

Hensley Henson and the Appointment of Bishops: State, Church and Nation in England, 1917–1920 and Beyond

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The nomination of Hensley Henson as bishop of Hereford in 1917 provoked a famous ecclesiastical controversy, the ‘Hereford scandal’, which threatened a split within the Church of England and a crisis between the Church and the State. The point of contention has always been understood to have been doctrinal, but this article argues that this was largely a proxy for disputes over Church policies, and that the outcome had significant consequences for the continuing character of the national Church. It also explains how the Hereford episode both stimulated and arrested demands for reform in the prime ministerial nomination of bishops.

On 9 December 1917, the British prime minister, David Lloyd George, asked Herbert Hensley Henson, dean of Durham and a prominent liberal churchman and public controversialist, if he

Bodl. Lib. = Bodleian Library, Oxford; CT = *Church Times*; ECU = English Church Union; HHA = Hatfield House Archives; LPL = Lambeth Palace Library; PREM = Prime ministers’ private office papers, The National Archives; RA = The Royal Archives

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 to Julia Stapleton, the project leader, for sharing research material and for valuable comments on the draft, and to Hilary Ingram for research assistance. This JOURNAL’s referee also made helpful suggestions. For access to records, the project thanks the staff at the archives listed above. Material in the Royal Archives is used with the permission of her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

would accept nomination as the next bishop of Hereford. This offer was made against the advice of the archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, and Henson's acceptance precipitated a bitter public dispute within the Church of England, which spread across the national as well as the religious newspapers. The chief features of what quickly became known as 'the Hereford scandal' are familiar to historians of the modern Church, chiefly from George Bell's magisterial biography of Davidson, supplemented by Henson's memoirs and Owen Chadwick's biography of Henson.¹ The overt issue was doctrinal: whether Henson accepted the literal truth of Christ's virgin birth and bodily resurrection, as attested in the Apostles' Creed. His appointment provoked protests from churchmen of varying opinions, especially Anglo-Catholic but also Evangelical, and included an influential group of Unionist politicians; his election by the chapter of Hereford Cathedral was contested; objections were submitted at his episcopal confirmation; and, in a 'solemn protest', Charles Gore, the bishop of Oxford, publicly asked the archbishop to refuse him consecration. Dismayed by the uproar and under great pressure, Davidson spoke of resigning his post. Eventually, after long discussion with Henson, the archbishop crafted a subtle affirmation of Henson's conformity with orthodox beliefs and persuaded him to sign it. This in turn persuaded Gore to withdraw his protest, and deflected other attempts to obstruct the appointment. Even so, a large number of bishops publicly boycotted Henson's consecration. Chadwick also revealed that there was serious disagreement about a second Henson appointment: in 1920, Davidson and the archbishop of York, Cosmo Lang, tried to prevent his translation to the bishopric of Durham.

Neither Henson's appointment to Hereford nor his promotion to Durham precipitated what might well have occurred if Davidson had been less pragmatic: a split within the Church, and a crisis between the Church and the State. The 'Hereford scandal' is now treated largely as an incident in Henson's career or an example of Davidson's management of awkward personalities, but at the time it raised large issues about the character of the Church of England and its relationship with the English nation. The public point of contention – the acceptable breadth of religious orthodoxy – was in itself momentous. But doctrine was to a

¹ G. K. A. Bell, *Randall Davidson: archbishop of Canterbury*, London 1935, ii, ch. liii; Herbert Hensley Henson, *Retrospect of an unimportant life*, London 1942–50, i, ch. vi; Owen Chadwick, *Hensley Henson: a study in the friction between Church and State*, Oxford 1983, ch. vi. See also Bernard Palmer, *High and mitred: a study of prime ministers as bishop-makers, 1837–1977*, London 1992, 170–4; John Grigg, *Lloyd George: war leader, 1916–1918*, London 2011, 359–63; J. S. Peart-Binns, *Herbert Hensley Henson: a biography*, Cambridge 2013, 85–97; and Michael Hughes, *Archbishop Randall Davidson*, Abingdon 2018, 99–101. The episode is mentioned in numerous studies of the modern Church of England.

substantial extent a proxy for two further matters, both connected with the Church of England's position as the established Church. One was the crown's ecclesiastical patronage. Bishops were appointed nominally by the sovereign as supreme governor of the Church, but in practice by the choice ('advice') of the prime minister, to whom had devolved, in this as in many political matters, the effective exercise of royal authority. Yet prime ministers were not required to be members of the Church of England, nor to take the advice of archbishops; even if they were members of other Churches or of none, they could make their own decisions on who should become leading figures in the Church.

This raised another and more fundamental issue: what kind of Church was the Church of England? Should it remain a national Church, available for the whole population, capacious in its doctrine and practices, and under ultimate control of the state? Or should it be a more 'gathered' church, ministering to the committed faithful, adhering to strict credal and liturgical standards, and self-governing? In 1917 these were matters of vigorous debate, after an archbishops' committee on Church and State, chaired by William Palmer, 2nd earl of Selborne, had made detailed proposals for increased ecclesiastical self-government, seeking 'a fuller expression of the spiritual independence of the Church' compatible with the continued 'national recognition of religion'.² After long and sometimes acrimonious debates within the Church, the Selborne committee's report resulted during 1919 in the 'Enabling Act', which relaxed parliamentary control by granting subordinate legislative powers to a new Church Assembly. This checked a growing interest in disestablishment within the Church, and would in time enable the Church establishment to be re-modelled.

However, the Selborne committee's remit did not include the appointment of bishops, the other leading feature of state control. This was a striking case of a pre-modern legacy, in essence unchanged since a Reformation statute of 1534, and enforceable on cathedral chapters and archbishops by penalties under the medieval statute of *praemunire*. The Hereford episode began the prolonged twentieth-century attempts to change the procedure. In its immediate aftermath, Lloyd George accepted two successive proposals for reform, only to ignore them. This, and Henson's later translation, produced a new scheme from the Church Assembly during the 1920s, and further proposals during later decades. Yet it was fifty years before the Church secured a large part in the selection of its own leaders, and another thirty before it obtained effective control.

This article describes the tensions inherent in the method of appointing bishops, and the reasons for Lloyd George's partiality towards Henson. It

² *The Archbishops' Committee on Church and State*, London 1916, 2.

qualifies the accepted account of the Hereford scandal as focused on Church doctrine, and argues that it is best understood from the wider perspective of frictions over Church policies, and ultimately of different conceptions of the modern relations between the British State and the Church of England, and between the Church and the English nation. The article then considers the failure of the first attempts to alter the system of episcopal appointments, and suggests that this helps to explain why reform was so long delayed. As Chadwick noted, ‘in the long constitutional argument over Church and State, and the place of crown patronage in the Church, the nomination of Henson was never forgotten’.³

I

Episcopal appointments were determined by three individuals: the sovereign, the prime minister and, normally but not always, the archbishop of Canterbury. The prime minister was decisive, but the sovereign might make suggestions or raise doubts, and the archbishop could submit proposals or be asked for opinions. Prime ministers and sovereigns often received unsolicited suggestions, and they commonly sought independent advice, from laymen as well as clergymen. All this meant that the qualifications for a bishopric were not limited to administrative ability, pastoral experience, learning or godliness. Allegiance to a particular political party – never wholly absent as a concern for prime ministers, given the twenty-six bishops’ seats in the House of Lords, opinion among their political supporters and the possibilities for electoral influence in constituencies – loomed large into the mid-Victorian period. As church parties grew more pronounced from the 1830s, a greater concern became the achievement of a balance between representatives of these parties. Sovereigns and prime ministers were vigilant in avoiding ‘extreme’ partisans, whether High-Church ‘Puseyites’ and Anglo-Catholics or Low-Church Evangelicals. Even so, there could be private disagreements and public criticisms. Nominations by Whig and Liberal prime ministers were particularly liable to be contentious, as their search for liberal-minded or ‘broad-church’ bishops could settle on men with advanced opinions on the implications of biblical criticism, and so vulnerable to accusations of heterodoxy or outright heresy. In this sense, Henson’s appointment in 1917 was comparable with the notorious controversies over Renn Hampden in 1847 and Frederick Temple in 1869.⁴ Yet Henson was not politically a Liberal, and in his case Lloyd

³ Chadwick, *Henson*, 147.

