

Herbert Hensley Henson, J. N. Figgis and the Archbishops' Committee on Church and State, 1913–1916: Two Competing Visions of the Church of England

by JULIA STAPLETON
Durham University
E-mail: julia.stapleton@durham.ac.uk

This article brings fresh perspective to the Archbishops' Committee on Church and State that sat from 1913 to 1916, emphasising the divisions in the Church that it both reflected and reinforced. The article focuses on the shadow that two competing legacies cast over the committee's appointment and recommendations, and the reception of its report. This is evident in the work of two prominent figures of the early twentieth-century Church: Herbert Hensley Henson (1863–1947) and J. N. Figgis (1866–1919). While Henson appealed to Hooker's legacy in upholding a national Church, Figgis drew on Tractarianism in defending a narrower, denominational ideal.

Until recently, historians—even historians of the Church of England—have shown little interest in the Archbishops' Committee on Church and State that sat from 1913 to 1916 and

Church and State report = *The Archbishops' Committee on Church and State, report, with appendices*, London 1916; DCL = Durham Cathedral Library; HHA = Hatfield House Archives; *JBS* = *Journal of British Studies*; LPL = Lambeth Palace Library; *RCC Proceedings* = *Report of Proceedings of the Representative Church Council*, London 1905–19

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provided momentum for the Church of England Assembly (Powers) Act of 1919, or Enabling Act.¹ However, increasing awareness of the significance of the legislation and of the vicissitudes of its passage through parliament has brought the work of the committee into clearer focus.² Its appointment followed a resolution in the Church's deliberative body – the Representative Church Council – ‘that there is in principle no inconsistency between a national recognition of religion and the spiritual independence of the Church’.³ The spectre of Welsh disestablishment loomed large over the resolution, a long-fought parliamentary battle that culminated in the passage of the Welsh Church Act in September 1914. The committee recommended the creation of a National Church Assembly that would enhance the autonomy of the Church without severing the connection with the state, as in Wales. The Enabling Act conferred powers on the Assembly, established separately by royal prerogative. However, despite appreciation of the importance of the committee in these respects is growing, its wider backdrop in a sharp conflict of ideas within the Church remains obscure.

The conflict was as much political and constitutional as ecclesiastical in nature, influenced especially by the growth of democracy and differing perceptions of the opportunities and challenges it presented to the Church. Crucially, the divisions centred on opposing conceptions of the Church and its membership, its relationship to the state and to other churches, the morality it sought to inculcate, and its place in contemporary national life. As such, the divisions broadly represented the confrontation between two powerful legacies that had shaped the Church's identity. The first owed much to Richard Hooker's sixteenth-century ideal of the identity of Church and commonwealth embodied in its privileged constitutional position. The *quid pro quo* was the Church's accountability to the nation through parliament, and compliance with legislation that only parliament, not the Church, could alter – hence the merely consultative status of the Representative Church Council. Under this Hookerian guise, the Protestant identity of the Church was axiomatic. However, the second legacy, resulting from the more recent Tractarian movement of the nineteenth century, conceived the Church in narrower terms as representing

¹ Exceptions are Anthony Dyson, ‘Little else but name: reflections on four Church and State reports’, in George Moyser (ed.), *Essays on the role of the Church in contemporary British politics*, Edinburgh 1985, 284–9, and Gary W. Graber, ‘Worship, ecclesiastical discipline, and the establishment in the Church of England, 1904–29’, unpubl. PhD diss. Toronto 2007, 136–42.

² Philip Williamson, ‘The Church of England and constitutional reform: the Enabling Act in British politics and English religion, 1913–1928’, *JBS* forthcoming. See also Colin Podmore, ‘Self-government without disestablishment: from the Enabling Act to the General Synod’, *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* xxi (2019), 312–28.

³ *RCC Proceedings*, 4 July 1913, 87.

the interests of the clergy in partnership with an active laity. This reflected the increasing hold on the Church of Anglo-Catholic practices and beliefs, opposed to the constraints of secular authority.

The most prominent custodian of the first legacy in the early twentieth century was Herbert Hensley Henson (1863–1947), who as dean of Durham from 1912 to 1918, bishop of Hereford, 1918 to 1920, and bishop of Durham thereafter until 1939, was both an outstanding churchman of his generation and a leading public figure. Since his ordination in 1887, Henson had upheld vigorously the idea of the Church as a national institution in numerous public forums and in his private journal;⁴ he was also a critic of socialism and its influence within the Church.

Henson has been the subject of two biographies,⁵ and has attracted further scholarly interest. This has centred not only on his liberal theology that famously sparked a crisis in the Church over his appointment to Hereford,⁶ but his apparent *volte-face* over Church Establishment following the rejection of the revised Prayer Book in 1927–8.⁷ However, his embrace of disestablishment at this time was strongly rooted in his earlier opposition to the archbishops' committee and its report, as well as to the Enabling Act.⁸ He was the most vociferous and persistent critic of the committee and the report, stating the case at length in speeches, articles and letters in the press for the Church remaining 'national', in the sense of being available for all, and for the Church continuing to be under parliamentary control to guard against the various dangers of 'clericalism'.

The figurehead of the second legacy was the Anglican priest, historian and political thinker, John Neville Figgis (1866–1919). Historians have recognised Figgis's centrality to the pluralist movement in English political thought, which challenged the theory of state sovereignty and asserted the freedom of groups to grow and develop as 'real' rather than fictitious persons. However, his role in the development of pluralist thought derived from a more fundamental concern to strengthen the 'Catholic' identity of the Church of England, enabling it to preach a 'social', if not

⁴ A digital edition of the journal is being prepared covering the years 1900 to 1939: The journals of Hensley Henson, 1900–39, Bishop Henson papers, Durham Cathedral Library, <<https://community.dur.ac.uk/henson.project>>.

⁵ Owen Chadwick, *Hensley Henson: a study in the friction between Church and State*, Oxford 1983; John S. Peart-Binns, *Herbert Hensley Henson: a biography*, Cambridge, 2013.

⁶ Keith W. Clements, *Lovers of discord: twentieth-century theological controversies in England*, London 1988, ch. iv.

⁷ S. J. D. Green, 'Hensley Henson, the prayer book controversy and the conservative case for disestablishment', in T. Rodger, P. Williamson and M. Grimley (eds), *The Church of England and British politics since 1900*, Woodbridge 2020, 102–18.

⁸ Green recognises the importance of the Enabling Act in shaping Henson's stance on Disestablishment, although only Peart-Binns has underlined the significance of his earlier opposition to the archbishops' committee: *Herbert Hensley Henson*, 76–81.

fully socialist gospel outside of existing Establishment constraints. This and his importance as an intellectual influence on some of the main promoters of the archbishops' committee and the Enabling bill have yet to receive the attention they deserve.⁹

The first section of the article examines the context of this confrontation of ideas in divisions within the Church created by the Tractarian movement of the nineteenth century. It focuses in particular on the divisions that arose from the problem of Church discipline in liturgy and worship, often linked to opposing conceptions of the Church. While the conflict abated with the appointment of the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline in 1904, it revived when revision of the Book of Common Prayer – the main recommendation of the commission's report in 1906 – raised questions on both sides concerning the 'right' of the Church to determine its own affairs. The formation of Henson's ideas on these issues is integral to the analysis. The second section turns to Figgis's use of F. W. Maitland's writings on group personality to strengthen conceptions of the Church's right to autonomy. It also examines Figgis's connections with churchmen who played a prominent role in the establishment and proceedings of the archbishops' committee – often referred to as the Selborne committee after its chairman, the second earl of Selborne – and the interaction of his ideas with other concerns in influencing the tone and recommendations of the report. The third section considers Henson's response to the report, and the religious differences within the Church the report both reflected and amplified. The final section compares Henson's and Figgis's understanding of the Church of England as a 'national' Church in the aftermath of the Enabling Act, and notes the revival of Figgis's conception of pluralism within the Church in recent years.

