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UNRESTRICTED

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STh AKC MTh

RESERVED SEATS

A Study of the Decline of a Convention in the Church of England

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## A B S T R A C T

This thesis explores the controversy about privileged seating in the Church of England during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The institutionalisation of the pew system implied some unease. Early protests are noticed, then the strictures of three bishops and the reactions of five priests in the first half of the nineteenth century are considered.

The Report on the Census argued that less than half the seats in parish churches were really free, and that such discrimination alienated the poor. But a House of Lords' Committee learned that numerous poor worshippers liked to pay for their accommodation. Nevertheless, it hoped the system would disappear.

The revival of Convocations enabled Church leaders corporately to debate the issue. York denounced the system, but Canterbury, though worried, reached no firm decision. In the 1860's some critics combined to form an Association leading to discussion in a forum where clergy and laity voiced strong opposition.

After much initial success, the Association's recourse to legislation probably retarded its advance. The Lords set up another Committee which produced valuable statistics (40% of churches now free, but 'appropriation' in most of the others) without comment.

The fortunes of the Association in the 20th century are tracked to its dissolution in 1929, and the influence of World War I is observed. When the government of the Church is reformed, the Association mounts its final assault through the new National Assembly. A committee is appointed which deplores the system, believes it to be in terminal decline, and proposes only that it be left to die. It lingers vestigially until the mid-century.

The thesis concludes that though the freeing of pews did not draw the working classes in, the struggle was worthwhile.

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## PERSONAL PREAMBLE

There were a number of illuminated texts to edify the congregation of Brenchley Church, near Tunbridge Wells, where I once ministered. All were appropriate. But there were two which especially caught my eye. They faced each other, boldly inscribed on the transept arches on either side of the nave. And the message of both seemed to be for those who bore the burden and heat of the day. 'The rich and poor meet together, the Lord is maker of them all', (1) the one declared. 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest', (2) was the invitation of the other.

Why were those scriptural citations so disposed, facing north and south into either arm of that cruciform building? The characters were Old English(Gothic) and their origins lay somewhere in the last century. Other texts, high on the horizontal beams of the roof, refrained from what one might call 'political statement', offering encouragement to everyone who worshipped in that place.

Somewhere I had read of a segregation in church under the terms of which the lower orders occupied benches in the transepts, while their betters invoked the Deity from more ample facilities in the nave. Would not the labourers of the village and their wives be able to see those texts as they sat in their social ghettos and, such as could read, draw comfort from words so promising? Not that the nave was engulfed by those majestic and intrusive artefacts that we know as 'box pews'. Yet these particular seats were not available to all.(3) When I went there in 1974, worshippers had long won their freedom from social constraints

within those walls. But attitudes and hesitations occasionally surfaced among older parishioners as they arrived for service and sought the obscurity of the aisles which, together with what I garnered from subsequent conversations, suggested that the legacy of division was still unexpired.

While wondering who caused those two texts to be exhibited, my interest centred on the Rev. Francis Storr. He had been vicar during the high Victorian period and his concern for the poor was legendary, and his views somewhat advanced for the time.(4) It seemed likely, then, that it was Storr, unhappy with a convention that divided the faithful even before the throne of grace, who conceived the consolation of those texts. He may not have been able to eradicate the pew system, far less to shatter the assumptions which undergirded it, but he could offer the rude occupants of those benches some word of reassurance. The human family, despite appearances to the contrary, had a common Creator who, in the person of his incarnate Son, had taken an 'option for the poor'.(5)

Although the mystery of those texts ignited my interest, it was not the only residue of the age of privileged seating that I had encountered in parishes where I had served. In St Michael's, Sittingbourne, an industrial town in north Kent, where I went in 1958, there were other relics. Adhering to the ledges of the seats, and sometimes hanging under the seats themselves, were those ungainly cupboards to which pew tenants or owners had committed their velvet covered prayer books replete with satin markers, and perhaps even the spare pinc-nez that did duty for this activity alone. By this time they were unlocked, though some still enclosed the belongings of worshippers who customarily, though no longer by right, occupied that particular place.

One of these receptacles, however, had successfully repulsed every assault upon it, for it was cunningly secured. Nevertheless, at last it also succumbed to an onslaught of great determination. Within were the conventional volumes. But, almost concealed, black and heavy with the grime of decades, was a copy of the Service of Thanksgiving for the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria. It seemed entirely appropriate if, as was possibly the case, the last private use of that particular compartment, and the pew of which it was the adjunct, ended with such a climactic occasion.(6) It may have so ended, perhaps because of the emigration from the parish of the occupying family. But did it continue to exude an intangible aura so that the corporate memory of the worthies once accommodated there, kept it inviolate and unvisited into the new century?(7)

These, then, are among my recollections to which I owe the interest which led to this study. It is a study of various influences or movements, individual and corporate, ecclesiastical and external, that made war on an institution that divided Christian congregations according to their rank or substance. In doing so I shall not be heedless of voices which defended the status quo and, when venturing to judge, will endeavour not to impose, without qualification, the presuppositions of one living in the 1980's. A general chronological order will be observed, though the pursuit of a theme will often lead to an overlapping in points of time. My sources will range from such primary material as the Charges of bishops to the minutes of appropriate organisations, from the Chronicles of Convocation to Parliamentary Papers, and I shall draw on such secondary material as works of history, biography, general social comment, and ecclesiastical architecture.



## Notes to Personal Preamble

(1) Proverbs 22.2.

(2) Matthew 11.28.

(3) Cf. Ch.VII, Rebuff in the Lords p.206. During my incumbency, the occupants of a house called 'Poundfield' still exercised their right, without any vainglory, to use the rear seat on the south side of the chancel.

(4) Francis Storr (1808-1888), vicar of Brechley 1854-1888. His praises were passed from one generation to another so that I heard of him from older parishioners and from his great, great niece. When rector of Otley in Suffolk he persuaded the farmers to discontinue the manufacture of cheese on Sundays so that the workers might enjoy some respite. At Brechley, among other good works, he entertained the hungry at the vicarage. He was also a pioneer of local ecumenism, inviting the Methodists to harvest festival and advertising their services in the parish magazine. His death was marked by extended obituaries not only in the Record, where one might expect an evangelical to be noticed, but also in the Tractarian Guardian. I am greatly indebted for copies of these obituaries, and for other material about Storr to the Dean of Carlisle, the Very Rev. Henry Stapleton, a descendant, who agrees that the insertion of the texts would be his doing.

(5) An expression associated with the principles of Liberation Theology and, in this country, with the Church's mission to the inner city. The Bishop of Liverpool, David Sheppard, wrote a book, Bias to the Poor, in 1983.

(6) Cf. Ch.VII, Rebuff in the Lords, p.206. Although, as this reference shows, a form of discrimination prevailed at Sittingbourne in the 1880's, some twenty years before, box pews had been removed making space for 64 more sittings. (This information was given to me by Mr V.J. Torr, a Kentish historian, who cites a letter from Thomas Walford, the vicar, to Archbishop Longley of July 1864).

(7) Another cause of division between the classes at worship, was the existence of the parish mission room situated only a few hundred yards from the church. Services were held there, as parish magazines show, simultaneously with those at St Michael's and met the needs of humbler folk who preferred the atmosphere of this austere structure to the grander setting of the parish church. This practice continued until the end of the Second World War and when services at the mission room ceased so that all could come together, many old people could not make the change. In my time as incumbent I often was told by parishioners who had switched to worship at the parish church that they longed for the more 'homely' atmosphere of the mission room. Those concerned with the absence of the poor in our period and who did not favour the freeing of the churches, sometimes suggested places of worship built specially for them. Cf. Ch.I, Problem Arises p.12, Ch.IV, External Pressures p.97, Ch.VII, Rebuff in the Lords p.195.