⁴ Episcopal appointments have been most thoroughly studied for the Victorian period: Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, London 1966–70, i. 112–26, 226–30, 234–50 (including Hampden), 468–76; ii. 86–9 (for Temple), 328–42; D. W. R.

George's concern was not with a balance between church parties. The reasons for his appointment lay elsewhere.

As a Welsh Baptist, Lloyd George was the first prime minister who did not conform to an established Church;⁵ indeed, he had built his early political career on campaigns to disestablish the Church of England's dioceses in Wales. He was nevertheless conscientious in his constitutional duties towards the Church, despite the pressures of national leadership during a world war and Davidson's complaints of insufficient time for discussion with him. He sought opinions from various churchmen, including not just a bishop with Liberal sympathies, Hubert Burge of Southwark, but also William Bridgeman, a Conservative minister in his coalition government, who represented a constituency in the Hereford diocese. Lloyd George also followed Davidson's advice to the extent of seeking to translate an existing bishop to the diocese, only to be obstructed by their refusals.⁶ But whether for a vacancy created by translation or for Hereford itself, Lloyd George wanted Henson to be among his first episcopal nominations, despite repeated objections from Davidson and a warning from King George V through his private secretary, Lord Stamfordham, that this was likely to 'arouse animosity in the Church'.⁷ Lloyd George went further: he would have preferred to send Henson to a populous and industrial district rather than a rural area, and all but promised him early translation to a more demanding diocese – which for Chadwick, acutely conscious of the Church's protocols, certainly was a 'scandal'.⁸

As is commonly observed, a large element in Lloyd George's choice was his Nonconformist admiration for good preachers. The Church, he believed, needed more of these among its leaders, and he considered

Bahlman, 'The queen, Mr Gladstone and church patronage', *Victorian Studies* iii (1960), 349–80, and 'Politics and patronage in the Victorian age', *ibid.* xxii (1979), 253–96. For appointments over a longer period see Bell, *Randall Davidson*, i. 162–98; ii. 1236–53, and Palmer, *High and mitred*.

⁵ Scots who became prime ministers had either been members of the established Church of Scotland, or conformed to the Church of England, as did Asquith, the first English prime minister brought up as a Nonconformist: his family had been Congregationalists.

⁶ Randall Davidson memo, 5 Aug. 1917, Bridgeman-Davidson letters, 30 Oct.–5 Nov. 1917, Archbishop Davidson papers, LPL, 380/23–5, 42–3, 44, 45, 50–1, 52; *The modernisation of Conservative politics: the diaries and letters of William Bridgeman, 1904–1935*, ed. Philip Williamson, London 1988, 122–3; Hubert Burge to David Lloyd George, 24 Oct. 1917, PREM 5/7; Burge in H. H. Henson journal, Durham Cathedral Library, online at <<http://community.dur.ac.uk/henson/project/>>, entries for 24 Oct., 5 Nov. 1917; Chadwick, *Henson*, 131–2.

⁷ Davidson memo, 5 Aug. 1917, Davidson papers, 380/23–5; Arthur Bigge, Lord Stamfordham, to Lloyd George, 16 Oct. 1917, PREM 5/7; Davidson to Lloyd George, 28 Nov. 1917, in Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii. 854–5.

⁸ Chadwick, *Henson*, 132–3, 134–5.

Henson to be one of its two ‘first class’ preachers (the other was Charles Gore). Although he knew of Henson’s opposition to Welsh Church disestablishment, this was amply offset by his championing of closer relations between the Church and the Nonconformist or (as they now called themselves) the Free Church denominations.⁹ But further reasons are evident in the correspondence of Lloyd George’s unofficial advisor on church appointments, Ernest Pearce, archdeacon of Westminster and the ecclesiastical correspondent of *The Times*. Pearce was encouraged both to comment on candidates proposed by the archbishops and to offer his own suggestions, and in this instance he criticised a series of Davidson’s nominees and persistently argued for Henson’s appointment. That he and Henson were friends and former colleagues has obvious relevance. But Pearce also had firm opinions about the requirements for new leaders in the Church. Davidson was, he wrote, surrounded by bishops with narrow perspectives, unable or unwilling to speak challengingly in bishops’ meetings – which Lloyd George took to mean that the Church was ‘degenerating into ... an Episcopal sect’. Davidson wanted a ‘quiet time’, yet the Church required ‘the introduction of men of a broader and more national type’ with the power of cogent and forceful argument. Henson was just such a ‘strong man’, and his appointment would, Pearce argued, command ‘very wide’ approval among laymen. For a politician with Lloyd George’s radical instincts, all this was compelling – stimulating, perhaps, a touch of Nonconformist mischief, but persuasive on ‘the general good of the Church’.¹⁰ It would also, he told Davidson, be better for the Church to have Henson expressing his opinions within ‘the Councils of the Southern Episcopate’ rather than in newspapers, although this considerably under-estimated Henson’s appetite for public debate.¹¹

II

In the conversations and correspondence which preceded Henson’s nomination, no concern was expressed about his doctrinal opinions. Davidson

⁹ Davidson memos, 5 Aug., 25 Dec. 1917, Davidson papers, 380/23–5, 13/226; Lloyd George to Andrew Bonar Law, 17 Dec. 1917, Andrew Bonar Law papers, Parliamentary Archives, 82/7/6; Chadwick, *Henson*, 129–30. See also Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii. 1247.

¹⁰ Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii. 853, 1242–3; Ernest Pearce to Lloyd George, 2, 6 Aug., 10 Sept., 26 Oct. 1917, PREM 5/7 (the extent of Pearce’s influence is evident from this file, available only since 2016); Pearce comment in Chadwick, *Henson*, 131; Lloyd George in Arthur Griffith-Boscawen to Viscount Wolmer (later 3rd earl of Selborne), 29 Dec. 1917, 3rd earl of Selborne papers (hereinafter cited as 3 Selborne), Bodl. Lib., ms Eng. hist. c.1010/73–6.

¹¹ Lloyd George to Davidson, 26 Nov. 1917, in Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii. 853, a letter drafted by Pearce: see PREM 5/7.

considered him well qualified for a bishopric, appreciated his 'wide and varied knowledge' and influence with 'lay folk', and made it known that if Lloyd George persevered, he would not be obstructive. His objection was about timing, to a degree because Henson's experience in urban and mining areas was not best suited to the Hereford diocese, but more generally because of his participation in current controversies within the Church. If he were to be made a bishop, this was best postponed to a calmer and more propitious period, as well as the availability of a more suitable vacancy.¹² Archbishop Lang was more critical: Henson would be a 'disastrous appointment', but this was on the general grounds that he was 'singularly lacking in the qualities needed for a Bishop'.¹³ The king thought Henson was 'a very nice fellow'; like Davidson, his reservation was whether it was the appropriate time to make him a bishop.¹⁴

Once Henson's nomination became public, Unionist MPs and peers from the influential Church Parliamentary Committee complained to Lloyd George and to their party leader, Bonar Law, as well as to Davidson. Again, doctrine was not the initial or main concern. Viscount Wolmer, the most intemperate, objected to Henson's 'personality', lack of 'tact and gentlemanliness' and combative style of public debate.¹⁵ Others did not go so far as him in considering Henson's 'contentious temper' an adequate reason for trying to prevent his appointment, still less to threaten withdrawal of political support for a prime minister during wartime.¹⁶ Arthur Griffith-Boscawen, impressed by hearing Lloyd George's private explanation of his choice, thought that the issue should turn to future nominations, to providing prime ministers with better advice.¹⁷ Nor, at first, did the religious press make much of the doctrinal point. *The Church Times*, the High Church newspaper which coined the phrase 'the Hereford scandal', noted in the press reports an 'absence of

¹² Davidson to Selborne, 19 Nov. 1913, Davidson papers, 255/155, when unsuccessfully suggesting Henson's appointment to Selborne's committee; Davidson to Stamfordham, 27 Aug. 1917, RA, PS/PSO/GV/C/I/1240/12; Davidson memo, 25 Dec. 1917, Davidson papers, 13/227-8; Davidson to Lloyd George, 29 Nov. 1917, in Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii. 854-5; Davidson to Henson, 13 Dec. 1917, Davidson papers, 380/67; cf. Chadwick, *Henson*, 132.