The Tractarian legacy and Henson's defence of the established Church

In his recent article on the Enabling Act and its long-term effects on the Church, Colin Podmore well situates the legislation within the context of the Oxford or Tractarian movement, the starting-point, also, of the analysis here. With the end of the confessional state in 1828–9 following the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and Catholic Emancipation, a leading aim of the Tractarians was to shift the centre of authority in the Church away from parliament towards the episcopacy, grounded in the principle of

⁹ See, for example, Cecile Laborde, *Pluralist thought and the state in Britain and France, 1900–25*, Basingstoke 2000, and David Nicholls, *The pluralist state: the political ideas of J. N. Figgis and his contemporaries*, Basingstoke 1994. Surprisingly, given its Church-centred perspective, the latter neglects Figgis's influence in church reform.

apostolic succession.¹⁰ They disliked the role of the civil authorities in the 1828–9 legislation and, following Newman's conversion to the Roman Catholic Church in 1845, their High Church successors targeted subsequent legislation and matters of doctrine and worship being decided by the courts, for example, in the Gorham judgement in 1850. The legislation and intervention of the courts was a response to the emergence of what Jeremy Morris has termed 'advanced sacramentalism' in the Church centring on the eucharist, and the increasing importance attached to external symbols as used in the Roman Catholic Church. While this was not associated exclusively with Anglo-Catholicism,¹¹ the latter increasingly dominated the High Church revival, certainly in the eyes of its opponents. As such, Anglo-Catholic 'ritualism' heightened conflict within the Church and between the Church and the wider religious nation, especially leading up to and following the Public Worship Regulation Act of 1874. The passage of the act and the prosecutions under it strengthened the hand of the English Church Union (ECU) formed in 1869 to defend the Tractarian legacy. In 1877 the ECU, under the leadership of Lord Halifax, rejected the authority of ecclesiastical courts in spiritual matters, fuelling the movement towards Church autonomy.¹²

Halifax's prominence within the Church provided the initial focus of Henson's public opposition to the spread of Tractarian influence. Ordained to the diaconate in June 1887 while a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, he spent the first decade of his priesthood as an 'English Catholic' in the sacramentalist tradition of the Church, albeit with increasing ambivalence. Not least, he retained an earlier, lay commitment to Church defence against mounting pressure for disestablishment, particularly in relation to Wales and among Nonconformists and radicals.¹³ His establishment convictions were strengthened on hearing Bishop Lightfoot's sermon at the opening of the Church Congress in Wolverhampton a few months after his ordination. Lightfoot urged the Church to recognise its responsibilities as the spiritual arm of an imperial nation, setting aside other distractions such as church discipline: a reference to the controversy over ritualism. It was, Henson recalled, 'a revelation of the possibilities of Anglicanism' in leading evangelisation worldwide.¹⁴

¹⁰ Podmore, 'Self-government without disestablishment', 312–13.

¹¹ Jeremy Morris, *The High Church revival of the Church of England: arguments and identities*, Leiden 2016, 37, 49, 84.

¹² G. I. T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1869 to 1921*, Oxford 1987, 70–86 at p. 84.

¹³ Peart-Binns, *Herbert Hensley Henson*, 28, 39, 43.

¹⁴ H. H. Henson, 'The Church of England', in H. H. Henson (ed.), *Church problems: a modern view of Anglicanism*, London 1900, 25; J. B. Lightfoot, 'An ensign for the nations', in *Sermons preached on special occasions*, London 1891, 248–65.

Henson took up Lightfoot's challenge at local level in his first appointment as rector of the large working-class parish of Barking in the following year, building upon pride of ancestry among older parishioners to enhance interest in 'the history of the Church and Nation'.¹⁵ He continued this work as incumbent at Ilford Hospital from 1895 to 1900, using the extra time for leisure afforded by the appointment to engage in historical studies of the Church, and at the same time, to combat its widening divisions. These intensified following the introduction of incense in some ritualist churches in 1898, precipitating what Bethany Kilcrease has termed the 'great Church crisis' that engulfed parliament and the Church.¹⁶ The crisis was marked by the disruption of ritualist church services by the Protestant agitator, John Kensit, and his supporters in the influential Church Association and other organisations established to assert the primacy of Protestantism within the Church. They enjoyed the support of a major political figure, Sir William Harcourt, who had been instrumental in the passage of the Public Worship Regulation Act.¹⁷ The archbishop of Canterbury, Frederick Temple, used his first charge to the diocese in October 1898 to assess the legitimacy of Anglo-Catholic practices and doctrines in the wake of this controversy. While giving some ground, for example, in private prayers for the dead, he reaffirmed the Church's prohibition on reservation and upheld the jurisdiction of the civil courts as a necessity, albeit a 'necessary evil'.¹⁸ In response, the principal organ of the English Church Union, *The Church Times*, asserted that 'Catholic minded Churchmen would risk any loss rather than submit to such a yoke.'¹⁹

This defiance prompted Henson to write one of his most forceful apologetics on behalf of a national, established Church, his open letter to Lord Halifax entitled *Cui bono?*, published as a pamphlet in the autumn of 1898. He urged Halifax to issue a declaration endorsing Temple's charge 'as broadly defining the position of the National Church', invoking the 'religious interest of the nation' as the ultimate arbiter of ecclesiastical differences, and the Church of England as the 'principal instrument by means of which Christianity is brought to bear on the National life'. He emphasised further the contrast between the institutional strength of the Church and the low levels of confidence in the clergy among the people.²⁰

¹⁵ H. H. Henson, *Retrospect of an unimportant life*, London 1942, 34.

¹⁶ B. Kilcrease, *The great church crisis and the end of English erastianism, 1898–1906*, Abingdon 2017, 1. ¹⁷ *Ibid.* ch. iv.

¹⁸ F. Temple, *Charge delivered at his first visitation*, London 1898, 28, 38.

¹⁹ *Church Times*, editorial, 14 Oct. 1898, 411.

²⁰ H. H. Henson, *Cui bono?*, 4th edn, London 1898, 48, 17, 27, and his 'The archbishop of Canterbury's charge' (Feb. 1899), in *Cross-bench views of current church questions*, London 1902, 91–104. See also Henson journal, 9 Oct. 1924.