THE PROBLEM ARISESGenesis of the System

The New Testament Church possessed no special buildings for its corporate devotion: the houses of members served for the breaking of bread and prayers.(1) Nevertheless, even in the 1st century, there is an indication that some Christians succumbed to, or at least were attracted by, an impulse to give special place in the congregation to brethren or enquirers of superior worldly status. Thus James, in his Letter, was moved to rebuke just such respect of persons.(2) And his strictures became the mandate centuries later for those who sought to eradicate the pew system, in its social sense, in the Church of England. The critical questions concerning the Letter, and in particular the interpretation of sunagoge and the religious allegiance of the elegant entrant to the gathering, need not detain us.<sup>(3)</sup> What is clear is that even in the infant Church, the tendency unduly to acknowledge rank to the disparagement of believers less endowed, threatens to invade the community as it assembles for worship. And the reaction of James to what the New English Bible starkly translates as 'snobbery', was subsequently understood as anathematising the convention of disposing the congregation according to a pattern that reflected the values of the secular order. Yet such a scheme became entrenched in the Church of the nation.

When buildings were eventually constructed specifically for worship, few concessions were made for the comfort of the faithful. The congregation stood. However, stone benches against the walls or at the base of pillars were sometimes available for the old and infirm.(4) But the earliest evidence for seating

related to status comes, in this country, from the 13th century. Peter Wyville, Bishop of Exeter(1280-1292), raises the question with his clergy in 1287. 'We have heard that the parishioners of divers places do oftentimes wrangle about their seats in church, two or more claiming the same seat'. And this competition has generated such unseemly turbulence that, 'the divine offices are sore let and hindered.' He then gives an instruction acknowledging the fact, though not necessarily approving the principle, of a class-based arrangement. 'Wherefore we decree that none shall henceforth call any seat in church his own save noble persons and patrons.'(5) Robert Phillimore(6) argued that no seats were assigned in church in this pre-Reformation period 'except for some very great persons'. And he discovered a faint foreshadowing of that condition of dependence on, or at least interest in, the allocation of seats on the part of the clergy which we shall often notice in this study. Some of them were apparently the property of incumbents, for Phillimore has unearthed wills of incumbents bequeathing seats to their successors.(7) Clearly, then, some material benefit was involved.

Our first glimpse of seats for which the occupant paid comes from Reading as early as 1441 after which their 'reservation and sale naturally grew with startling rapidity as soon as listening to sermons came to be considered by many as almost the chief object of church attendance.'(8) In a chapter devoted to the accounts of St Edmund's, Salisbury, Cox noted 'the changes that began in Edward VI's reign, when the pulpit was exalted above the altar'. The increase is not dramatic, but he shows that whereas in 1523 the income from "'the Settes in the Churche"' produced 17s 1d, by 1633 it was £10 14s 6d. During the intervening

century the vestry had seized the opportunity of increasing their revenue by this means, for certain of the pews had been "enlarged at the ends towards the walke, and the Seates to be narrower, to the end that more pews may be made in that space, for the benefit of the Church".(9)

Plainly, between pulpit and pew there was a dynamic connection. In the middle ages, 'The nave was basically still a great hall thronged with worshippers attending upon the priest in his chancel.'(10) But 'the popularity of the parish sermon had introduced a new element into the service. It may be as a result of this that fixed seating at last began to appear in the naves.'(11) And, according to Moorman, 'there are not examples of pulpits in England earlier than about 1340, while the absence of pews or chairs would have imposed a considerable strain upon the listeners' patience and endurance.'(12) Drawing on his great authority in the field of Franciscan studies, he suggests a reason for the advent of the preacher. The coming of the friars led many parochial clergy 'to reconsider their duties and try their hand at a sermon.'(13)

It was, however, the Reformation that really elevated the sermon, thus giving powerful impetus to the question of the conditions in which it was heard. So in Henry VIII's reign, the erecting of pews became sufficiently widespread as to draw a protest from Sir Thomas More.(14) In the reign of Elizabeth I, John Aylmer, Bishop of London (1574-1595), in his Articles of Enquiry for 1586, asks his clergy, 'whether any strife hath grown about pews or seats in the church; and between whom it was.'(15) A question to the clergy of the Archdeaconry of Nottingham in 1599, implies that, at least in the Diocese of Lincoln, the provision of seats is becoming almost obligatory. The archdeacon

wants to know whether, 'convenient seats [are] placed in the church for the necessary use of parishioners in time of divine service.'(16) And two years later, from a question of a successor of Aylmer as Bishop of London, Richard Bancroft, we can infer that seating has now become so much the norm that appropriate questions are included regularly in the episcopal Articles of Enquiry. He asks, 'Whether there have grown in your church since the last visitation in the year 1598, any contention betwixt any of the parishioners, touching the placing or displacing of any in any seat or pew in the church; and whether there have been any pew built since the aforesaid year 1598 in any your churches, without the express leave and consent first had of the ordinary of the diocese; and by whom have any such been built.'(17)

The parishioners of Stuart England saw the surrounds of the pews getting higher until the occupants were even hidden from the vulgar gaze. This phenomenon is not amenable to a single explanation. It may be that such seclusion was desired so that Puritans worshipping within could omit unnoticed those ceremonial gestures, such as bowing at the name of Jesus or facing east for the Creed, which the Laudians would make compulsory. However, a more mundane solution has been proposed: to counter those copious draughts, which still rustle in our ancient churches, against which a barrier of oak or pine afforded some immunity. A faculty for such a construction for a church in Essex defines its purpose with admirable candour as being, 'to break and keep off the wind that cometh out of the chancel.'(18)

The 18th century, in the words of two ecclesiastical historians, witnessed as regards the fabric of churches, 'the triumph of the Philistines'.(19) And they detect a causal relationship between that tastelessness which did not forbear to

crown St George's, Bloomsbury with a full-sized statue of the monarch, and the furniture within. For it was this lack of sensitivity which 'pushed that bad old pew-system to its most offensive height, glorifying the well-to-do and practically excluding the poor.'(20) By now the system had become so general that a regulation of the Convocations in 1712 required that new churches to be consecrated should be 'previously pewed.'(21) And the satirists were abroad making sport with those chambers which invited, or at least permitted, <sup>surrender</sup> to the call of Morpheus. Thus Dean Swift related the history of a bedstead converted by a craftsman into pews,

'Which now their ancient nature keep

By lodging folks disposed to sleep.'(22)

As we may include the sermon in the period of somnolence, the very object which seats were installed to serve was consequently frustrated. That, however, was a venial sin. Inexcusable was that the underprivileged were, through this wasteful encroachment upon available space, being denied a niche from which they too could worship, or relegated to those mean and cramped benches labelled 'Free'.

In the 19th century we confront a curious development. For, as our study will show, on the one hand it was a period of strident protest. First it came from individuals, then from assemblies taking counsel together, and later from a body organised for this very purpose. Yet, on the other hand, it is the period in which the pew system became most rigorously institutionalised. It was the urgent need of which Parliament had taken account, to provide churches in the burgeoning towns for the rapidly growing population that baptised the pew system.

