmer, "Church and State," *Times*, 7 January and 9 August 1928; "Church Self-Government," *Times*, 9 February 1929.

<sup>176</sup> *Church and State*, 1:46, 58–64.

<sup>177</sup> For the circumstances and method, see Webster, "Parliament and the Law of the Church of England," 195–97.