Unsurprisingly, the two main High Church newspapers, not only *The Church Times* but also the more moderate *The Guardian*, dismissed his pleas.²¹ Both took exception to his belief that the Church should serve the English people as a whole, particularly in their existing religious guise, which the newspapers associated with the Kensit agitation. *The Church Times* defended the distance the clergy had taken from the laity, emphasising the importance of leadership to the issue of ‘confidence’. ‘[T]he leader in whom men have confidence is not the one who is in all points like themselves, but the one who is cast in a different mould, whose thoughts they can but half understand.’ In a preface to the fourth edition of the pamphlet, Henson condemned the newspaper’s ‘arrogant, unspiritual tone’.²²

Throughout the ritualist crisis at the turn of the century and in the years between 1913 and 1919, Henson regarded the main Church problem as that of its internal divisions, which parliament alone could bridge. He distrusted ‘clerical assemblies’ as law-making bodies, and was critical of the Church Reform League which had been established in 1895 to campaign for greater powers for the Church to correct abuses itself.²³ This distrust was evident in his response to the report of the royal commission on ecclesiastical discipline in 1906, particularly its recommendation that the Convocations of York and Canterbury secure letters of business from the Crown for revising the Prayer Book. Writing in *The Contemporary Review*, he maintained that the recommendation recalled the canons of 1640 prepared by Convocations that were overwhelmingly High Church in membership, against the predominantly Protestant temper of the country.²⁴

For Henson, at the heart of the Church’s divisions was a shift of power from ancient parishes, represented in a lay capacity by churchwardens, to ‘congregations’, easily mobilised by organisations such as the Church Association and the English Church Union.²⁵ In a sermon of 1910 preached in St Margaret’s, Westminster, where he had served as rector since 1900, he reflected on the meaning of the term ‘the Church’ in the light of this development. ‘The Church’ did not denote a specific church, one of the many offshoots of the ‘Society’ that Christ had established, each claiming to embody the Founder’s intention. It denoted instead His Church, into which was ‘gathered ... all the moral loyalty of mankind, past, present, and future’. This notion of the Church as the

²¹ *Guardian*, editorial, 23 Nov. 1898, 1808; *Church Times*, editorial, 25 Nov. 1898, 617.

²² Henson, *Cui bono?*, p. iv.

²³ Idem, ‘Church reform – I’ (1897), *Cross-bench views*, 7, 9.

²⁴ Idem, ‘Letters of business’, *Contemporary Review* xc (July 1906), 703–22 at pp. 713, 720–1. For analysis of the royal commission’s report see Kilcrease, *The great church crisis*, 156–8.

²⁵ H. H. Henson, ‘Report of the royal commission on ecclesiastical discipline’, *Contemporary Review* xc (Aug. 1906), 241–57 at pp. 244, 255–6.

focus of the ‘spiritual energy’ unleashed by the Incarnation rejected any clear demarcation between clergy and laity; nor did it permit a return to the separation between Church and State as two distinct societies, rivalry between which had led to the breakdown of the medieval system. Quoting Hooker, Henson emphasised that Church and commonwealth were one, belonging to the “self-same people whole and entire”.²⁶

These ideas were deliberately aimed at the modern ‘sacerdotalists’ within the Church led by Charles Gore, bishop of Oxford and a leading Anglo-Catholic active in church reform.²⁷ As in 1640, this faction seemed once again in the ascendant. Against the ‘flock’ theory of the Church rooted in the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments available to all who accepted the call to discipleship, the sacerdotalists upheld the narrower and more exclusive conception of the Church as a ‘little fold’. The distinction informed Henson’s watershed sermon preached in Cambridge in 1901, in which he argued for a union of the Protestant Churches in England, bringing together the Church of England and the Nonconformist denominations.²⁸ A truly national Church had to be capable of full comprehension, that is, of drawing the Nonconformists back into the mainstream of the Church, although a Church shorn of prelacy. Henson continued to berate the Church for its failure to give ground on this issue, including in the report of the archbishops’ committee, in insisting on the need for the episcopal ordination of clergy.

The ‘little fold’ conception of the Church was central to attempts to loosen the connection between Church and State. In an article in 1919, Henson acknowledged other factors at play in this respect. They included delays in Church legislation due to a congested parliamentary timetable, and the presence in the House of Commons of Scottish and Irish representatives with little sympathy for the Church of England. More concerning for him, though, was the increasing influence of what he termed – with evident contempt – ‘theoretical considerations’, or the new, and alien idea of the Church as a denomination, a ‘little fold’. He identified Gore as the chief force behind the promotion of this idea during the meetings of the archbishops’ committee.²⁹ However, as we shall see, he credited Figgis with the language of ‘autonomy’ that resonated in the committee’s report. How had that language been framed, and why?

²⁶ Idem, ‘What is the Church?’, 6 Nov. 1910, in *Ecclesiastica: a triplet of ‘old sermons’*, London 1910, 9, 19.

²⁷ Charles Gore (ed.), *Essays in aid of the reform of the Church*, London 1902.

²⁸ H. H. Henson, ‘An appeal for unity’, in *Godly union and concord: sermons preached mainly in Westminster Abbey in the interest of Christian fraternity*, London 1902, 127–8.

²⁹ Idem, ‘Practical proposals for church reform’, *The Modern Churchman* viii (1919), 481–9 at pp. 482–3.

The influence of Figgis's idea of a 'free' national Church on the establishment and report of the archbishops' committee

Figgis had undergone a complex personal development before his ordination in 1895, first in rejecting the Nonconformity of his early life and later overcoming wider religious doubts to embrace the Anglo-Catholic faith.³⁰

As a history student at Cambridge, he was encouraged to take holy orders by Mandell Creighton, professor of ecclesiastical history and later bishop of Peterborough. At Cambridge, he was influenced by two other leading historians, Lord Acton, regius professor of history, and F. W. Maitland, Downing professor of the laws of England. In an article for *The Guardian* in 1907 on Maitland's death, he paid tribute to all three historians, particularly their 'strong belief in liberty and their perception of the hollowness of much that goes by the name nowadays'. He added that all three, 'two of them without particularly desiring it [Maitland and Acton], have helped, and will help still more in the future, towards a true conception of the place of our Church in regard to Christendom at large, and also in relation to modern democracy'.³¹

This statement outlined the direction in which Figgis had begun to take the work of his mentors, Maitland especially, whose translation of Otto Gierke's *Political thought of the Middle Age* and lively introduction marked a turning point in Figgis's thought. The introduction emphasised the relevance to Britain of some weighty issues at the forefront of legal debate in Germany, highlighting the British state's long-standing denial of personality to groups. While in recent political theory the state had been accorded a 'real will', and even 'the real will', suggesting that its 'personality' was more than simply 'artificial', this had not been extended to other groups.³²

In explaining the continuing difficulty in Britain with the notion of corporate personality, Maitland pointed to the persistence of Roman Law ideas concerning the 'fictitious' nature of groups as representing no more than the sum of their individual parts. At the same time, however, a flourishing group life had developed, some of it of medieval origins, assisted by the law of trusts. The latter had proved a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it had enabled a wealth of associations to exist, mostly outside the boundaries of formal incorporation; on the other, it had hindered engagement with ideas concerning groups and their relation to the state of the kind that had taken place in Germany. Here, Maitland

³⁰ Maurice G. Tucker, *John Neville Figgis: a study*, London 1950, 54–5.

³¹ J. N. Figgis, 'Three Cambridge historians: Creighton, Maitland, and Acton', in his *Churches in the modern state*, London 1913, 230.