So the first Church Building Act 1818 (58 George III) authorised the issue of a million Exchequer bills for this purpose. Places with a population of not less than 4000 but with church accommodation for not more than 2000, or any place where there were a thousand people resident more than four miles from any church or chapel were eligible for a grant to cover the cost of the bricks and mortar (c.45,ss. 13,14). But how was the priest to be paid? Not from the government's subvention, but, 'It shall be lawful for the Commissioners to assign out of pew rents a proper stipend to the spiritual person serving in such church or chapel.'(c.45 s.64). Thus pew rents entered the Statute book. But the ambivalence of that entry will appear at the end of this chapter.(23)

#### Signs of Unease

To a large extent the earliest murmurings against the pew system ride upon the record of its history. For, as we have seen, our knowledge of the presence of fixed seating derives from the anxieties which it generated. So from Bishop Wyville of Exeter in the 13th century to Bishop Bancroft of London at the beginning of the 17th century, our knowledge is thus acquired. The division of this chapter is, therefore, arbitrary for the previous section is the first part of this section. From the 17th century, with the system widely developed, we are no longer looking for traces of its existence so that the voice of protest may, as it were, be heard for itself alone.

Sir Christopher Wren's was one such voice. We would expect that the objection of the great architect would proceed from such considerations as appearance and proportion. And, indeed, for this cause he would have dispensed with pews altogether and substituted benches with wide aisles dividing them

so that the glory of St Paul's might be reproduced in his humbler creations.(24) His concern, however, was not purely aesthetic. 'A church', he wrote, 'should not be so filled with pews but that the poor may have room to stand or sit in the alleys for to them equally is the gospel preached.' And Wren was not blind to the economic realities of the system, for 'there is no stemming the tide of profit of pew-keepers; especially since by pews in the chapel of ease the minister is chiefly supported.'(25)

Likewise in the 18th century, Mrs Anna Barbauld(26) deplores the system for more than one reason. 'I would reprobate those gloomy solitary cells, planned by the spirit of aristocracy which deform the building not less to the eye of taste than to the eye of benevolence, and insulating each family within its separate enclosure, favour at once the pride of rank and the laziness of indulgence.'(27) Although her protest is double-edged a study of her words leaves no doubt that the social aspect of the system for her was the primary offence. About the same time another literary woman entered the fray. Mrs Sarah Trimmer(28) addressed the subject, somewhat obliquely, in her book The Economy of Charity published in 1787. She ponders the alienation of the working-classes from public worship and concludes, 'in the metropolis and other populous places, little provision is made for seating the poor.' This leads to some of them 'joining the congregations of schismatics or following itinerant preachers.' In the course of her argument she sheds light incidentally on a contemporary practice. Wealthy worshippers are seeking to sit at the feet of fashionable preachers wherever they are. For there would be room for the poor 'were the respective parishioners to keep to their own parish churches.' And Mrs Trimmer has observed that in London 'very few parish churches, whatever room



there may be inlocked-up pews, furnish seats for the poor.' Her remedy is to insert benches in churches which have wide aisles; they would not need desks, but they should have backs. In the West End she looks to the charity of those able to afford it to 'supply the deficiency of places of worship for the poor' on the model of the 'Free Chapel at Bath.' (29)

Though they combine to rebuke the selfishness of the upper-classes, the approaches of these two devout and articulate women diverge. Barbauld would evidently eradicate the institution of privileged seating: Trimmer's solution, though not bereft of compassion, would leave intact the principle of socially based seating. Even if all sorts and conditions gather in the same building, benches with no desks at which to kneel or on which to place a book or other article, are symbols of a gradation according to rank and substance. Nevertheless, she deserves some small acknowledgment. For she questioned fearlessly the conduct of the privileged tenants of the pews, and the logic of her complaint, if pursued, would lead to a more radical reform than that which she proposed.

Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff (1782-1816), outlined, in a letter to William Wilberforce in 1800, a scheme towards that very reform. Though his close acquaintance with London seems not entirely to his credit (30) he ventures to make a suggestion. Having observed the shortage of churches in the capital, he argues that 'this inconvenience is much augmented by the pews which have been erected in them. What I would propose is the building an additional number of new churches, each on a large scale, in proper situations, which should have no appropriated seats but, being furnished merely with benches, should be open alike to the rich and poor of all parishes and all countries.' (31) The

allusion to benches seems at first to make his proposal similar to that of Mrs Trimmer; but, unlike hers, they are to be occupied, without distinction, by all classes alike. However, his scheme falls short of demanding the total abolition of the pew system, for despite his censure of the wastefulness which it causes in existing churches, the liberty he seeks is to be enjoyed in new buildings only. Watson's hope, as a reforming bishop, may have been for a more general commonwealth while he kept the expression of it within the realm of possibility.(32)

Finally, to these early instances of unease we must, paradoxically, append the very statute which, as we saw, institutionalised the system. For that Act of 1818 also decreed that in buildings erected under its aegis there must be provided, 'pews, sittings, or benches for every such church or chapel to be marked with the words "free seats" amounting to not less than one-fifth of the whole of the sittings'.(c45;s75) Those free seats may, indeed, be situated behind pillars or in positions equally obscure, and of a standard of workmanship such as to make their use a penance or a humiliation.(33) Nevertheless, as a lawyer of the Court of Arches, reflecting on the Act some fifty years later, remarked, it seemed to him 'a matter of astonishment to find that in 1818 the ancient rights of parishioners to the use of their parish church, without payment of rents, were fully recognised; and although to relieve the pressing wants of the moment, a system of appropriation and pew renting was sanctioned, the Act contemplated it as a temporary measure'.(34)

Notes to The Problem Arises

(1)As at the house of John Mark's mother. Acts 12.12.

(2)James 2.1-3. The charge is 'snobbery' in the New English Bible, 'partiality' in the Revised Standard Version.

(3)Initially Jewish Christians did not perceive themselves as embracing a faith totally distinct from Judaism, and so continued the devout practices which they had previously observed. Cf. Acts 3.1.

(4)Hence, probably, the idiom, 'The weakest go to the wall.' Some worshippers may have used crutches to ease their aching limbs. Cf. The Prayer Book Dictionary G. Harford and M. Stephenson. Pitman 1912. p.536.

(5)English Church Furniture J. Charles Cox and Alfred Harvey. Methuen 1907. p.284.

(6)Robert Joseph Phillimore(1810-1885).High Churchman. Friend of Gladstone. Held a number of ecclesiastical legal appointments and in 1867 became Dean of the Court of Arches.

(7)Ecclesiastical Law in the Church of England Robert Phillimore 2nd Ed. 1895. Vol. II.p.1424.

(8)The Churchwardens' Accounts J. Charles Cox. Methuen 1913.p.186f. An article about the Church of England in the 14th and 15th centuries, links the actual origin of pew rents to the general popularity of the Church in that period. Using the records of St Lawrence, Reading, which Cox later used, he reasons from the numerous gifts received, ad opus ecclesiae, to the willingness of parishioners to pay for their places. 'In the same way, there can be no doubt, pew-rents originated.' At first they were let only to women. Thus the statement in the accounts for 1515-16, 'Also it is agreed that all women that shall take any seat in the said church do pay for the same seat 6d, except in the middle range and the north range beneath the font, the which shall pay but 4d, and that every woman do take her place every day as they cometh to church, except such as have been mayors' wives.' Church Quarterly Review October 1900. Author unnamed p.99.

(9)Cox. Ibid. p.149.Also in the Salisbury diocese pews 'soon after the Reformation' were traded for private profit at Warminster where besides buying and selling and letting even 'parcels of the very soil within the walls were sold for the erection of such seats as the purchaser pleased.'The History of Warminster J.Daniell. Simpkin 1879. p.187.

(10)Parish Churches: their Architectural Development in England Hugh Braun. Faber 1970 p.149.

(11)Braun. Ibid. p.149.