¹³ Cosmo Lang to Davidson, 8 Aug. 1917, Davidson papers, 380/28-9.

¹⁴ W. R. Inge, *Diary of a dean: St Paul's, 1911-1934*, London 1949, 43; Stamfordham to Lloyd George, 16 Oct. 1917, PREM 5/7.

¹⁵ Wolmer to Lloyd George, 11 Dec. 1917, and circular letter to Ian Malcolm, Edward Wood and other parliamentary churchmen, 22 Dec. 1917, 3 Selborne, MS Eng. hist. c.1010/52-6, 63-6.

¹⁶ Letters from various MPs to Wolmer, 18 Dec. 1917-2 Jan. 1918, *ibid.* c.1010/68-82, c.988/137; *Modernisation of Conservative politics*, 123.

¹⁷ *The Crawford papers: the journals of [the] earl of Crawford ... 1892-1940*, ed. John Vincent, Manchester 1984, 383, entry for 18 Dec. 1917; Griffith-Boscawen to Wolmer, 29 Dec. 1917, 3 Selborne, MS Eng. hist. c.1010/73-6.

any specific ground of objection against Dr Henson on the score of unorthodoxy'; the issue, again, was his 'personality' and his 'record in general'.¹⁸

The doctrinal objections came principally from Anglo-Catholics. Their main organisation, the English Church Union (ECU), led by its president, Charles Wood, 2nd Viscount Halifax, its secretary, H. W. Hill, and Darwell Stone, president of Pusey House, Oxford, created a widespread campaign to obstruct Henson's successive election, confirmation and consecration. As well as letters to newspapers, publication of tendentious selections from Henson's books, and interviews with Davidson, it asked through a long-running notice in the *Church Times* for memorials to be sent to Lloyd George, the king, the archbishops and bishops and the Hereford chapter.¹⁹ The *Church Times* itself now joined in, giving much publicity to accusations of 'heresy'. Davidson was soon 'inundated' with petitions and letters of protest from vicars, curates, ruridecanal chapters and parishioners. But he discounted most of these, as their partisan character was obvious from their use of a phrase in the ECU notice: Henson 'holds principles widely divergent from the teaching of the Church of England'. Davidson regarded many of the critics as 'excitement mongers' and 'petty and venomous controversialists', an impression increased by scurrilous leaflets circulated in Herefordshire, which included a re-purposing of the collect for St Matthias's day as a prayer for 'the present distress' in the diocese, implying that Henson was 'the modern equivalent of "the traitor Judas"'. At first, opinion was more divided than the scale of the ECU agitation suggested. Davidson claimed that most of the letters he received, at least most from 'thoughtful men', were 'commendatory rather than denunciatory'.²⁰ Henson reported in *The Times* that among the nearly 700 congratulatory letters he had received were 'representatives of every type of English Churchman, including thirty-three bishops'.²¹

What inflamed the doctrinal issue was the actions of Gore, the most prominent and revered Anglo-Catholic among the bishops, as a founder

¹⁸ *CT* editorials, 14, 21 Dec. 1917.

¹⁹ *Dr Hensley Henson's opinions* [ed. H. W. Hill], London 1918; Halifax and Darwell Stone letters, *The Times*, 20 Dec. 1917, 1 Jan. 1918; ECU notice in *CT*, 21 Dec. 1917–18 Jan. 1918; E. F. Cross, *Darwell Stone*, Westminster 1943, 131–7.

²⁰ Davidson to John Darragh, 22 Dec. 1917, to John Watts-Ditchfield (bishop of Chelmsford), 23 Dec. 1917, to W. R. Inge (dean of St Paul's), 24 Dec. 1917, and to Edward Winnington-Ingram (archdeacon of Hereford), 28 Dec. 1917, Davidson papers, 380/296, 381/10–11, 380/259, 382/173–5. The Hereford leaflets are in Davidson papers, 381/120–5, and see Henson, *Retrospect*, i. 241. However, it should be noted that among the surviving documents on this episode in Davidson's papers (over 800 pages, in volumes 380–2), criticism far exceeds approval.

²¹ *The Times*, 2 Jan. 1918. At least 19 were diocesan bishops: Henson journal, entry for 23 Dec. 1917.

of Pusey House and the Community of the Resurrection, and a leading critic of modernist interpretations of the New Testament. He began by privately asking the bishops of Canterbury province to join him in calling for Henson to be refused consecration if he did not retract his statements on the Apostles' Creed, adding the pressure of an implied threat to resign from the episcopate on the issue. In January 1918 he sent a lengthy formal protest to Davidson, and circulated copies to the bishops.²² He also made his doctrinal objections known to prominent lay churchmen, which immediately stiffened the criticisms of members of the Church Parliamentary Committee, including Griffith-Boscawen and especially the interrelated Selborne-Wolmer-Cecil family connection, whose members, as leading figures in the Church's houses of laymen, were assured of Davidson's attention. Selborne and Hugh Cecil now feared that Henson's consecration would constitute 'apostasy' by the Church, to the extent of even declaring that disestablishment would be preferable, while Robert Cecil and others became alarmed by the possibilities of schism among the clergy and secessions to Roman Catholicism.²³ Gore then sent his protest to religious and national newspapers, which widened and deepened the opposition. The ECU had already circulated standard petition forms through its branches; large numbers of clergy now signed further petitions to their bishops, for example, 128 in Rochester, 220 in Bath and Wells and 457 in Gore's diocese of Oxford.²⁴ Wolmer, Selborne, Hugh Cecil, Griffith-Boscawen and other members of the Church Parliamentary Committee sent a joint petition to Davidson.²⁵

The doctrinal issue evidently caused much distress in the Church, reaching beyond committed Anglo-Catholics and including some prominent Evangelicals, notably Henry Wace, dean of Canterbury.²⁶ Yet Gore's protest – and consequently much of the accompanying opposition – had

²² Charles Gore to diocesan and suffragan bishops, 14 Dec. 1917, Davidson papers, 381/147, and to Davidson, 3 Jan. 1918, in Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii. 859–62. For Gore's part in the Hereford episode see G. L. Prestige, *The life of Charles Gore*, London 1935, 394–403.

²³ Robert Cecil to Bonar Law, 18 Dec. 1917, Bonar Law papers, 82/7/8; Hugh Cecil to Edward Talbot, 30 Dec. 1917, and Selborne to Davidson, 11 Jan. 1918, Davidson papers, 380/222–23, 382/33–4; Hugh Cecil to Wolmer, 11 Jan. 1918, 3 Selborne, ms Eng. hist. c.980/69; Gore to William Palmer, 2nd earl of Selborne, 13 Jan. 1918, 2nd earl of Selborne papers, Bodl. Lib., ms Selborne, 91/22.

²⁴ ECU standard petition, *CT*, 4 Jan. 1918, and Hill to ECU branches, 8 Jan. 1918, Darwell Stone papers, Pusey House, Oxford, G18/B59; clergy petitions in Davidson papers, 381/229 (Rochester diocese), *CT*, 1 Feb. 1918 (Bath and Wells, Oxford).

²⁵ Wolmer to Davidson, with petition, 16 Jan. 1918, Davidson papers, 382/179, 180–1.