³² Otto Gierke, *Political theories of the Middle Age*, trans. F. W. Maitland, Cambridge 1900, p. xi.

impressed upon his readers the importance of Gierke's *Genossenschaftstheorie*, inadequately translated as the law of fellowship. It vested sovereignty in the 'whole organised community', constituted by freely formed associations, rather than in the state, or the 'single part' of it that exercised sovereignty in modern society. Towards the end of the introduction, he came down hard on the theory of sovereignty associated with the nineteenth-century legal philosopher, John Austin, which identified parliament, particularly the democratically elected House of Commons, as the new locus of legal sovereignty. Maitland urged his readers to take seriously the warning of some that, 'in the future the less we say about a supralegal, suprajural plenitude of power concentrated in a single point at Westminster – concentrated in one single organ of an increasingly complex commonwealth – the better for that commonwealth may be the days that are coming'.³³

This statement well captured the spirit of mounting resistance to the authority of the state within the Church and concern for the Church's interests in an increasingly unreliable legislature to which Figgis's writings would soon lend support. Influenced by Maitland, Figgis abandoned his defence of the doctrine of state sovereignty in his earlier work, *The divine right of kings* (1896). There, he had traced the doctrine back to the policy of toleration pursued by the state in establishing its omnipotence following the failure of political absolutism to bring about religious unity in the aftermath of the Reformation. In his *Studies of political thought* published in 1907 and dedicated to Maitland, he positioned himself as a leading critic of the doctrine as both obsolete – like the 'divine right of kings' it replaced – and suspect morally.³⁴ The opposition of the French priest and scholar, Jean Gerson, to papal autocracy in the early fifteenth century combined with the rich, associational polity upheld by the Dutch political thinker Althusius in the aftermath of the Dutch revolt suggested an alternative.³⁵ Their work, deepened by the insights of Maitland and Gierke, led Figgis to believe that it was groups such as Churches, including the Church of England, that were 'real', and the state as the seat of sovereignty in society a mere abstraction. This conviction was to provide ammunition for powerful interests in the Church seeking to transform the Church's relationship to the state.

In October 1905, as rector of the parish of Marnhull in Dorset, Figgis took advantage of the meeting of the annual Church Congress in nearby Weymouth to outline his new conception of the relationship between Church and State.³⁶ He protested against the 'unitary state' that denied

³³ Ibid. p. xliii.

³⁴ For an acute account of this transition in Figgis's thought see David Runciman, *Pluralism and the personality of the state*, Cambridge 1997, 128–34.

³⁵ J. N. Figgis, *Studies of political thought from Gerson to Grotius, 1414–1625*, Cambridge 1907, 179.

³⁶ Ibid. 132–3.

the right of organisations such as Churches to develop in their own way as ‘facts’ of social existence, not as ‘fictions’ created by the state. Against the backdrop of the dissolution of the religious orders in France in 1905, he insisted that the Church should now take a stand on its ‘real rights’ and also the ‘true authority’ it possessed over its members, ‘the moment they become such’.³⁷ He drew the same conclusion from the recent Free Church of Scotland case, in which the House of Lords decided in favour of the minority against the majority who sought reunification with the United Presbyterian Church in a new United Free Church. While an act of parliament reversed the judgement in August 1905, the Roman theory of groups as artificial entities remained intact.

As a magnet for activists within the Church, the Church Congress would have been receptive to Figgis’s paper. A few months later, Figgis sent a copy of his address to Lord Hugh Cecil, later Lord Quickswood, son of the three times prime minister, Lord Salisbury, and leading Conservative politician and church layman, whom he had met at the Congress. In his letter, he impressed upon Cecil the importance of the conceptual issues raised in the paper, not least for the controversy over religious education in Britain in which Cecil had taken an active role.³⁸ He emphasised that the Baptist leader, John Clifford, and other Nonconformist campaigners for the replacement of denominational with ‘undenominational’ education in church schools ‘differed from us about the nature of the State which they wish to be unitary & the source of all right, while we do not’. He urged Cecil to read Maitland’s introduction to Gierke’s *Political theories of the Middle Age*, asserting that ‘undenominationalists quand même and ourselves are divided by a chasm and divided not so much on religious grounds as on a theory of the state which theory (theirs) goes back thro’ Rousseau to Ultramonanism & thence to [the] Roman Empire’.³⁹

Cecil’s response has not been found. However, if it is presumed that he did read Maitland’s introduction, exposure to Figgis’s ideas would have stiffened his resolve to distance the Church from the State. While his primary grounds for doing so were practical, that is, the removal of an obstruction to Church reform,⁴⁰ he was also sensitive to the spiritual dimension, particularly in relation to the issue of marriage following the passage of the Deceased Wife’s Sister Act in 1907.⁴¹ The same is true of Viscount

³⁷ ‘The Rev. J. N. Figgis’, *Church Times*, 13 Oct. 1905, 45.

³⁸ Julia Stapleton, ‘Ecclesiastical conservatism: Hensley Henson and Lord Hugh Cecil on Church, State, and nation, c. 1900–1940’, in Rodger, Williamson and Grimley, *Church of England*, 80–101 at p. 90.

³⁹ J. N. Figgis to Lord Hugh Cecil, 5 Feb. 1906, HHA, ms Quickswood 5, fo. 49r–v.

⁴⁰ Roundell Cecil Palmer, 3rd earl of Selborne, ‘Memories of Lord Quickswood’, *Church Times*, 28 Dec. 1956, 3.

⁴¹ Cecil to Charles Lindley Wood, 2nd Viscount Halifax, 27 July 1908, Borthwick Institute, York, ms Hickleton A4.233.

Wolmer – like Cecil, his uncle, a prominent figure in Unionist politics and among the Church's lay leaders. Wolmer was to have shared a platform with Figgis at the meeting of the Church Congress in October 1914 before it was cancelled at the outbreak of war.⁴²

Clearly, Figgis was keen for his ideas to find influence within the Church, and in this he was not disappointed. A few days before the meeting of the Representative Church Council in July 1913, Wolmer wrote to the archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, urging him to consider proposals for overcoming an impasse in parliament on legislation affecting the Church. A particularly pressing problem was the changing religious composition of the House of Commons, with increased numbers of Nonconformists, Roman Catholics and the religiously indifferent among its membership consequent upon democratic reform. In this context, he reminded Davidson of the resolution tabled by Sir Alfred Cripps, a Unionist MP and chairman of the Canterbury House of Laymen, for the forthcoming council meeting. The resolution, cited earlier, maintained that there was no inconsistency between 'a national recognition of religion and the spiritual independence of the Church'.⁴³ Anxious to prevent the momentum for disestablishment developing further, Wolmer urged Davidson to support the policy of 'establishment cum liberty', emphasising its timeliness in view of the negotiations currently taking place in Scotland for reunification between the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church. Unsurprisingly, Figgis's name was included among those who had approved the proposals.⁴⁴

As well as Cecil, Wolmer was working closely with Halifax, who wrote to Davidson in the same vein and at the same time. He pressed the archbishop to consider ways of appointing a committee comprising 'the right people' that would draft a new constitution for the council acceptable to both public opinion and parliament. It would, he suggested, 'get rid of all these questions of disestablishment and disendowment'. Like Wolmer, he appealed to developments in the Scottish Church as evidence of the timeliness of the proposal. He went further, however, in sending a copy of Figgis's recent collection of sermons, *Anti-Christ*, with his letter, remarking, '[i]t seems to say exactly those things that need saying at the present time'.⁴⁵ The volume included the sermon entitled 'Church and State' that Figgis had preached in St Alban's, Holborn, the previous year at the 'annual festival' of the English Church Union. He had addressed the congregation as churchmen loyal to 'the great England that bore us' and, as Catholics, anxious to remain part of that 'stream of universal life which

⁴² 'The Church Congress', *Church Times*, 10 July 1914, 53.