(12)Church Life in England in the Thirteenth Century J.R.H. Moorman. Cambridge 1945 p.78, citing G.R.Owst,Preaching in Medieval England.

(13)Moorman. Ibid. p.78.

(14) The English Church in the Eighteenth Century C.J. Abbey and J.H. Overton. Longmans 1878. vol. II p.423. The writer of the article quoted above (8) remarks, 'Sir Thomas More has references to the custom of seeking out and paying for good places.' p.99. Such criticism comes well from the author of Utopia, whose citizens are warned against a man who 'inordinately and ambitiously desireth promotions.' The Second Book. CUP 1879. p.126.(Ed. J. Rawson Lumby).

(15) Elizabethan Episcopal Administration Alcuin Club Collections Mowbray 1924. vol.3 p.203.

(16) Ibid. p.317.

(17) Ibid. p.341.

(18) The Architectural Setting of Anglican Worship G.W.O. Addleshaw and F. Etchells. Faber 1948. p.86.

(19) Abbey and Overton Op.cit. vol.II p.421. The outspoken comments of these scholars at a time when criticism was far from universal may win for them a place in the record of opposition to the system.

(20) Abbey and Overton Ibid. p.421.

(21) Abbey and Overton Ibid. p.422.

(22) Quoted by Cox and Harvey Op.cit. p.286 who explain, 'The fairly close resemblance of some of these pews to the elaborate tester bedsteads of Elizabethan and Jacobean date led Swift thus to satirize them in Baucis and Philemon.' (This 'ancient nature' of private pews was illustrated sympathetically by the Pre-Raphaelite, Sir John Millais, in his tableaux, My First Sermon and My Second Sermon. The seat on which it is believed his subject slept is preserved in Winchelsea Church. When the present writer attempted to recline in that compartment, his heart went out to the little Victorian girl who could have seen nothing but the panel in front of her, and who eventually succumbed to a discourse of apocalyptic duration.) Swift's couplet is also quoted in John Neale's A Supplement to the History of Pews and he adds another from Joseph Warton (1722-1800) who in his Progress of Discontent told of a churchman who,

'Studies to find out latest dues,  
And regulates the state of pews.'

Even more cynical is the outlook of another clergyman, whom Neale cites. In his Love of Fame, Edward Young (1683-1765) analyses the motivation of a member of his congregation at Welwyn, where he was rector,

'Since Sundays have no balls, the well-dressed belle,  
Shines in the pew, but smiles to hear of hell.'

(23) It had long been possible for private individuals to apply for private Acts of Parliament to build churches and finance them according to their wishes. See, for example, Ch.III, Priestly Initiatives, p.60. The first Church Building Act legitimised rents in parish churches, that is churches with territorial obligations.

(24) Addleshaw and Etchells Op.cit. p.88.

(25) Both quotations from, Life in the English Church J.H. Overton Longmans 1885. p.202f.

(26) Anna Letitia Barbauld(1743-1825). Married the Rev. Rochemont Barbauld with whom she kept a boarding school in Suffolk. A prolific writer, among her works are Hymns in Prose for Children and Best English Novels that ran into 50 volumes which she edited.

(27) Abbey and Overton Op.cit.p.424.

(28) Sarah Trimmer(1741-1810). Interest in children and wrote many books for them. Much involved in education, insisting that the duty of teaching lay with clergy of the Established Church not with Nonconformist ministers. A pioneer of the Sunday School movement.

(29) Quotations from The Economy of Charity are in English Historical Documents ed.A Aspinall and E. Anthony Smith.Eyre & Spottiswoode 1959. vol.XI pp.645-7. It was in the revised edition of her book that Trimmer referred to the 'Free Chapel at Bath'. Opened in 1798, it was built on the initiative, and at the expense of Charles Daubeny, who formed the plan of a place of worship for the poor while staying in the city. At the time he was vicar of North Bradley in Wiltshire, later becoming Archdeacon of Sarum. Like Trimmer, he did not seek to abolish the pew system itself but inveighed against proprietary chapels in his book, A Guide to the Church(1799). Cf. Ch.vI, Frontal Attacks p.163. DNB claims for Daubeny that his creation was the 'first free and open church in the country.' Though a bold advance on common practice, it was the floor only of the church at Walcot that was free, as is apparent from the following account of its first Sunday, November 24, 1798. 'The gallery, indeed, was not above half-filled, the seats being reserved for the renters of them; but the area below contained above a thousand persons, decently and cleanly dressed, and receiving the benefits of divine worship with a degree of propriety and attention that made the service extremely awful and impressive.' Report of the Society for Bettering the Conditions of the Poor vol. II p298f. Moreover, churches built for the poor to enter without price are not equivalent to parish churches free and open to all and for all strata of society.

(30) 'Watson, the notorious absentee from his diocese, could yet see what would be useful in London.' English Church Life from the Restoration to the Tractarian Movement J. Wickham Legg Longmans 1914. p.154.

(31) Wickham Legg Ibid. p.154.

(32) Cf.Ch.III, Priestly Initiatives p.58, for Hook's compromise.

(33) For the arrangement of free seats in the parish church of Sheffield see Church and People in an Industrial City E.R. Wickham. Lutterworth 1957. p.43 and Appendix III.

(34) The History and Law of Church Seats Alfred Heales. Butterworth 1872. Book II p.135. The Act also provided a seat for the incumbent's family in such a way as to ensure their presence or, alternatively, that their absence would be noticed. For a seat able to hold at least six persons was to be available near the pulpit. When this writer came to his first living in 1958 he can recall such a seat still being described as the 'Vicarage pew'. It is doubtful whether all of a priest's close relatives relished such proximity to the source of edification. It was also decreed that seats, not among the free ones, were to be reserved for the incumbent's servants. It is a comment both on the worldly condition of their employer as well as what was expected of his retainers, that at least four places were to be set aside for this purpose. (c.45,S.75).

The results in terms of church-going of the statutory provision of free seats and the legalisation of pew rents, were mixed. 'Many of the incumbents of the new churches announced that they had gratifyingly large congregations; but a note of disappointment was sometimes heard. The Archdeacon of Nottingham complained that although he had, at St Paul's, congregations of more than 1200 every Sunday, the pews were not all occupied, and it was difficult to collect the pew-rents: in consequence he was compelled to pay his curate more than he received from the rents. Finding it impossible so to continue, he announced his intention of closing the church.' Six Hundred New Churches M.H. Port SPCK 1961. p.127. And whatever the actual statistical facts, thirty three years after the first Church Building Act, the first census of church attendance presented a sombre picture of the nation's public religious observance. Cf.Ch.IV, External Pressures, p.95. New churches, however, with a proportion of free seats must be distinguished from churches declared wholly free. For results in such churches see Ch. III, Priestly Initiatives, pp.70,78 .

## Appendix to The Problem Arises

### The Legal Position

Both sections of this chapter ended with a reference to an Act of Parliament. Inevitably the law of the land impinges upon the life of the Established Church. So throughout this project the subject will recur, although our main concern does not lie there. It lies with those movements of thought and action which gradually, though unevenly, eroded the pew system. These movements, of course, might indeed appeal to law, but that was not the nub of the matter: the nub was the spiritual propriety of a discriminatory method of assembling the worshippers. Nevertheless, some account of this formidably complex area will be appropriate, though the layman moves therein with abundant caution. So here we attempt briefly, 1) to investigate the legality of the system as perceived by a great ecclesiastical lawyer of the time; 2) to note the relevant Acts of Parliament; 3) to cite some official opinions of more recent years.