²⁶ Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii. 863–5; *The Record*, 17 Jan. 1918. Wace initially supported Henson, but was shocked into opposition by both the ECU criticisms and Modernist defences of his doctrinal beliefs.

a slender basis. To his considerable disappointment, only one bishop, and this a suffragan, made another formal protest.²⁷ Although numerous diocesan bishops were now disturbed by Henson's nomination or at least by Gore's opposition and the ECU campaign, not even the other leading Anglo-Catholic bishop, Edward Talbot of Winchester, went so far as to doubt his essential orthodoxy. Nor were Gore and the ECU prepared to press their doctrinal challenge further by recourse to the church courts and privy council, as Anglo-Catholics eschewed these in principle because of their record of 'erastian' anti-ritualist judgements. Gore accepted that Henson believed in the fundamental article in the Apostles' Creed, the incarnation of Christ. His accusation was that Henson had denied the associated miracles of the virgin birth and the bodily resurrection.²⁸ Yet, as Davidson repeatedly stated, despite selective quotations by his opponents this was not what Henson had written and meant. As modern science and historical criticism raised doubts about the scriptural accounts of the two miracles, he treated their precise character as open questions. His position, summarised earlier to a leading modernist theologian, was 'to decline either to affirm or to deny' the occurrence of the miracles, but 'to insist on the Incarnation and to profess a "reverent agnosticism" as to the historical circumstances'.²⁹ His opinions, expressed as appeals for Christian tolerance towards faithful doubters rather than as firm assertions of his own beliefs, had been available in print for years, yet until now no one had publicly accused him of heresy. Nor were his opinions uncommon; they were becoming conventional among liberal Churchmen. A masterly public reply by Davidson to Gore exposed the fragility of the doctrinal protests. Gore, he noted, had explicitly stated that what he attributed to Henson was 'your inference from what he has written and is not found in the words themselves'. Davidson also appealed to the widely-acknowledged experience of progress in Christian thought. He observed that the charges against Hampden and Temple had with time been found to be unfair – and pointedly added that this was also true of accusations which had been made against Gore himself, when in *Lux Mundi* forty years earlier he too had sought to reconcile Christian faith with contemporary thought.³⁰

²⁷ Edward Shaw, bishop of Buckingham, to Davidson, 4, 15 Jan. 1918, Davidson papers, 380/204, 206; Prestige, *Gore*, 395–6.

²⁸ Davidson memo, 25 Dec. 1917, in Hughes, *Davidson*, 177.

²⁹ Henson to William Sanday, 16 Jan. 1917, Bodl. Lib., MS Eng. misc.d.123/546–7. See also Henson in Davidson memo, 8 Jan. 1918, in Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii. 866. For ECU misrepresentations see Arthur Headlam, 'The bishopric of Hereford', *Church Quarterly Review* lxxxvi (1918), 99–118.

³⁰ Davidson memo, 17 Dec. 1917, and Davidson to Gore, 16 Jan. 1918, in Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii. 857, 875–8. For implication rather than words see Gore's protest at ii. 861.

Faced with what might have become either an illegal rejection of a crown nomination and a clash with the state, or the creation of a rupture within the Church, Davidson found the episode ‘the most anxious and harassing in the whole of his life’.³¹ He sought much advice, from bishops, ecclesiastical lawyers and past and current lord chancellors. He rejected calls to gather the bishops or chair a special tribunal, as likely to exacerbate the divisions. He made his confidence in Henson’s orthodoxy known in the Hereford chapter and to numerous correspondents, and established that charges of heresy were inadmissible during the legal confirmation of his election. He spoke of his own possible resignation, though chiefly in order to keep Gore and other bishops in check and to put pressure on Henson.³² But ultimately the issue turned on how to reconcile the insistence of ECU members that Henson recant, calls by bishops and Unionist politicians for him to clarify his beliefs and Henson’s refusal, especially under Anglo-Catholic pressure, to justify opinions which no one had previously challenged.³³ Davidson achieved this accommodation by an adroit exchange of short statements, in which Henson gave an assurance of his belief in the Apostles’ Creed without any desire to change its words, but also without committing himself to the literal truth of the miracles.

Chadwick described this exchange as verging into ‘sleight of hand’,³⁴ but its effectiveness in deflating the crisis is testimony to the narrowness of the doctrinal issue. Eight diocesan bishops agreed to participate in Henson’s consecration. Half of the twenty-two bishops in Canterbury province publicly refused to do so,³⁵ but these were gestures to ease their own discomfort and appease petitioners among their clergy, not principled stands on the point of doctrine. Although the ECU dismissed Henson’s declaration as

³¹ *Ibid.* ii. 882.

³² Davidson memos, 25 Dec. 1917–18 Jan. 1918, Davidson papers, 13/228–9, 236–7, 243, 245–7, 249–52, 259–60; Davidson to Halifax, 17 Dec. 1917, and to Winnington-Ingram, 28 Dec. 1917, Charles, Lord Parmoor (vicar general) to Davidson, 10 Jan. 1918, and Davidson to Selborne, 12 Jan. 1918, and to Gore, 18 Jan. 1918, Davidson papers, 380/359, 382/173–5, 380/85–7, 382/35–6, 381/187–8.

³³ Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii. 865–7, 872–3; Henson journal, 22–26 Dec. 1917, 2–6, 14, 17 Jan. 1918.

³⁴ Chadwick, *Henson*, 141–2. For the circumstances and letters see Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii. 871–4, and Henson, *Retrospect*, i. 214–15, 244–6. Davidson had dealt with the same doctrinal point nine years earlier, when privately easing the ordination of a future archbishop: F. A. Iremonger, *William Temple*, London 1948, 108–22.

³⁵ Those present were the bishops of Bristol, Lincoln, Llandaff, Peterborough and Southwark, and, from York province, Carlisle, Durham and Newcastle. Besides Gore, the bishops who publicly refused to attend were those of Chelmsford, Ely, Exeter, London, Rochester, St Albans, Salisbury, Truro, Winchester and Worcester: *CT*, 14, 24 Jan., 2 Feb. 1918.

inadequate and prepared a detailed case against him, this was eventually abandoned as likely to fall ‘absolutely flat, and merely confirm Henson’s position in the eyes of the British public, outside of Catholic circles’.³⁶ New denunciations and threats of secession from the Anglican communion by Frank Weston, bishop of Zanzibar, attracted little attention.³⁷ Efforts to generalise the doctrinal point, by calling for the whole Church to reaffirm belief in the virgin birth and the resurrection, quickly subsided. A motion by Hugh Cecil was passed in the Canterbury house of laymen in March 1918, but few members bothered to vote and it proceeded no further.³⁸ A petition to the same effect sponsored jointly by Cecil, Selborne, Griffith-Boscawen, Halifax, Stone and the ECU, signed by over 54,000 clergy and laity in Canterbury province and over 10,000 in York province, was submitted to the upper houses of the two convocations during July; but Davidson buried the petition by allowing resolutions in its favour to pass without comment, and Lang by an offer of later consideration.³⁹ Gore had not supported Cecil’s motion or the new petition; he was now ‘profoundly impressed with the apathy of the Church in the matter’.⁴⁰

III

Concern about theological modernism was not new in 1917. Gore had from 1911 to 1914 taken the lead in persuading the bishops of Canterbury convocation to issue declarations on clerical orthodoxy, a campaign which in similar manner to the Hereford episode provoked petitions of support and threats of resignation by both Gore and Davidson.⁴¹ Nevertheless, men with well-known ‘modernist’ opinions or sympathies had already been appointed to senior ecclesiastical positions –

³⁶ Cross, *Stone*, 136–40; N. P. Williams to Stone, 9 July 1918, Stone papers, G18/B.124.

³⁷ See Davidson’s extensive correspondence with and about Weston, 18 Apr. 1918–12 Dec. 1919, Davidson papers, 233/254–345; Frank Weston, *The Christ and his critics: an open pastoral letter to the European missionaries of his diocese*, Oxford 1919; and H. Maynard Smith, *Frank, bishop of Zanzibar*, London 1926, 181–3, 220–1.

³⁸ *CT*, 1 Mar. 1918.

³⁹ *The chronicle of Convocation, being a record of the proceedings of the Convocation of Canterbury [in 1918]*, London 1918 (hereinafter cited as *Chronicle of Canterbury Convocation*, with date of the session), 417–18, 476–83; *York journal of Convocation ... 1918*, York 1918, 4211–12. See Henson journal, 8, 10 July 1918, commenting dryly that 54,000 was not impressive in a population of 20 million.