⁴³ *RCC Proceedings*, 4 July 1913, 87.

⁴⁴ Viscount Wolmer to Cecil, 25 June 1913, LPL, MS Davidson 255, fos 108–13.

⁴⁵ Halifax to Randall Davidson, 24 June 1913, *ibid.* fos 105–6.

flows through the Church of the ages'. As such, he maintained, they were 'doing a service to politics by asserting on the highest plane the doctrine of the inherent, underived, though not uncontrolled, life of societies within the State'.⁴⁶ This was central to his developing conception of the state as a *communitas communitatum*, a community of communities, not inconsistent with the existence of a Church 'by law established', if the Church's independent origins were recognised.⁴⁷

Following the representations of Halifax and Wolmer, Davidson encouraged Wolmer to propose a motion in the council once Cripps's motion had been debated, urging the archbishops to appoint a committee representing the different wings of the Church to consider how the principle of consistency might be given 'practical effect'.⁴⁸ In the private discussions that followed, a rider was added to Cripps's motion, drafted by Cecil,⁴⁹ requesting the archbishops to establish a committee 'to inquire what changes are advisable' to achieve the ideal for the Church that the resolution sought.⁵⁰ Wolmer duly seconded the motion at the council meeting. In Henson's absence, it was passed with only one dissentient, the dean of Canterbury, Henry Wace, a leading Evangelical.⁵¹

It seems clear that the leading figures responsible for the establishment of the committee were aware of Figgis's ideas and had used them to strengthen a wider case for Church autonomy. What of those who became members of the committee? While the evidence is limited, it supports a strong presumption in favour of Figgis's continuing influence.

At the suggestion of Cosmo Lang, archbishop of York, the chairman of the committee was Lord Selborne, Wolmer's father, a prominent church layman and Unionist politician who had served in the administrations of Lord Salisbury and Balfour.⁵² He could not have been unfamiliar with Figgis's work given his son's awareness of its value in church reform. The list of members agreed between the two archbishops and Selborne included Wolmer, Cecil and Edward Wood, Halifax's son;⁵³ all three were Anglo-Catholics broadly in Figgis's mould. Two other prominent Anglo-Catholics were Charles Gore and W. H. Frere, both attached to the Community of the Resurrection, the small Anglican monastery in

⁴⁶ J. N. Figgis, *Anti-Christ: and other sermons*, London 1913, 262.

⁴⁷ *Idem*, *Churches*, 8–9, 80.

⁴⁸ 'Interview at Lambeth with Lord Wolmer on Sunday, June 29th, 1913', LPL, MS Davidson 255, fo. 116.

⁴⁹ Selborne, 'Memories of Lord Quickswood'; for Wolmer's approach to Cripps see Halifax to Davidson, 2 July 1913, LPL, MS Davidson 255, fo. 118r–v.

⁵⁰ *RCC Proceedings*, 4 July 1913, 87.

⁵¹ Henry Wace, 'The Committee on Church and State', *The Record*, 6 Feb. 1914, LPL, MS Davidson 255, fos 106–7.

⁵² Cosmo Lang to Davidson, 30 Aug. 1913, *ibid.* fo. 127r–v.

⁵³ Press notice, published in *The Morning Post*, 30 Jan. 1914, *ibid.* fo. 97.

Mirfield, West Yorkshire, which Figgis had joined in 1907 following his departure from Marnhull. Figgis's influence extended to another member of the committee, the historian and Master of Balliol College, Oxford, A. L. Smith, who contributed one of the historical appendices to the committee's report. Davidson approached Smith following Selborne's request for greater representation of 'liberals in politics' and Evangelicals, in keeping with Davidson's concern that the committee should reflect a broad spectrum of Church opinion.⁵⁴ Smith was currently reviewing the book that marked Figgis's full conversion to pluralism, his *Churches in the modern state*, and in accepting Davidson's invitation he referred specifically to Figgis's book as dealing in 'a very able and interesting way with the committee's general object'.⁵⁵ Although he did not share Figgis's belief that Church and State were now separated by a wide moral and spiritual gulf, he endorsed Figgis's conception of the Church as a corporate body, no more dependent on the state for its existence than other voluntary organisations.⁵⁶

Another 'liberal' was William Temple, rector of St James, Piccadilly, from 1914, and associate of Gore in the Workers' Educational Association and the Christian Social Union, an organisation dedicated to transforming the Church into an instrument of social morality informed by the tenets of Christian Socialism. Temple was to lead the Life and Liberty movement in the Church that pressed for the immediate implementation of the report's recommendations in 1917, a year after its publication. The movement anticipated a newly invigorated Church from this action, one that in turn would transform the nation, socially, politically and economically.⁵⁷ Among its staunch supporters was Figgis.⁵⁸

Selborne readily accepted these and other names, including Douglas Eyre, a lawyer active in the work of Oxford House – the settlement established in Bethnal Green by Keble College, founded by Tractarians;⁵⁹ and Albert Mansbridge – co-founder and secretary of the WEA. Both were *protégés* of Gore, and would have been influenced by the intersection of his ideas with those of Figgis. Ecclesiastical lawyers who had been active in church reform during the previous decade also served on the committee, including Lord Phillimore, Cripps (who became Lord Parmoor in 1914), and Lewis Dibdin, chairman of the Court of Arches, the ecclesiastical court of the province of Canterbury. Francis Chavasse, bishop of

⁵⁴ Selborne to Davidson, 31 Oct. 1913, *ibid.* fo. 140r–v.

⁵⁵ A. L. Smith to Davidson, 7 Jan. 1914, *ibid.* ms Davidson 521, fo. 66.

⁵⁶ A. L. Smith, 'Dr Figgis's Churches in the modern state', *The Commonwealth* xix (Feb. 1914), 53–7; xix (March 1914), 83–7.

⁵⁷ Williamson, 'The Church of England and constitutional reform'.

⁵⁸ D. Newsome, 'The assault on Mammon: Charles Gore and John Neville Figgis', this *JOURNAL* xvii (1966), 227–41 at p. 235.

⁵⁹ Charles Gore to Davidson, 2 Oct. 1913, LPL, ms Davidson 255, fo. 131.