1) It was the contention of opponents of the pew system (whatever the Church Building Act 1818 guaranteed or allowed) that parishioners by common law enjoyed the freedom of their own church. (1) That statute, therefore, on this view only acknowledged a position that had always obtained. We have seen that Robert Phillimore showed that seating for eminent persons existed before the Reformation. (2) He went on to affirm, 'It is clearly the law on this subject that, where no statute has intervened, a parishioner has a right to a seat without paying for it.' (3) He adds, however, that this is just what has happened, for various Church Building Acts have authorised such payments in churches

erected under their provisions. Nevertheless, most seats, he contends, have been constructed or repaired, as the rest of the church has been, at the expense of the parishioners and, because the church is 'dedicated to the service of God', the 'use [of seats] is common to all persons who pay for the repair thereof.'<sup>(4)</sup> But, who are these persons? Five years before the first edition of Phillimore's work (1873) Gladstone had abolished the compulsory Church Rate, which was levied for the purpose in question, and substituted a voluntary impost.<sup>(5)</sup> It seems, then, that the people who pay for the upkeep may not be all the parishioners, for not all may opt to pay the voluntary rate. Nevertheless, he adds, 'Every man who settles as a householder, has a right to call on the parish for a convenient seat.'<sup>(6)</sup> The same qualification applies, for a householder would, of course, be a parish ratepayer, but not necessarily a church ratepayer. As we shall see, the matter remained uncertain, and there were authoritative denials of the right to general freedom in the parish church.<sup>(7)</sup>

Another way of looking at this question of a right to a seat is by what is implied in the Act of Uniformity. For an obligation to attend church can only be realistically imposed if space is available. If for any reason space is not available, 'A churchwarden cannot forcibly prevent an inhabitant of a parish or district from entering the church for the purpose of attending service, even though he may be of opinion that the parishioner cannot be conveniently accommodated, seeing that 5&6Edw. VI.c.1, which imposes a general duty to go to church, is still binding on the members of the Church of England, and confers a correlative general right to enter the church for that purpose'.<sup>(8)</sup> So



arguing from this position, a parishioner has a right of entry, but the manner of his accommodation, once within, is entirely problematic.

However, whether a free seat is an absolute right or not, a parishioner has no assured choice as to which one he may, in fact, occupy. That prerogative belongs to the bishop for 'parishioners are not at liberty to choose which seats they like but the ordinary will exercise his powers by the church-wardens who are his officers as well as those of the parish.'(9) But the law presumes that he will have a prudent regard to the qualities of men in this case and give precedence to such as ought to have it.'(10) However, Phillimore adds a word of caution to check any impulse to take up more room than is necessary, for 'in no case are the higher classes to be accommodated beyond their real wants, to the exclusion of their poorer neighbours.'(11)

In Phillimore's exposition one senses a tension between what is actually authorised by statute and what is tolerable in practice. The convention that the more eminent worshippers prayed in one place, and those with no claim to distinction in another, had been hallowed by time and passive acceptance. Nevertheless, although such a division, if tested, may be found to lack any legal foundation, the consequences of henceforth allowing anyone to sit where he liked may have seemed a prospect awesome to contemplate. Classes did not fraternize outside the building.(12) To permit them to compete on equal terms within it may have appeared a step as radical and disturbing as inviting one's servants into the drawing-room. Contemporary affluent man may sit side by side before the altar with his impecunious

brother: their worlds might not meet again anywhere else. For the Victorians the two worlds remained ever apart, and at least that had the merit of consistency. So Phillimore, and others who represent the age, may insist that 'there can be no property in pews'(13) and at the same time hold that they are not free to all.

2)The Church Building Act 1818 was the fountainhead of a stream of parliamentary legislation in the 19th century which implied some concern about the seating of the congregation in the churches of the Establishment.(14) As early as the following year, any existing church,rebuilt with a subvention from the Building Commissioners, and which thereby gained additional accommodation must make half of those extra seats free(59Geo.III c.134,s.40). Furthermore, while acknowledging the de facto sale of pews, it forbade the process by public auction(c.134,s132).(15) In 1831 even the autonomy of private individuals building or endowing a new parish or district church was circumscribed: they may exercise the patronage only if a third of the accommodation is free(1&2Will.IV c.38,s.2) Two Acts in the 1850's gave more encouragement to the objective of enlarging the free space. Thus in 1851 the Church Building Commissioners were given power wholly to extinguish rents where some alternative method of funding the clergy was available, and 'the seats and pews so exempted from rents shall be at the disposal of the churchwardens'(14&15Vict. c.97). The New Parishes Act 1856 addressed the problem of the actual siting of free seats. Allowing rents where funds were not available wholly to endow a new church, it stipulated that at least half of the remaining accommodation must be free and 'with respect to position and convenience, as advantageously

situated as the others.'(19&20Vict.c.104,s.6). In 1869 another New Parishes Act clarified the right of, and thereby encouraged, pew owners (as distinct from pew tenants), to yield up their pews to the bishop or the Commissioners'with or without consideration' and the recipients 'are hereby authorised to accept any such surrender'; and those pews will then 'be subject to the same laws as to all rights and property therein as the pews and sittings of ancient parish churches'(32&33Vict.c.94,s.2,5). These last three Acts in particular infer that the pew system is not to be regarded as part of the natural order, but as an expedient to meet a financial problem.

In 1872 legislation which by its very title focussed upon the question of seating, received the Royal Assent. The Church Seats Act is subtitled, 'An Act to provide for the free use of Seats in certain churches.' Implicit in this statute is an anxiety that undertakings given by those receiving grants from the government source, are not always being scrupulously observed. So it adds to the requirement that the appropriate portion in an assisted church shall be free, the qualification that 'thereupon it shall be unlawful to let the same pews or seats or portion of the same for payment of money.'(35&36Vict.c.49). Finally, in 1884, a further New Parishes Act tackled the matter of buildings replacing ancient churches which themselves were sustained by the provision of pew rents. Should it be viable to do so the Commissioners are empowered to 'revoke in whole or in part or in any way alter the deed or instrument making such provision.'(47&48Vict.c.65,s.4). (16)

3) In 1932 the Legal Board of the Church Assembly was asked two questions concerning the rights of pew-holders. First,

whether, should a faculty pew(17.) be unoccupied at the beginning of a service, the parochial church council could put persons other than those who held the faculty into it. The reply was that only the churchwardens had authority to do so, but they may only take such action when 'every other available seat in the church has been filled and never till after the service has begun.'(18) This is at least an advance on the empty, sacrosanct sittings which troubled Mrs Trimmer(19), but so qualified a concession is less than we might have expected after more than a century of agitation. The embarrassment which such a requirement must have caused to the would-be worshippers is painful to contemplate: first they witness the anxious scrutiny of the building in case any alternative, however uncomfortable, has been overlooked, and then are compelled to interrupt the first moments of the service as they take their places. The Board was also asked about the lay rector's seat.(20) To this question is returned the unflinching reply that in no circumstances may it be occupied by anyone other than its owner. But supposing he is non-resident and therefore unable to use it, may nobody else go into it then? 'Apparently, yes' is the forlorn reply. And this judgment was reiterated even after the Second World War, when the Board explained that as the chancel is the lay-rector's freehold the churchwardens cannot invade the rights of the owner.(21)

Throughout the 1930's pew rents in churches built under the Church Building Acts remained lawful according to the official source.(22) Moreover, it is explained that the 'Acts provide for a proportion, generally one-fifth of free seats, and the letting of the other seats to parishioners at a rate to be

fixed by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.' In 1943 the New Parishes Measure repealed the Church Building Acts so henceforth the reference to rented pews is dropped. But the duty of churchwardens to seat the congregation continued to be qualified. Their powers did not hold when 'a particular pew is attached to an estate by prescription or held under a faculty.'(23)

Even as recently as 1957, the general question of rented pews was deemed sufficiently alive to warrant comment from a distinguished ecclesiastical lawyer, W.L. Dale. He began from the premise that every parishioner has a right to a 'place' in the parish church for this is the implication of the Second Act of Uniformity, to which we have alluded.(24) The churchwardens, he continues, decide, as the deputies of the bishop, where the people shall sit and there is no reason why they should not accept a 'voluntary' payment. This seems mere approval of a pure gift until he declares that there 'seems no objection to allotting seats to those willing to pay and to leave the rest free and unappropriated.'(25)

From that remark there appears no reason, in principle, why the system should not begin all over again. That we live under no such threat is not due entirely to the fact that church-going has ceased to be the fashion. (26) It is to a change in the climate of thought that we would look for an explanation. Whatever the legal position may be, it is inconceivable that a local Christian community would contemplate a division of its members according to their ability to pay. Significantly, in later editions of Dale's compendium pews receive no mention.