⁴⁰ Gore to Hugh Cecil, 1 Apr. 1918, HHA, QUI 23/17.

⁴¹ Prestige, *Gore*, 342–51, 357–8, 363–4; Bell, *Randall Davidson*, i, ch. xli: the declarations were re-stated in Gore’s protest against Henson, *ibid.* ii. 860–1. For the doctrinal context of the Hereford episode see Arthur Michael Ramsey, *From Gore to Temple*, London 1960, chs v–vi, and Keith W. Clements, *Lovers of discord: twentieth-century theological controversies in England*, London 1988, chs iii–iv.

W. R. Inge, Henson himself and Hastings Rashdall, respectively as deans of St Paul's, Durham and Carlisle – without a public outcry.⁴² How did Henson's nomination as a bishop differ from these? As Chadwick stated, for Gore and other opponents of New Testament criticism this was a 'test case'. A bishop had not only greater prominence but special responsibilities, expressed at his ordination by the obligations to 'teach and exhort with wholesome doctrine' and 'to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrine'.⁴³ A bishop also had to examine the suitability of candidates for clerical orders: Henson might, his critics claimed, allow disbelievers in the Creed to become priests.⁴⁴ But this does not explain why doctrine was not the objection for Davidson and Lang, nor the initial or main complaint for the *Church Times*, parliamentary churchmen and numerous bishops. Nor does it adequately explain the force and extent of Gore's and the ECU's protests.

As Hugh Cecil wrote privately, if Henson's nomination was to be successfully resisted, this could only be on the ground of heterodoxy.⁴⁵ Nothing less would suffice, because differences over the Church's policies – its form of government, relations with other Churches and connections with the state – were legitimate issues for debate. They were not, in themselves, reasons to obstruct the promotions of well-qualified clergymen. This being so, Gore considered it necessary to emphasise that his protest was not because of differences with Henson 'about the ministry of the Church, or any other matter of Church polity or policy'.⁴⁶ Talbot, explaining his decision not to attend Henson's consecration, declared that this was 'not merely or mainly' because he and others differed deeply from him 'on important matters of Church principle and policy'.⁴⁷ These disclaimers are significant: their very existence indicates that matters other than doctrine were at stake.

For Inge, who was asked by Davidson to preach at Henson's consecration, it was obvious that 'the charge of heresy is the ostensible but not the real ground of the agitation. The real ground is that Henson has

⁴² Gore had been privately critical of Henson's appointment as dean: Gore to Hugh Cecil, 18 Dec. 1912, HHA, QUI 15/197–8, and see Chadwick, *Henson*, 110 (though *CT*, 1 Nov. 1912, criticised his temperament, not beliefs). Davidson had warned of trouble over Rashdall's appointment, but to Lloyd George's amusement there had been none: Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii. 853.

⁴³ 'The form of ordaining or consecrating of an archbishop or bishop', in *The Book of Common Prayer: the texts of 1549, 1559 and 1662*, ed. Brian Cummings, Oxford 2011, 648.

⁴⁴ Chadwick, *Henson*, 136; Selborne to Davidson, 11, 15 Jan. 1918, Davidson papers, 382/33–4, 36–7.

⁴⁵ Hugh Cecil to Wolmer, 28 Dec. 1917, 3 Selborne, MS Eng. hist. c.1010/68–9.

⁴⁶ Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii. 859.

⁴⁷ Edward Talbot letter, 18 Jan. 1918, *Winchester Diocesan Chronicle*, Feb. 1918, Davidson papers, 382/170–2, summarised in Chadwick, *Henson*, 143–4.

openly challenged the policy of the dominant party in the Church'.⁴⁸ Henson had decided and prolific opinions, which he expressed combatively, incisively and very publicly, through persuasive speech and prose, in church assemblies and in national newspapers, notably the letter columns of *The Times*. He had scant respect for persons or authorities, including bishops and archbishops, when he thought they expressed wrong ideas. He was an archetypal turbulent priest. This was what Lang meant by his unfortunate qualities, and Wolmer and the *Church Times* by his lamentable personality – his 'venomous personal attacks', his 'insolent defiance of bishops' and the 'enmity and discord which he never ceases to stir'.⁴⁹ But Henson's general temperament and manner mattered less than particular disagreements between him and several sections of the Church, especially the Anglo-Catholics and their sympathisers.

Since the 1890s Henson had been a persistent opponent of Anglo-Catholic practices and claims, clashing repeatedly with Lord Halifax and the ECU. Insisting that the Christian message was to the personal soul and individual conduct, he was a critic of the collectivist 'social gospel' of the Church Social Union, in which Gore, Talbot and other Anglo-Catholics were prominent. Though a staunch defender of the Church establishment, he wanted a more comprehensive Church, able to incorporate the Free Church denominations, by relaxation of what High Churchmen regarded as essential principles of Anglican clerical orders and episcopacy. He even flouted church rules on ministerial relations with the Free Churches. In 1909 he preached at an institute attached to the Carr's Lane chapel in Birmingham, despite an inhibition by Gore, then the bishop of Birmingham – a document which Henson displayed as a badge of honour.⁵⁰ In March 1917, he went further by preaching at the City Temple, inside a chapel itself, against the wishes of the bishop of London.⁵¹

Chadwick noted these infringements of ecclesiastical discipline as elements in the opposition to Henson: he was regarded as a 'schismatic' as well as a 'heretic'.⁵² But the greatest reason for objection has been treated by biographers and historians as if the issue was distinct from the resistance to his nomination.⁵³ Henson was a relentless and withering

⁴⁸ Inge to Davidson, 17 Jan. 1918, Davidson papers, 381/12, and see, similarly, [Anon.], 'The meaning of the Hereford controversy', *Spectator*, 22 Dec. 1917.

⁴⁹ Wolmer to Malcolm and other MPs, 22 Dec. 1917, 3 Selborne, MS Eng. hist. c.1010/52-6, 63-6.

⁵⁰ Henson, *Retrospect*, i. 92-6; Prestige, *Gore*, 305-7. In *The Times*, 24 Jan. 1917, Henson stated that he had framed the inhibition and hung it on his study wall.

⁵¹ Henson, *Retrospect*, i. 193-202.

⁵² Chadwick, *Henson*, 127-8, 132.

⁵³ Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii, chs liii (Hereford) and lix (Enabling Act) established a pattern of separating the two issues. Chadwick refers to church self-government some fifty pages after his account of the Hereford episode: *Henson*, 185-6.

critic of the movement for church self-government. Gore had been among the clerical leaders of this movement through the Church Reform League, formed in the 1890s, and Wolmer, Selborne (Wolmer's father) and Hugh Cecil (his uncle) had since 1913 become its principal lay leaders. It had strong support from the ECU and the Church Parliamentary Committee, and from two new bodies formed early in 1917: a Church Self-Government Association, established by Wolmer with Gore as president, and a 'Life and Liberty' campaign, led by William Temple, with Gore as a member. There were differences over strategy and timing, but Davidson, Lang and most bishops were also firm supporters of the movement, which became focused on the recommendations of the Selborne committee.⁵⁴ In a searing article in October 1916, Henson ridiculed the committee's composition, which included Wolmer and Hugh Cecil, as representing 'almost ... a single *family* party', creating an atmosphere 'not so much national as domestic'.⁵⁵ His larger complaint was that the committee – Gore was another member – was the vehicle for an intended Anglo-Catholic takeover of the Church, with calamitous consequences for its future. The committee's proposals for a new Church assembly, elected by church members and with legislative abilities, would, he argued, result in a sectarian Church, separated from the general life of the nation. Henson had spared none in his public attacks on supporters of the Selborne report and the procedures for implementing it, not even Archbishop Davidson. During the two months before his nomination, Henson protested in letters to *The Times* and a speech in the Representative Church Council that the Church was being 'hustled' into a 'revolution', and argued that the Selborne committee should be superseded by a royal commission, to ensure a more truly representative and impartial enquiry into the Church's connection with the State.⁵⁶

So far, Henson had been in a minority, but his ability to impress readers and auditors, especially lay churchmen and those outside the Church, had the potential to become still more obstructive to the cause of church self-government. Not only did the Selborne committee's recommendations have to be approved by the Representative Church Council and the two convocations, but an enabling bill, to confer statutory authority on a church assembly, had to be passed by parliament and would need

⁵⁴ Philip Williamson, 'The Church of England and constitutional reform: the Enabling Act in British politics and English religion, 1913–1928', *Journal of British Studies* (forthcoming).