Liverpool, was also a member, a leading Evangelical who – unlike Wace – had supported Cripps’s resolution, although his Figgisian sympathies are unknown. Davidson’s suggestion that Henson be considered for membership appears to have been vetoed by Selborne, despite the importance the archbishop attached to his ‘wide and varied knowledge’ of matters concerning Church and State and to avoiding a sense of grievance, ‘not to him only but to some of those lay folk who give special heed to all he writes’.⁶⁰

In general, the connections between Figgis and members of the archbishops’ committee – both the personal connections through Gore and Frere, and the reading of Figgis’s writings – support Henson’s contention in his review of the report for *The Edinburgh Review* that *Churches* provided its ‘theoretical substructure’.⁶¹ It is not known who drafted the report as no records exist of the committee’s proceedings during the twenty-three days on which it met, or even of attendees at its meetings; this strengthened Henson’s suspicion that those outside the ‘sacerdotal party’ had played a marginal role.⁶² Nevertheless, there are clear parallels between the two publications that deserve emphasis in understanding the direction the Church was to take following the report’s publication.

Turning first to Figgis’s *Churches*, its starting-point was a robust attack on Austin’s ‘theoretic’ understanding of the state as heir to papal, imperial and Hobbesian conceptions of the unlimited power of the sovereign. Against Austin’s associated conception of the dependence of corporations for their existence on a ‘grant or concession of the State, tacit if not express, which may be given or withheld’, he asserted their independence.⁶³ This was through a general claim about the nature of corporate bodies as embodying ‘real personality’, together with a critique of industrial capitalism to which he believed the ascendancy of the ‘Leviathan state’ was indebted in sanctifying ‘oppression’.⁶⁴ In emphasising the failure of Austin’s conception of the state to reflect the ‘facts’ of social life, Figgis sought to detach churchmanship from citizenship in a new, self-limiting polity of Church and State as each a *societas perfectas*.⁶⁵ This would enable the Church to preach the Christian condemnation of materialism in full.⁶⁶

Accordingly, Figgis rejected the charge he explicitly associated with Henson that a sectarian Church of the kind he openly advocated was the

⁶⁰ Davidson to Selborne, 19 Nov. 1913, *ibid.* fo. 155.

⁶¹ H. H. Henson, ‘Church and State in England’, *Edinburgh Review* ccxxiv (1916), 209–29 at p. 218.

⁶² *Church and state report*, 1; Henson, ‘Church and State’, 213.

⁶³ Figgis, *Churches*, 60, 79.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 57. For Figgis’s opposition to capitalism see A. Wilkinson, ‘John Neville Figgis and Christian Socialism’, *Journal of the United Reformed Church Society* vii (2002), 19–27 at p. 23, and Newsome, ‘The assault on Mammon’, 232, 237.

⁶⁵ Figgis, *Churches*, 68–9, 109.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 128.

‘evil fruit of High Churchmanship’.⁶⁷ It was instead the outcome of toleration, now – it appears – the nemesis rather than basis of state sovereignty. The ‘fire of criticism’ lit by the competition of faiths ‘purges out the weaklings’, intensifying the religious life of those who remained.⁶⁸ Targeting the attack on the creeds associated with Henson and other liberal churchmen in the early twentieth century, he dismissed the Hookerian vision of the Church they sought to strengthen as a result: ‘We cannot escape sectarianism even by sacrificing the creeds; still less by attempting a wholly unreal identification of the Church with the nation, an identification which had ceased to represent all the facts even in the time of Hooker, and has been becoming less true ever since.’⁶⁹

This insistence on the sectarianism of the Church and denominational competition as the realities of modern religious life clearly baffled more orthodox Tractarians, for whom a sectarian Church was anathema. *The Guardian* carried a critical review of *Churches*, emphasising the book’s strong savour of Nonconformity in this respect. Gently, but defiantly, the reviewer declared his faith in the capacity of ‘the Providentially guided genius of our national English Church’ to solve the ‘age-long problem of the Church and the State’, and to draw its Nonconformist brethren back into the fold.⁷⁰

Figgis’s Nonconformist past certainly defined the central issue of the book: that of corporate freedom for churches, particularly the freedom to determine the nature and level of Christian commitment required for membership. Did churches exist ‘by some inward living force, with powers of self-development like a person’? Or were they instead ‘mere aggregate[s], fortuitous concourse[s] of ecclesiastical atoms, treated it may be as one for purposes of convenience, but with no real claim to a mind or will of [their] own, except so far as the civil power sees good to invest [them] for the nonce with a fiction of unity’?⁷¹ Figgis drew this distinction with reference to the decision of the courts in the Free Church of Scotland case. However, the Selborne committee justified the changes it sought in analogous terms, asserting the Church of England’s claim to an independent existence as a body that represented more than simply the sum of its institutional parts, and regardless of its ‘national’ obligations.

For example, the committee’s report was at pains to ensure that the elected parochial church councils it recommended were ‘living realities’, their members ‘really represent[ing] the feelings and wishes of the mass of the Church laity’, in order to make good the committee’s claim for the liberty of the Church.⁷² To this end, the committee endorsed the recommendation of another church committee chaired by Chancellor Philip

⁶⁷ Ibid. 132.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 118–19, 132.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 133.

⁷⁰ [Anon.], ‘Catholic Nonconformity’, *Guardian*, 30 Jan. 1914, 135–6 at p. 136.

⁷¹ Figgis, *Churches*, 40.

⁷² *Church and state report*, 43.

Smith, as approved at the meeting of the Representative Church Council in July 1914,⁷³ that confirmants, not merely communicants, should be included in the Church franchise.⁷⁴ In practice, the confirmant franchise would be exercised largely by communicants. However, as Frederick Chavasse – who favoured the wider, baptismal franchise – informed Henson in 1917, the committee ‘did not go into the franchise’; instead, its members were free to take their own view when the question was discussed in the council following publication of the report.⁷⁵ Clearly, even the carefully selected Selborne committee failed to agree on this issue.

Figgis’s thought was also consistent with the report’s concern to retain the Church’s ‘national character’, although in a much more attenuated form than existed at present. Under its recommendations, a veto over ‘measures’ passed by the proposed new Assembly within forty days of being tabled in parliament would be substituted for the latter’s normal powers of amendment. The report conceded the necessity of this provision because ‘the Church of England does not represent the mind of the English people as fully as the Established Church of Scotland represents the mind of Scotland’.⁷⁶ However, its author(s) played down the significance of the veto, denying that it entailed any ‘sacrifice of spiritual independence’ and maintaining that ‘in the last resort, the Church may, at the cost of disestablishment, assert its inherent rights’.⁷⁷ Gore echoed this ominous note in his memorandum on ‘the fundamental idea of the spiritual independence of the Church’.⁷⁸

Henson was certainly correct in emphasising the report’s Figgisian tone. Figgis provided the language and the ideas that brought together the different levels at which the Church had been seeking greater autonomy since the 1880s: legal, spiritual and administrative. However, it is important to understand the basis of Henson’s determination to resist Figgis’s influence in the Church amid receding public interest in ecclesiastical questions and the distractions of war.⁷⁹ What lay behind it?

Henson and the threat of the committee’s report to the Church’s Protestant identity

Primarily, Henson sought to emphasise the effect of Figgis’s work in reinforcing widespread denial within the Church of its Protestant character. This, he maintained, explained the growing internal hostility to the

⁷³ ‘Representative Church Council’, *Church Times*, 17 July 1914, 87.

⁷⁴ *Church and state report*, 41.

⁷⁵ Henson journal, 13 Oct. 1917.

⁷⁶ *Church and state report*, 49.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 48.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 248.