## Notes to The Legal Position

(1) Cf. Ch. VI, Frontal Attacks pp. 148, 153f, 161.

(2) p. 6 above.

(3) Phillimore Op.cit. p. 1424.

(4) Ibid. p. 1424

(5) Church Rates were a compulsory charge on every parishioner of any religious allegiance or of none, and were used for the upkeep of the church and the churchyard. They appear to date from the Middle Ages and may have been a sombre replacement of Church Ales as a source of finance. Cf. Growth and Development of the English Parish Wray Hunt. Harrap 1932. p. 127. Also, The Canon Law in Medieval England Arthur Ogle. Murray 1912. p. 84f, who shows that unlike Roman church law, English law laid responsibility on the parishioners. In the 19th century there was great resentment from Nonconformists who did not see why they should pay for a facility they never intended to use. In consequence there was anxiety as to how the deficit would be recouped if the Church Rate were abolished. One suggestion that reached Parliament was that pew rents should be increased for this purpose. Cf. Politics and the Churches in Great Britain 1832-1868 G.I.T. Machin. Oxford 1977. pp. 59, 265, 274, 289, 340. Eventually the Compulsory Church Rate Abolition Bill reached the statute book in 1868. It made no recommendation as to how the loss was to be made up, but allowed for a voluntary assessment. Although previously not related rates and pew rents now had an informal connection when, in some places, voluntary ratepayers were rewarded with pews for their exclusive occupation. Cf. Ch. VII, Rebuff in the Lords p. 208.

(6) Phillimore Ibid. p. 1425.

(7) Cf. Ch. V, Collective Disquiet pp. 110, 123, Ch. VII, Rebuff in the Lords p. 196.

(8) A Practical Treatise on the Law Relating to the Church and Clergy Henry Cripps. 7th Ed. (Aubrey Lawrence and Stafford Cripps) Sweet and Maxwell 1921. p. 386.

(9) Phillimore Ibid. p. 1426.

(10) Ibid. p. 1425.

(11) Ibid. p. 1427.

(12) Cf. Ch. IV, External Pressures p. 97 for Horace Mann's comments, and Ch. V, Collective Disquiet p. 136f for Wilberforce's.

(13) Op.cit. p. 1425.

(14) Fifteen years before, the Gifts for Churches Act 1803, included a faint, and somewhat vague, whisper of concern. Thus, 'in every parochial church or chapel hereafter to be erected

ample provision shall be made for the decent and suitable accommodation of all persons, of what rank or degree soever, who may be entitled to resort to the same, and whose circumstances may render them unable to pay for such accommodations.' (43Geo.III,c.108).

(15) Cf. Church and People in an Industrial City E.R. Wickham. Lutterworth 1957 p.43 for an example of such an auction in Sheffield.

(16) In this Act the existence of the pew system in ancient churches was implicitly acknowledged. Cf. Ch.VI, Frontal Attacks p.171 for the efforts of pew-holders in ancient churches to protect their privilege in the new church. At Swinton in 1868 'when the Rev. H.R. Heywood rebuilt the church he found that he had to carry over the system of pew rents into the new building: it was a system which he greatly disliked, and he strove for many years to abolish it.' Victorian Period Piece J. Stanley Leatherbarrow. SPCK 1954. p.128.

(17) A faculty pew was a private pew erected especially for an individual subscriber who, in return for a contribution to the funds of the church, received the exclusive right to its use for himself and his heirs.

(18) Opinions of the Legal Board Press and Publications Board of the Church Assembly 1932. p.86f.

(19) p.11f above.

(20) A lay rector enjoyed the rectorial tithes of a benefice. By custom he had the right to the 'chief seat' in the chancel for himself and his family as a freehold. In 1897 in an action, Stileman Gibbard v Wilkinson, the question of what was meant by the 'chief seat' arose. 'The right to the chief seat,' said Mr Justice Charles, 'appears to be more than a right to one sitting only. The size and situation of the seat must in each case, I presume, be determined by the user.' Commenting on this judgment, an ecclesiastical lawyer wrote, 'The extent of the right, therefore, rests upon the user, and it will be found in many cases that the lay rector is entitled to as many seats as may be required for the accommodation of himself, his family, and servants, and even some of his tenants.' In view of his right to such an extensive supporting company, it is almost surprising to learn that the lay rector may not take total possession of the chancel and should he attempt to prevent the churchwardens from accommodating other persons there then 'proceedings should be taken against him for "indecent behaviour" under the Brawling Act, 23&24Vict.c.32.' Points of Church Law Clement Sturge. Macmillan 1907. p.49f.

(21) Opinions of the Legal Board 1946. p.155.

(22) Official Year Book of the Church of England Summary of Legal information. Editions of 1930's.

(23)Year Book Summary of Legal Information: Seating the Congregation. The subject is no longer referred to in the Year Book. Nevertheless, Canon Law admits the 'rights of any person to a seat or to allocate seats conferred by faculty, prescription, or statutory authority.' Canon F4, The Canons of the Church of England SPCK 1969. p.70. Such rights may still frustrate the plans of a local church. Thus, in October 1986, an application by Banbury parochial church council, which reached the Court of Arches, to remove some box pews, was lost. Two people produced documents relating to an Act of 1790 which gave them a right, through their ancestors, to occupy a particular pew. One of the objectors had not exercised his right for 10 years. Nevertheless, the Dean of Arches, John Owen QC, ruled that the pews must stay. A spokesman for the Diocese of Oxford revealed that several 18th and 19th century country churches have such ancient rights, and when they are invoked, as in this case, they are customarily upheld. Church of England Newspaper October 17, 1986. Cf.p.15(23) above.

(24)p.19 above.

(25)The Law of the Parish Church W.L.Dale. Butterworth's 1957. p.80ff.

(26)As has been remarked of the confident assumption of the first Church Building Act that the clergy would be paid out of pew rents, 'it was an Act which could only have been passed in the days of the Church of England's unchallenged security.' The Making of Victorian England G.Kitson Clark. Methuen 1962. p.156. Cf.p.14(8)above.



## II

### EPISCOPAL CONCERN

In the course of this project a formidable array of bishops will be called in evidence - more than forty in all. Apart from the fact that an episcopal Church largely depends for its capacity to change, as for its continuity, upon its consecrated leaders, it was specifically the bishops, as we have seen(1), who had final authority in the matter we are discussing. We turn now to consider three bishops who were outspoken in their criticism of the pew system in the earlier half of the century.