⁵⁵ H. Hensley Henson, 'Church and State in England', *Edinburgh Review* ccxxii (1916), 209–29 at p. 213 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁶ Henson letters, 'The archbishops' summons', 'Church and nation', 'The Representative Church Council', *The Times*, 17 Oct., 23 Oct., 3 Dec. 1917; *Report of proceedings of the Representative Church Council, sessions November 27 and 29 1917*, London 1917, 64–9.

assistance from the government. Yet parliament and government had long ceased to be largely Anglican bodies, neither had shown any recent willingness to assist legislation for the Church of England and they contained members who could all too easily be persuaded by Henson's criticisms.

There were, then, in late 1917, ample political, ecclesiastical and personal reasons for opposition to Henson gaining the authority and influence of a bishopric, and for supporters of church self-government to embrace hostile interpretations of his doctrinal beliefs. It is this dispute about the Selborne report, more than those over doctrine or relations with the Free Churches, which explain Davidson's desire to delay Henson's appointment as a bishop. The disagreement over church self-government also explains why Wolmer, Selborne, Hugh Cecil and other members of the Church Parliamentary Committee, as well as the ECU, were so quick to complain.

IV

At the root of the Hereford episode were different understandings of the character of the Church of England and its place within English society. These had long been ambiguous: the Church claimed to be a divine institution, and both a state Church and a people's Church – to use Chadwick's terms, a *Nationalkirche* and a *Volkskirche*.⁵⁷ These ambiguities provided possibilities for quite different conceptions of the Church, and discussion of these could raise acute sensitivities. Davidson advised Inge against using the apparently bland theme of 'the national character of the English Church' for his sermon at Henson's consecration, because this was 'the very subject which affords the battle field to Henson's opponents, notably to the Bishop of Oxford', and was liable to cause renewed controversy.⁵⁸ The differences were in part over doctrinal emphasis, and in part over the balance between 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' in the identity and worship of the Church. But they were also much concerned with the Church's relationship with the English nation and the British state.

For Henson's Anglo-Catholic opponents, the Church was ideally a distinct spiritual community of the clergy and a committed laity of true and strict believers, with an identity that owed more to Catholic Christendom than to the English Reformation. As the English 'nation' and the British parliament now contained large numbers of Free Churchmen,

⁵⁷ See Owen Chadwick, 'The idea of a national Church: Gladstone and Henson', in Marcel Simon and others (eds), *Aspects de l'anglicanisme*, Paris 1974, 183–4.

⁵⁸ Inge-Davidson letters, 22, 24 Dec. 1917, Davidson papers, 381/8–9, 10–11. Inge's sermon nevertheless applauded Henson's 'zealousness for the honour and greatness of the National Church': *Church Family Newspaper*, 8 Feb. 1918.

Presbyterians, rationalists and the religiously indifferent, the idea of a 'people's Church' had no reality and little appeal for them. They accepted the national church establishment, but only conditionally – so long as the Church could become self-governing, released from control by an apostate parliament and able to determine its own doctrines, worship and leadership. If these conditions were not met, disestablishment would be an attractive alternative. Not all the advocates of church self-government shared every aspect of these ecclesiological principles. Temple and other 'Life and Liberty' members wanted a revived popular Church; while Anglo-Catholics preferred a limited confirmation franchise for election to the Church's lay assemblies, the leaders of 'Life and Liberty' successfully pressed in 1919 for a wide baptismal qualification, a decision which finally persuaded Gore to resign from the episcopacy.⁵⁹ The Unionist churchmen's main aims were political and practical, to strengthen the Church by empowering it to undertake institutional and financial reforms. Nevertheless, the Anglo-Catholic conception of a self-governing Church was a strong influence on the premises of the Selborne report.⁶⁰

Henson, in contrast, was committed to both a *Nationalkirche* and a *Volkskirche*. He had a firm Protestant understanding of a national Church that was comprehensive, sensitive to ordinary lay opinion and available for everyone, whatever their degrees of belief, or even disbelief, in its doctrines and formularies. Church establishment, control by parliament and prime ministerial appointments ensured properly national and lay perspectives, and provided a necessary check against introverted 'clericalism' and the sectarianism of church parties. Self-government would turn the Church in upon itself, increase clerical – and worse, Anglo-Catholic – influence, and detach the Church from much of the laity. The church establishment would be fatally undermined, and the national Church would be reduced to a narrow denomination.⁶¹

Davidson was as committed as Henson to a comprehensive, national and established Church, but his sympathies were wider. For him, as for the Anglo-Catholics, Henson's appointment in 1917 was a test case, but in reverse: a defence of the Church's commitment to 'liberty of private judgment in the interpretation of Holy Scripture and in matters of faith' which he had upheld against Gore's earlier campaign for 'rigorist' credal standards.⁶² Yet unlike Henson he did not treat Anglo-Catholics and their

⁵⁹ Bell, *Randall Davidson*, 970–2.

⁶⁰ 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', this *JOURNAL* lxxiii (2022), 814–36.

⁶¹ Henson, 'Church and State'; Stapleton, 'Henson, Figgis and the Archbishops' Committee'.

⁶² Randall Davidson, *The character and call of the Church of England*, London 1912, 45–51; Melanie Barber, 'Randall Davidson: a partial retrospective', in Stephen Taylor (ed.),

pressure for church self-government as a threat to the Church. Tolerance cut both ways, extending to Anglo-Catholics as much as to Liberal churchmen: balance, the avoidance of hard boundaries and irenicism were vital if the Church was to fulfil its duties to the nation. Davidson also agreed with the Unionist churchmen rather than the Anglo-Catholics on church self-government, treating it not as the creation of a spiritual community but as a matter of practicalities, of assisting the national Church to work more effectively.

Despite his nonconformity, Lloyd George as a prime minister in alliance with the Conservative party soon came to understand the rhetoric (if not necessarily the principles) of the national Church. In 1920 he was even reported to be 'most anxious to enable the Church to increase its hold upon the people', as there was a great need for its influence 'on the life of the Nation'.⁶³ During the Hereford episode he commented – with what Griffith-Boscawen noted as a 'strange attitude' for an 'ardent Disestablisher' – that 'with the Church an established body it is essential that all aspects should be reflected in its government; were the Church merely a sect ... it would be possible ... and might even be right that aspects such as those which Henson reflects should be excluded or suppressed'.⁶⁴ Notwithstanding Davidson's warnings and the trouble within the Church, he could feel that his own judgement had been vindicated among the range of opinion that was most important for him. In the national, regional and Free Church press, rather than in the Church of England newspapers, the appointment was widely welcomed, with Henson praised for his 'tolerance', 'broadmindedness', 'liberalising influence on Christian thought' and 'fraternal spirit towards Nonconformists'.⁶⁵

V

The outcome of the Hereford episode – the circumvention of a largely Anglo-Catholic resistance to a liberal bishop – had important consequences for the Church. As Inge noted in early 1918, if the critics had succeeded, it might have taken 'all the heart out of those who ... wish to prevent the Church of England from cutting itself off, not only from its past, but from the future which it may have and ought to have in the

From Cranmer to Davidson, London 1999, 428–30, 434, and see Hughes, *Davidson*, 59–69.

⁶³ Ernest Evans (Lloyd George's private secretary) to Davidson, 21 May 1920, Davidson papers, 11/26.

⁶⁴ Griffith-Boscawen to Wolmer, 29 Dec. 1917, 3 Selborne, ms Eng. hist. c.1010/75; *Crawford papers*, 383 (18 Dec. 1917).