⁷⁹ H. H. Henson to John Boden-Worsley, 26 Aug. 1916, Westminster Abbey Manuscripts, MS 67056, fo. 15.

Church as national in its only meaningful sense, that is, as subject to *full* parliamentary authority and the royal supremacy that followed from it. Fundamentally, resistance to the Reformation was based on misunderstanding the conflict between Church and State in the late Middle Ages, not between ‘temporality’ and ‘spirituality’, but between the clerical order and lay rulers as the former asserted its independence from the latter. Moreover, the ‘clerus’ – that is, the clergy and members of the religious orders whom he assumed to have given their allegiance to the international papacy – was ‘non-national, and potentially anti-national’. He maintained that the conflict was resolved only through Henry VIII’s creation of a national Church that was ‘spiritually independent’ from the Church of Rome. However, this change was political only, and logically separate from the religious change that took place in 1549 with the abolition of the mass. For Henson, it was crucial that the uniqueness of the experience of two stages of the Reformation in England was fully appreciated, resulting in a Protestant and national religion that was ‘modern’ in doctrine while remaining ‘medieval’ in its hierarchical system of episcopal control.⁸⁰

The appointment of the archbishops’ committee and the publication of the report intensified Henson’s interest in the religious conflict that had followed the death of Henry VIII, particularly as expressed in the Book of Common Prayer of 1549 and its successive revisions in 1552 and 1559. Among other works, he read the letters of Matthew Parker, archbishop of Canterbury at the time of the Elizabethan settlement, and the tracts at the centre of the controversy between Bishop Jewel, who defended the settlement, and Bishop Harding, whose sympathies lay with the old religion. He sought insight into the efforts that were made by Elizabethan divines to prevent a resurgence of Roman Catholic influence and to ensure – in Parker’s words – that the ‘Royal Will stabilised by Law and Injunction’ prevailed.⁸¹ For Henson, the royal supremacy had (and continued to have) real meaning, as a guarantee of the national character of the Church and its sensitivity to the laity, and as a check on the clergy.

In his review of the Selborne committee’s report, he noted the evasion of the term ‘Protestant Reformed Religion’, even in the passage on the coronation oath, in which the phrase had been a statutory requirement since 1689.⁸² This suggested to him a desire to return to aspects of the medieval Church, not least under Figgis’s influence. He made much of Figgis’s conception of the Church as a corporation, no different from other Churches and from secular organisations such as colleges, trade unions, companies and clubs. All shared ‘an “inherent original power of self-development acting as a person with a mind and will of its own”’. ‘On this view’, he maintained scornfully, ‘ordination vows and clerical subscriptions [that is, to the

⁸⁰ Henson, ‘Church and State’, 216–18.

⁸¹ Henson journal, 13 Dec. 1915.

⁸² *Church and state report*, 26; Henson, ‘Church and State’, 218.

Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church] might be cast aside, and the position of the clergyman made clear to himself and the world by a single and simple pledge in the terms of *fides carbonarii!* In contrast, on Figgis's own admission the state "restrains" and "controls" corporations, and therefore it mattered little whether they owed their existence to spontaneous growth or to the state's concession.⁸³

More widely, the report's evasiveness concerning the Protestant nature of the Church attested to the damaging legacy of the Tractarian movement in dividing the Church, which the report also failed to acknowledge.⁸⁴ He identified Gore especially with this 'neo-Tractarian' bias in the Church. In a letter to James Bryce, he compared Gore to Thomas Chalmers, the Scottish Presbyterian leader who forced through the 'disruption' in the established Church of 1843: both men, Henson maintained, 'belong to the category of fanaticks. They hypnotise themselves with a single idea – ecclesiastical autonomy – and see all things in its light'.⁸⁵ However, in his review of the Selborne committee's report, he questioned whether "autonomy" could 'exorcise' the 'deep dissidence within the Church' that Gore and his associates had created in pursuing 'a conception of the relations of Church and State which is frankly incompatible with any possible Establishment'.⁸⁶ Pointedly, he argued that it was more than a mere coincidence that the 'agitation for autonomy' had gained ascendancy 'under the continuing regime of Scottish primates'.⁸⁷ He meant here that Davidson and Lang both came from Presbyterian, Church of Scotland families, which would have had very different attitudes towards the place of an established Church in national societies than that which prevailed in England.

For Henson, the report's difficulty with the Protestant character of the Reformation was closely connected with the lack of middle-class representation on the committee, in contrast to the presence of 'Labour men'. This presaged a growing alliance between socialism and sacerdotalism, based on a shared opposition to 'private judgement, the claim of the individual conscience, personal rights', the one seeking to subordinate the individual to the state, the other to the organised Church, duly 'reconstructed'.⁸⁸ Henson never wavered in his view that the central purpose of Christianity was to enhance morality, though at a personal rather than social level. It would have been significant for him that two of the most influential members of the committee, Gore and Frere, were socialist sympathisers as well as 'neo-Tractarians'. Gore was co-founder of the Christian

⁸³ Henson, 'Church and State', 219.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 211.

⁸⁵ Henson to James Bryce, 22 Dec. 1916, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Bryce 473, fo. 123v.

⁸⁶ Henson, 'Church and State', 228.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 214.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 212–13.

Social Union;⁸⁹ Frere was co-founder of the Christian Socialist League in 1906. Nevertheless, Henson suggested, the influence of the alliance at this level of the Church was in inverse proportion to its acceptance by the majority of the English laity.

Henson sustained his criticism of the report as its sponsors embarked upon a vigorous campaign to persuade Church opinion of its merits, seeking to ease the path of its acceptance by parliament after the end of the war. The campaign included the convening of a special sitting of the Canterbury House of Laymen in November 1916 to receive Selborne's address on the report.⁹⁰ In a wide-ranging speech in the York House of Clergy the following February, responding to Frere's motion commending the report to the attention of the Church, Henson remarked upon Selborne's apparent obliviousness in his 'apologia' to any other division within the Church than that of supporters and opponents of establishment. The main issue dividing the Church, that between Anglo-Catholics and what he believed to be the majority of ordinary churchgoers loyal to the Elizabethan settlement, had thus been obscured.⁹¹ Henson's main ally, Bishop Knox of Manchester – one of the few Evangelicals who opposed the report – pressed the same point at the meeting of the Representative Church Council in November 1917, emphasising the inevitable effect of the report in 'sectarianising' and 'congregationalising' the Church.⁹² Henson followed with a long and corrosive speech, denouncing the attempt to seal the fate of the Church by a report that took the form of 'essays or otherwise the opinions of a little body of experts'. In contrast, the nineteenth-century practice was to settle even small ecclesiastical issues by royal commissions, so pivotal was the Church to the nation.⁹³

The Hookerian keynote here is striking, and was explicit in a sermon Henson preached as bishop of Hereford in February 1919 in a crowded Temple Church, which included Parmoor in the congregation.⁹⁴ While conceding that Church reform had to be part of the effort of what he referred to with evident contempt as "reconstruction" after the war, he warned of the danger that English Churchmen,

yielding to a self-isolating habit which has grown strong in recent years, and led astray by a dubious theory, may pursue an ideal of ecclesiastical independence, which can only be realised, if realised at all, by the complete severance of Church and State. Every Church must imply a theory, and no Church can be effectively governed or reformed on any other theory than its own. Only on Hooker's

⁸⁹ J. Kirby, 'R. H. Tawney and Christian social teaching: *Religion and the rise of capitalism* reconsidered', *EHR* cxxxi (2016), 793–822 at p. 800.