The first is closely connected with an Act of Parliament which may itself reflect, as we saw, some concern about the trespass upon the rights of parishioners to a seat in their churches.(2) For while on the one hand it institutionalised the imposition of pew rents, on the other it guaranteed the freedom of a fifth of the accommodated in any church built from funds received under its provisions. William Howley(3)

In 1814, a year after becoming Bishop of London, Howley had a letter from a group of eminent laymen, headed by Joshua Watson (4), which presented the statistic that in many urban areas parish churches could provide room for only one tenth of the inhabitants. Moreover, this deficiency was reckoned to be 'one great cause of the apparent defection from the Church, and of the increase of Sectarianism and Methodism.'(5) In consequence of that letter the Church Building Society was founded four years later. And to the success of that body in arousing the concern of persons of great influence, including the Regent, the passing of the first Church Building Act may be directly attributed. In that same year, 1818, Howley, commenting upon it to his clergy, touched upon a surprising variety of

aspects of the pew controversy which recur in the debate throughout the century.(6)

He reflects upon the forces which militate against religion among which 'an important place must be assigned to the want of accommodation for public worship.' The movement of population into the towns had exacerbated that want and now some people were compelled to seek instruction and worship 'in less perfection and purity in the assemblies of the Dissenters.'(7) This defection to nonconformity by the common people due to lack of space for them in the buildings of the Establishment worried the bishops throughout our period. Clearly, however, in the view of the Bishop of London it was better that they sought edification there than that they forsook the practice of religion altogether.(8)

There was, indeed, a shortage of churches to welcome the burgeoning masses of the capital. But the lack of places for the poor was not entirely to be blamed upon that shortage. There was also 'the injudicious disposition, or inequitable allotment of pews, by which an undue proportion of seatings is invidiously reserved for the thin and uncertain attendance of the higher classes.'(9) Such a stricture upon his own social order from a high Tory (and who was, indeed, to become the last 'Prince-Archbishop') must have provoked some consternation in the ranks of the clergy assembled in St Paul's for the reading of the charge. They may also have been nonplussed that he took no account of the primary purpose of the legislation of that year, which was the construction of new churches. Instead, he chose to castigate the wastefulness for which the pew system was responsible. Existing churches could be extended and, indeed, galleries could be installed. But much could be achieved by 'a more economical arrangement or a more impartial distribution of seats!'(10)

Howley was fully seized of the obstacles to a change so revolutionary. There was the 'ascendancy of inveterate habits' which made formidable the task of 'inducing the holders of seats in the church to relinquish for the general convenience their claims of occupation on which they are taught by their prejudices to set a disproportionate value.'(11) The remark about 'disproportionate value' may be taken as a general rebuke of those neurotic about having their own seats. If so it doubtless caused some eyebrows to rise. But if the position of worshippers is perceived as reflecting the arrangement of classes in the world, what then? The bishop's comment could be construed as an unfavourable reflection upon the assumptions of that order to which he belonged. It illustrates the potentially political implications of episcopal involvement in this apparently insignificant and restricted area of pastoral concern.

No specific instructions are given to the clergy as to the action which they are to take. But Howley, nevertheless, exhorts them to try to amend what is 'in direct opposition to the dictates of Christian charity'. And should they not immediately succeed, they must wait for 'more favourable opportunities of renewing our suit'. The gravity of what is at stake is made plain in terms which we associate more with the renewal of the pastoral mission of the Church of England later in the century. We must strive, he declared, so that 'no omission of ours has deprived any individual parishioner of participating in the blessings of the Gospel'.(12) Here is both a tender solicitude for the souls of the poor, and a lofty estimate of the Church as the agent of the Good News which this particular flaw in its machinery contrives to withhold from the disadvantaged majority.

Yet the elimination of this 'flaw' will not, of itself, be

sufficient to reclaim wanderers from the fold. A prophetic realism concludes this section of the charge. Perhaps then, as there are now, there were some among his clergy who clung fondly to the belief that the spiritual ills of the day could be cured by some single outward structural adjustment. So he cautions against the 'sanguine persuasion that the most ample provision of church room would extirpate irreligion, or conciliate dissent.'(13) The future was to endorse that warning. Not, of course, that Howley's generation was to witness that endorsement.

Nevertheless, the fact that the correction of some widespread injustice does not convert the multitude is no reason for not implementing it as soon as possible. As we shall see, the working classes were repelled for so long, at least to a great extent by the pew system, that the appetite waned while the debate continued. So when this cause of stumbling had been removed the churches were not exactly under seige. Of course, in the meantime other factors had interposed to deter. But the exclusive pew system must carry a heavy share of responsibility, for the poor who ventured in could scarcely hear the Gospel within a physical setting which caricatured its message. Clearly the Bishop of London was not blind to this.

Charles Sumner(14)

'I observe, with much regret, that the most flagrant abuses prevail with respect to pews. The system of sale and hire has become inveterate in many places, no more in opposition to the law of the land, and the accommodation of the people in general, than to the interests of religion.'(15) These explosive sentiments were voiced - like those of Howley - in the primary charge of the Bishop of Winchester to his clergy in 1829. We shall return to consider some passages from that charge at the end of this section. Meanwhile, the

quotation may serve as a text to provide a background for the exchanges between Sumner and the most distinguished opponent, lay or clerical, of the pew system.

In 1837 the rapid increase of population in the diocese prompted Sumner to try to found a church building society. Among the influential persons whom he approached for support was the first Duke of Wellington who lived in the parish of Stratfield Saye in Hampshire of which benefice he was the patron. His response to the bishop's letter was enough to show, in the words of Sumner's biographer, that 'his views respecting "free and open churches" were very considerably in advance of his day.'(16) He explained to the bishop, 'I have in this parish done everything in my power, at some expense and at some sacrifice of personal convenience, to afford additional accommodation in the church; and it does not appear at least there is any want of room in the church of this parish.'(17) The church has 'free sittings for the poorer classes and their children.' He admits that if the entire body of Anglicans in the village should present themselves at worship simultaneously then there would be congestion, but 'attended as the church is now, there is more space than is required.'(18)

Wellington pursues his theme. As the Church of England constituency in Stratfield Saye is adequately catered for, and as Sumner's letter dealt with church building rather than seating, his insistence on discussing the pew system seems to indicate how much the matter rankled in his mind. Thus he offers gratuitous advice. Before new churches are contemplated 'the first thing to do is to prevail upon individuals to give up the pews they cannot use; which was the course which was adopted in this parish last year. This and a new arrangement of pews, gave much accommodation.'(19)

But supposing more space still is required? Then the

remaining strongholds of privilege must yield. 'I should propose that all pews should be given up; that the whole space of the church should be laid open for the accommodation of all parishioners indiscriminately, separate chairs of a cheap description with arms, being provided for their accommodation.'(20) Despite his sympathy for the humbler members of his flock, we may reasonably wonder if the adverb 'indiscriminately' caused the bishop some consternation. Was it quite the word for a former Tory prime minister to use? To censure 'flagrant abuses' as he, the bishop, had done, was one thing, to recommend the unregulated distribution of the congregation may have seemed an extreme reaction to the problem of finding seats for the poor.