⁶⁵ *Globe*, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, *Leicester Evening Mail*, 13 Dec. 1917; [*Evening*] *Mail*, *Derbyshire Advertiser*, 14 Dec. 1917; *Yorkshire Post*, 20 Dec. 1917.

national life'.⁶⁶ Henson's consecration preserved the Church's comprehensiveness, its wide freedom of religious enquiry and its position as both a *Nationalkirche* and a *Volkskirche*. By preventing ostracism of a leading advocate of Protestant unity, it avoided a check to the improved wartime relations between the Church's leaders and those of other British Churches, which contributed to two far-reaching developments: the ecumenical 'Appeal to all Christian Peoples' by the Lambeth Conference in 1920, and the archbishops acquiring an acknowledged leadership in British religion, resulting in a re-invention of the national Church.⁶⁷ Indirectly, Henson's consecration also assisted the achievement of church self-government. There are ironies here. If Anglo-Catholics and Unionist churchmen had overturned a crown nomination, it is very likely that a 'Protestant' reaction among other MPs and among government ministers would have defeated their larger aim, the passage of the enabling bill; conversely, Henson's appointment as a bishop probably eased what he was most trying to oppose.⁶⁸ Further ironies would follow the 1927–8 parliamentary defeats of revisions of the Prayer Book in Anglo-Catholic directions: Henson became the first bishop to advocate disestablishment, yet Anglo-Catholics continued to accept the church establishment.

Another outcome, originating with Henson's critics but arising more generally in the Church from dismay at the unseemly public squabble over his nomination, was pressure to change the method of episcopal appointment. Given the Church's constitutional connections with the crown, few wanted or thought it practicable to remove the prime minister altogether from the procedure; the issue was how to ensure that he was better informed about church opinion and sensitivities. One early suggestion was that as Lloyd George was a Nonconformist, the task should be temporarily delegated to one of his coalition allies in the Unionist party, conventionally regarded as the 'Church party' – to his amusement, because at this time the Unionist leader was a Scottish Presbyterian and its chief whip a Roman Catholic.⁶⁹ But the main proposals were for provision of more representative and systematic advice than that of the

⁶⁶ Inge to Davidson, 17 Jan. 1918, Davidson papers, 381/12.

⁶⁷ Philip Williamson, 'Archbishops and the monarchy: leadership in British religion, 1900–2012', in Tom Rodger, Philip Williamson and Matthew Grimley (eds), *The Church of England and British politics since 1900*, Woodbridge 2020, 57–79.

⁶⁸ For the political potency of distaste for Anglican 'Catholics' see Bethany Kilcrease, *The great church crisis and the end of English erastianism, 1898–1906*, Abingdon 2017, and John Maiden, *National religion and the Prayer Book crisis, 1927–1928*, Woodbridge 2009.

⁶⁹ Robert Cecil to Bonar Law, 17 Dec. 1917, Bonar Law papers, 82/7/5; *Life with Lloyd George: the diary of A. J. Sylvester, 1931–45*, ed. Colin Cross, London 1975, 161–2, entry for 17 Nov. 1936.

archbishops, and any others that prime ministers happened to consult.⁷⁰ The first to seek alterations was the Church Parliamentary Committee, which on Wolmer's initiative submitted to Lloyd George in February 1918 a memorandum signed by thirty-one MPs. Lloyd George 'welcomed' their suggestion of a 'small consultative committee of representative laymen', through on condition that it co-operated with Pearce as his 'standing advisor'.⁷¹ But this was glib propitiation: Lloyd George never bothered to consult any of its members when making further nominations. For one MP this 'shameless flouting of Church opinion' was likely to result in further 'Henson appointments', while for Wolmer it was final proof of Lloyd George's untrustworthiness.⁷² Though a small incident in itself, it was an early instance of Anglican Unionist disillusionment with his premiership.⁷³

The second attempt at reform also began during 1918, amid petitioning campaigns by the ECU and the Church Reform League encouraged by Gore, and a proposal from an archbishops' committee of inquiry on post-war reconstruction.⁷⁴ In the bishops' house of Canterbury convocation, against fierce opposition from Henson on wide national grounds, Gore secured the creation of a committee to consider how 'the mind of the Church' could be better expressed for ecclesiastical appointments. This committee recommended that the prime minister should be advised by a standing committee consisting mostly of bishops, clergy and laymen elected by each of the three houses of the Canterbury and York convocations.⁷⁵ In Canterbury convocation in February 1920, this too

⁷⁰ There was annoyance with other Lloyd George appointments, especially of an Evangelical as vicar for the Anglo-Catholic parish of St Chad's, Haggerston: *CT*, 10 Aug. 1917; Wolmer to Malcolm and other MPs, 22 Dec. 1917, and William Bridgeman to Wolmer, 30 Dec. 1917, 3 Selborne, MS Eng. hist. c.1010/63-6, 79-80.

⁷¹ Correspondence and reports of meetings, 10 Jan.-11 Mar. 1918, and memo, 12 Feb. 1918, in 3 Selborne, MS Eng. hist. c.988/141, 146, 147, 153, 154, 165, 166-7; Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii. 1243 (misinterpreted by Palmer, *High and mitred*, 174-5). Those nominated were Sir Walter Phillimore (described as High Church), Lord Hambleton (moderate-High), Sir Lewis Dibdin (moderate-Evangelical) and Sir Robert Williams MP (Evangelical).

⁷² *Sylvester diary*, 162; Phillimore to Wolmer, 9 Jan 1919, Wood-Wolmer letters, 13, 24 Jan 1919, 3 Selborne, MS Eng. hist. c.989/1, 9, 10.

⁷³ For the Anglican politicians, especially Cecilians, who contributed to the end of the coalition government in 1922, see Maurice Cowling, *The impact of Labour, 1920-1924*, Cambridge 1971, chs iii-iv.

⁷⁴ ECU and Church Reform League (CRL) meetings, CRL motion in Canterbury house of laymen, and CRL notices, *CT*, 22 Feb., 1 Mar., 30 Apr., 10 May-9 Aug. 1918; Archbishops' committee of inquiry, *The administrative reform of the Church*, London 1918, 17.

⁷⁵ *Chronicle of Canterbury Convocation ... 1918*, 323-31, 508; Chadwick, *Henson*, 145-7; 'Report of the joint committee on crown nominations', appended to *Chronicle of Canterbury Convocation ... 1920*.

was opposed by Henson in the house of bishops, though the more effective criticism came from the house of clergy, where it was argued that a committee might become too powerful and be too susceptible to partisanship. Instead, it was resolved that the prime minister should be asked to consult the archbishops before each nomination.⁷⁶

The resolution was intended to limit prime ministerial independence by establishing a formal process of consultation. But its terms were easily accommodated: in a published reply, Lloyd George blithely presented the resolution as ‘an expression of approval’ of his ‘invariable practice’, and stated that he was ‘glad to know’ that he was ‘acting in accordance with the wishes of Convocation’.⁷⁷ Consultation did not require agreement. To the archbishops’ intense annoyance, just three months later Lloyd George brushed aside their preferred candidate for the vacant diocese of Durham and nominated Henson instead, fulfilling his half-promise to him in 1918. Both Davidson and Lang warned Lloyd George that this would produce another outcry; and this time they took their objections so far as to propose intervention by the king, and even his veto – a remarkable and uncharacteristic willingness to risk a constitutional crisis, placing the sovereign and archbishops against a prime minister.⁷⁸

Stamfordham had also warned Lloyd George of the possibility of a revived agitation, but he and the king had a better sense of proportion. Neither regarded the matter as sufficiently serious to risk the politically hazardous course of challenging formal prime ministerial advice, especially because, with Henson already consecrated as a bishop, the issue was now a change of diocese, a matter of ‘administration’, not principle.⁷⁹ Davidson and Lang were indeed on weak ground. Henson had made no further provocative statements on doctrine; Gore had retired; the enabling bill had been enacted in 1919; and closer relations with the Free Churches had, with the Lambeth Appeal, become official church policy. Lloyd George also had the reasonable case that as Henson had been a popular dean of Durham, his translation would be welcomed in the diocese.⁸⁰ A repetition of anything on the scale of the ‘Hereford scandal’ was unlikely. But the archbishops had further reasons to be annoyed. For Lang, this was the prospect of having an argumentative bishop in his own province. Davidson had a more general anxiety. Given the convocation resolution

⁷⁶ *Chronicle of Canterbury Convocation ... 1918*, 104–10, 191–204.