⁹⁰ 'Church and State', *Church Times*, 3 Nov. 1916, 381.

⁹¹ *The York Journal of Convocation*, London 1917, 65–71.

⁹² *RCC Proceedings*, 27 Nov. 1917, 63.

⁹⁴ Henson journal, 2 Feb. 1919.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 67.

lofty doctrine of the State can the English Reformation be defended. On no other assumption can the Church of England be justified or reformed.⁹⁵

Although unnamed, the author of the ‘dubious theory’ was Figgis.

How much weight was attached to Henson’s views at this critical turning point for the Church? While the Representative Church Council voted three weeks later to accept the Selborne scheme, it adopted the baptismal rather than confirmational franchise by a clear majority, which included Henson himself.⁹⁶ For Anglo-Catholics and Figgisites, the baptismal franchise would include many of uncertain conviction, in contrast with an electorate of confirmed and committed believers at the core of the ‘sacramental community’. The greater influence on the decision was Temple who, from a different Christian socialist perspective than that of Gore, wanted to involve more working people in church matters, and carried the Life and Liberty movement with him.⁹⁷ However, the influence of Henson’s forceful and persistent opposition to the Selborne report in addition cannot be discounted.

Henson, disestablishment and the legacy of conflict and change in the Church in the early twentieth century

The baptismal vote notwithstanding, the acceleration of change in the relationship between Church and State with the appointment of the archbishops’ committee in 1913, culminating in the Enabling Act and the establishment of the National Church Assembly, owed much to the pluralist thought of Figgis. This article has argued that the various parties favouring ‘autonomy’ found focus and unity in Figgis’s conceptions of the Church as an exclusive institution, its membership confined to the clergy and practising laymen and laywomen. Figgis did not live to see the transformation in the Church as he died nine months before the passage of the act in December 1919. In contrast, Henson counted the cost as the ‘obligations and restraints’ of the Establishment seemed to become increasingly ‘repulsive’ to the Church Assembly, in keeping with what he conceived as the logic of the Selborne report towards disestablishment.⁹⁸

Ironically, Henson accepted the conclusion of that logic before the report’s protagonists themselves; this followed the rejection in the House of Commons of the revised Prayer Book in 1927–8, a measure he had supported in the House of Lords in a speech that one newspaper regarded as

⁹⁵ ‘The national Church’, *The Times*, 3 Feb. 1919, 12.

⁹⁶ Henson journal, 26 Feb. 1919.

⁹⁷ Morris, *The High Church revival*, 72–3, 247–50.

⁹⁸ Henson to George Frodsham, 28 Feb. 1925, DCL, MS Henson 105.

his best ever.⁹⁹ Previously, he had maintained an unwavering belief in the Church as the mainstay of a largely Christian nation focused in parliament. This was despite growing unease at the threat to the Church's salience posed by the combined forces of democracy and socialism, their shared utilitarian outlook challenged—for example—by the Church's historic association with nobles and prelates immortalised in richly furnished church interiors such as that of Canterbury Cathedral.¹⁰⁰ Following the defeat of the Prayer Book measure, he lost confidence in the capacity of the Church, burdened by an 'ancient, anomalous, and largely inoperative Establishment', to ensure the triumph of the principles of Christian civilisation against those of its secular rival in the 'violent conflict' between them that approached.¹⁰¹ At this point he ceased to be the guardian of Hooker's legacy.

However, while, like Figgis, Henson now sought to free the Church from the State, this was to align the Church more closely with the nation, not with a denominational shadow of its former self. The disestablished Church would still serve a largely Protestant and specifically English nation, drawing in its 'separated' brethren in the Free Churches; in this way, Henson strengthened a wider connection between Protestantism and English national identity during the interwar period, while questioning the Church's capacity to provide a focus for this identity in its established form.¹⁰² In contrast, Figgis had insisted that national Churches should not be deflected by misplaced national pride and an illusory identification with 'national Christianity' from playing their full part in the universal Catholic Church.¹⁰³

Henson secured little, if any support for his stance on disestablishment, despite writing letters to well-placed figures in Church and State concerned by the Prayer Book defeat, for example Lord Sankey and Lord Hugh Cecil.¹⁰⁴ Although respected among leading Nonconformists, particularly as a staunch opponent of Anglo-Catholicism in the Church,¹⁰⁵ his concern for the adoption of a conciliatory attitude towards disendowment in such

⁹⁹ Henson, House of Lords Debates, 5s, 69, cc. 924–37 (14 Dec. 1927); *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, 27 Oct. 1938, 1.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Henson journal, 18 Oct. 1919.

¹⁰¹ Henson to Ernest Barker, 20 Sept. 1929, DCL, MS Henson 109, fo. 158.

¹⁰² For context see Matthew Grimley, 'The religion of Englishness: Puritanism, providentialism, and "national character", 1918–1945', *JBS* xlv (2007), 884–906 at pp. 892–3.

¹⁰³ Figgis, 'National Churches', in his *Our place in Christendom: lectures delivered in St Martin-in-the-Fields, autumn, 1915*, London 1916, 132.

¹⁰⁴ Henson to John Sankey, 1st viscount, 22 Nov. 1933, Bodl. Lib., MS Sankey 510, fos 122r–123v; Henson to Cecil, 11 July, 1931, HHA, MS Quickswood 42, fos 28v–30r.

¹⁰⁵ The editor of the Free Churches newspaper *The British Weekly* assured Henson that his views on the first Anglo-Catholic Congress in 1924 were keenly sought in such circles, and Henson accepted the invitation to articulate them in the newspaper:

circles, enabling the Church to discharge its national role to the full, had little prospect of success. The Free Church leader who might have advanced this cause—the Wesleyan John Scott Lidgett—had lost influence through his support for the revised Prayer Book.¹⁰⁶ Overall, Henson's advocacy of disestablishment as a means of strengthening the National Church was irreconcilable with that of 'voluntaryists' (who believed that non-established Churches should pay their own way), secularists and 'medievalists' (those of Figgis's persuasion), as he well recognised.¹⁰⁷

In the long term, it was the pluralist ideas of Figgis—broadened and extended away from their Anglo-Catholic core—that best reflected the changing dynamics of the relationship between Church, State and nation in Britain. Indeed, it has been argued recently that the cultivation of religious pluralism and its 'communal' nature since the end of the twentieth century through the influence of leading Anglicans such as Rowan Williams is a direct legacy of Figgis's pluralism.¹⁰⁸ The privileges the Church of England continues to enjoy have helped rather than hindered this development, but in a far more diverse religious polity than either Figgis or Henson could have contemplated.

Henson journal, 13 July 1923; H. H. Henson, 'The Anglo-Catholic conference', *British Weekly*, 19 July 1923, 319.

¹⁰⁶ Henson journal, 7 Feb. 1930.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 6 Sept. 1930.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel S. Loss, 'The Church of England, minority religions and the making of communal pluralism', in Rodger, Williamson and Grimley, *Church of England*, 298–315 at pp. 301–2.