⁷⁷ Lloyd George to Davidson, 21 Feb. 1920, in Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii. 1246–7.

⁷⁸ Davidson to Evans, 24 May 1920, Lang to Evans, 26 May 1920, Lang to Davidson, 28 May 1920, and Davidson to Stamfordham, 31 May 1920, Davidson papers, 11/27, 29, 28, 31; Palmer, *High and mitred*, 177–8.

⁷⁹ Stamfordham to Burge, 10 May 1920, and to Davidson, 1 June 1920, RA, PS/PSO/GV/C/I/1611/15, 23.

⁸⁰ Evans to Davidson, 29 May 1920, Davidson papers, 11/30; Stamfordham to Davidson, 1 June 1920, RA, PS/PSO/GV/C/I/1611/23.

and Lloyd George's reply, it might appear that the archbishops had approved or even initiated Henson's new appointment, and renewed objections could have unfortunate consequences for their authority. If there were protests, Davidson thought they should publicly deny any responsibility for the nomination and expose the lack of meaningful consultation, even if this meant a 'breach' with the prime minister. In the event, as few complained, Davidson issued no explanation, and he soon restored amicable relations with Lloyd George.⁸¹ Nevertheless, Henson's promotion re-opened the issue of episcopal appointments. For some, it exposed the hollowness of the convocation resolution; Davidson drew a different conclusion.

VI

The Enabling Act created a new body through which Church reform could be sought. In the Church Assembly during July 1923 Wolmer and Hugh Cecil attacked what the latter called an 'abominable system' for appointing bishops,⁸² and obtained the appointment of another committee to make new recommendations. But this was followed by prolonged delay before an interim report in 1929, by referral to a new commission on Church and State, and then by a succession of further enquiries, disagreements and obstructions. During the 1950s, provisions were made to ensure that the archbishops received fuller advice from dioceses and other members of the Church, but without affecting the nomination by prime ministers. More committees proposed further reforms, before in 1970 another commission on Church and State, chaired by Chadwick, produced a scheme which was, after further negotiations, acceptable to both the Church and the government. In 1976 the Labour prime minister, James Callaghan, announced that in future prime ministers would make a selection from two names submitted by a Crown Appointments (later, Nominations) Commission, representative of the Church and chaired by an archbishop. Only in 2007 did another Labour government declare that 'in principle ... the Prime Minister should not play an active role in the selection' of bishops.⁸³ Since 2008 prime ministers have simply forwarded to the sovereign a single nomination made by the Commission.

⁸¹ Davidson to Stamfordham, 31 May, 2 June 1920, Davidson papers, 11/31, and RA PS/PSO/GV/C/I/1611/25.

⁸² *CT*, 20 July 1923.

⁸³ *The governance of Britain*, CM 717, London 2007, 26. For the various proposals since 1923 see Palmer, *High and mitred*, 279–88; Colin Podmore, 'The choosing of bishops ... an historical survey', in General Synod paper, *Working with the spirit: the choosing of bishops*, London 2001, 119–21; and 'Prime ministerial involvement in ecclesiastical appointments', House of Commons briefing note 2008, at <<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sno4403/>>.

Why did it take so long for the Church to obtain control of the appointment of its own leaders? Paradoxically, this was another effect of the Hereford episode: even while it started the movement for change, it strengthened the existing system of prime ministerial patronage. The opposition to Henson's appointment confirmed Lloyd George's instinct, reinforced by Pearce, that the Church could not be wholly trusted to make the best choice of its own bishops. Even the archbishops could be too yielding towards particular influences. In the case of Henson, Davidson was, he thought, too sensitive towards what he regarded as a 'comparatively unimportant clique'.⁸⁴ In his general assumptions, he was no different from previous prime ministers, and many of his successors. The Church of England had too important a part in national life to be left to its own devices in the nomination of bishops; the task required an independent perspective.

Resistance to reform was not confined to prime ministers. More important was the opposition of successive archbishops. Notwithstanding his two setbacks over Henson, Davidson defended the existing procedure, and discouraged efforts to change it. When consulted by the Church Parliamentary Committee in 1918, he urged that the proposed advisory group should be private, informal and not meet as a committee, because this would become 'almost wholly mischievous'.⁸⁵ He was equally cool towards convocation's appointment of a committee to recommend changes. He disliked its recommendations, and insisted that the already mild alternative resolution – that prime ministers should consult with the archbishops – should be diluted further by removal of the word 'officially'.⁸⁶ He then undermined the spirit of the resolution by providing Lloyd George with the terms, indeed the very text, for his reply, that it expressed approval of his existing practice. 'Nothing whatever', he added to reinforce the point, had been said in convocation 'to suggest that the Prime Minister should be bound by the advice' of the archbishops.⁸⁷

Davidson's annoyance at Henson's translation to Durham surely indicates some sense of betrayal, that Lloyd George had exploited his helpfulness. Nevertheless, he continued to think – even when in 1924 the prime minister was for the first time the leader of the Labour party, and potentially less sympathetic towards the Church than Lloyd George – that 'nothing must be done which will weaken in any degree the responsibility

⁸⁴ Lloyd George reported in Stamfordham to Davidson, 1 June 1920, RA, PS/PSO/GV/C/I/1611/23.

⁸⁵ Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii. 1243–4.

⁸⁶ *Chronicle of Canterbury Convocation ... 1918*, 330; 1920, 220–4; Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii. 1244–5.

⁸⁷ Davidson to Lloyd George, 20 Feb. 1920, Davidson papers, 11/18.

of the Prime Minister' for nominating bishops.⁸⁸ This was more than his conservative attachment to a familiar procedure, of which he himself had been very much a beneficiary. In his experience, the procedure normally worked so well that it was worth the cost of occasional frictions: it mostly produced good appointments, because prime ministers were usually amenable to the archbishop's advice. Any prime ministerial advisory committee would limit or rival the archbishop's own advice, and complicate matters by becoming an arena or target for pressure from particular church parties; an enduring lesson from the Hereford episode was that Anglo-Catholics had an organisation capable of prejudicing a committee against the appointment of liberal bishops. Davidson shared Lloyd George's (and Henson's) opinion that prime ministers had the detachment from church concerns and the sources of independent advice to be impervious to lobbying by church parties. This meant that the existing system assisted the archbishops in securing a balance in appointments. It also had the advantage of reducing pressure on themselves; any criticism would be directed towards prime ministers, not them, and this could ease their management of the Church in other matters. So in several respects, prime ministerial responsibility helped to preserve the national character of the Church. Later archbishops shared Davidson's attitude; Lang in convocation during 1938 and Fisher at the Church Assembly in 1952 vigorously defended the existing method.⁸⁹ In this, they could usually obtain support from within the Church's assemblies, where there was also suspicion that an advisory committee would be manipulated by 'wire-pullers'.

Why was the system changed from the 1970s? In part, this was a result of an acceptance by the archbishops and bishops of a need for more professional organisation and procedures in the Church, leading to the creation of representative and bureaucratic systems for the collection of information and advice on the qualities of potential nominees and the circumstances of dioceses, with a senior appointments secretary and 'vacancy-in-see committees'. This enabled prime ministers to have confidence in the Church's ability to ensure that nominations combined both individual merit and general appropriateness, minimising undue sectional pressure. More generally, it was an extension of a further loosening of the connection between the Church and the State, marked especially in 1970 by the replacement of the Church Assembly with a General Synod, empowered with further legislative independence. More simply and more obviously, from the 1950s a presumed secularisation and a greater religious and cultural pluralism meant that the Church of England, though still important, had ceased to be so integral to national life.

⁸⁸ Davidson to Parmoor, 1 Feb. 1924, in Bell, *Randall Davidson*, ii. 1251–2.

⁸⁹ *CT*, 3 June 1938, 21 Nov. 1952.