However, it is still possible to assume that the duke's proposals were generated by necessity rather than by principle. That is until he goes on to consider the possibility of accommodation being still insufficient. Only then would he explore the prospect of enlarging the church or building another. But the latter enterprise would require another priest who 'can be remunerated only by the sale or hire of the pews and places in the new place of Divine worship; and here again would commence the evil which has, in my opinion, been the most efficient cause of the non-attendance at Divine worship of the lower classes of the people of this country.'(21) It would be possible to ascribe his opposition simply to the deterrent effect that the system had upon attendance, but not when he calls it an 'evil'. That the deterrent factor is what motivated some of the other opponents is plain. But evidently Wellington judged the system to be wrong in itself.(22)

Eventually he accepts Sumner's argument that more churches are needed in Hampshire. Even so he recurs to the subject. 'But I

never can put myself forward as a promoter of a plan for leasing pews in country churches - until I see what is the result of this plan, I must beg leave to decline to put myself forward as presiding over a meeting in the county of Hants for the purpose of organising a Church Building Society.'(23) Happily the bishop was able to set his anxieties at rest so that at the end of 1837 the victor of Waterloo took the chair at a meeting to inaugurate the Diocesan Church Building Society, at Winchester. In his speech the bishop paid a delicate compliment to the duke; a compliment which depended for its appreciation by the audience on a working knowledge of the Peninsular Wars. He confessed to a fear that in implementing the objects of the newly founded society 'every pew would be found to be a Saragossa, and every church a Badajoz.'(24)

Further evidence of the duke's convictions comes from the period when he held the office of Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports. The Lord Warden customarily worships at Walmer Parish Church where one Sunday 'a certain pew was occupied by some ladies, who were visitors in the village, for on entering the church, they were conducted there by the Churchwarden, who concluded that, by being late, the usual occupant had no intention of coming that morning to church. Presently the good parishioner appeared, and, without any hesitation, turned the whole of them out into the aisle. There they stood, all eyes intently gazing upon them, not a little confused, but whilst the inward uprising of displeasure was brooding within their breast, the noble Duke of Wellington rose from his seat, opening the door of his pew, politely invited them all into it. What a relief must this act have been to the agitated feelings of those ladies, and what a rebuke at the same time to the parishioner; given in the face of the congregation as it was, it must have been a very mortifying

scene. In the house of prayer all men are equal (for God is not a respecter of persons) and in no church is that sentiment so manifest as in the Church of England, and the great soldier and statesman in this instance shewed that it was so.'(25)

So this unexpected opponent of the system put his beliefs into practice. Certainly not every pew in Walmer Church was 'a Saragossa'.(26)

We turn now to consider other passages from Sumner's primary charge. After the strictures about 'many flagrant abuses', which we quoted at the beginning of this section, he goes on to contend that 'as a national Church should be as inclusive in its doctrines as possible, consistently with the professed faith, so should it be as comprehensive as possible in means of accommodation, that all who choose may be enabled to pray within its walls.'(27) The irony of a national church effectively applying a principle of selection towards its worshippers is a recurring complaint of many who sought the freedom of its buildings.(28) But it appears that only Sumner expounded the offence in relation to its theological basis, and in so doing he makes a striking contribution to the debate.

The Elizabethan Settlement constituted an attempt to embrace within the Establishment as many degrees of believers as possible in the hope that the reformed Church would be truly national in composition. In consequence doctrinal requirements were kept to a minimum. And liberty of interpretation, for example especially in respect of the Holy Communion, was permitted as far as possible. Therefore when such a Church gathered for worship it should be truly representative of all the people, not of a privileged segment of the nation. This was the vision to which the bishop held and of which



the pew system made a mockery.

In common with his fellow bishops and others who spoke out on this matter, Sumner's unease was not exhausted by the mere fact that many parishioners were kept out by the system. How they filled the vacuum thus created troubled him also. 'There are instances, indeed, where in consequence of the almost total want of free sittings, the great mass of the people must be considered as banished from the walls of the Church and driven of necessity into dissent or something worse.'(29) Howley, as we saw, said much the same.(30) Perhaps Bishop Sumner implies that the welcome which awaited those who resorted to the chapels gave impetus to the expansion of the Free Churches. Though unhappy about that it seems to him at least preferable to the alternative which he does not specify, but which we may surmise included drink and gambling.

Nevertheless, the law compels Sumner to keep his indignation within bounds. So his instructions to his clergy fall short of the rhetoric. 'As soon as the pressure of more urgent business permits my attention will be directed to this subject; and I must content myself, in the meantime, with requesting the clergy not to witness illegal transfers of property belonging to the parish for the common good without making the transaction known in the proper quarter.'(31) This, surely, is self-evidently unlawful. And it tells us much about the situation in the Winchester diocese and lends substance to the bishop's anxiety, when incumbents have to be urged not to countenance such a proceeding.

When the charge was printed Sumner added an appendix which he plainly intended to give weight to his plea. It concerned the case of a faculty pew.(32) The judge had stated (*Stevens v Woodhouse and Buller* 1792), 'There is one clause in the faculty

which is illegal, the permission to the parties erecting seats to sell the same. This is a practice which may have prevailed frequently; but wherever it has appeared before a court it has been consistently discountenanced.' However, Sumner concedes that not even all business deals concerning pews are illegal however distasteful they may be to the Christian conscience. For he comments, 'These authorities are applicable to parish churches in general unless there be a special local act.'<sup>(33)</sup>

In a number of his subsequent charges, the bishop returned briefly to the problem; they show both his continuing concern and his relief as the position improves. The problem intertwines with that of sufficient accommodation for parishioners whether free or reserved. In his second charge, in 1834, he instances a Surrey<sup>(34)</sup> parish where not one in forty of the residents could be received within the church should they arrive en masse; and there is another parish of 14000 souls where 'there are only 150 free and unappropriated sittings for the poor.' The rapid growth in population in the diocese impels him, three years later, to declare that 5000 new sittings per annum are needed to keep pace with such an increase. However, by now the Diocesan Church Building Society which, as we have seen, was founded in this same year, 1837, is making strenuous efforts to redress the balance. As a result, in 1841 Sumner is able to announce that the Society has provided 6000 new sittings of which between a third and a half are free.<sup>(35)</sup> By 1845 the total of new sittings achieved by the Society has reached 29242, two thirds of which are free.<sup>(36)</sup> The revival of convocation enabled the bishop to speak on the subject to his colleagues in 1860.<sup>(37)</sup>

The attention that Charles Sumner gave to the matter of accommodating the under-privileged is a little mystifying coming

as it does from a bishop who enjoyed an opulent prelatical lifestyle, surviving, in Chadwick's memorable phrase, 'from some cloud-capped Georgian England.'(38) One would not naturally cast him in the role of an early and consistent critic of at least an aspect of the pew system. Unlike some critics, whom we shall meet, he does not openly link the exclusion of the poor with the prospect of civil disorder, though he was in office in 1831 when bishops experienced the resentment of the mob for their opposition to the Reform Bill. Sumner's motivation lies in his sense of the Church of England as a great national institution and, negatively, the recourse to nonconformity or 'something worse' that the practical refusal of that vocation engendered. His reproaches are more circumscribed than Howley's. There is no hint that the system itself may be wrong. Nevertheless, when its corruption is so openly and repeatedly deplored, the way is prepared for more searching questions.

Henry Phillpotts(39)

Like Sumner and Howley, there was nothing in the career of the Bishop of Exeter which prepares us for a radical pronouncement on our subject. A conservative in both religion and politics, the year after his consecration was marked by the burning of his effigy in the cathedral yard during the disturbances mentioned above. For of the poor and their hopes for enfranchisement he had declared, 'Least of all may they join in that foolish and wicked cry, which has already been heard in some parts of our island, as if all the distresses we are compelled to bear may be attributed to our rulers: as if reform in the government will bring with it the remedy for every evil.'(40) But in 1842 he told his clergy that at a time when the Church sought to extend its boundaries, and when most churches could not contain all the

parishioners, 'it is well to bear in mind that a system of pews is, by law, tolerable only when they do not interfere with the accommodation of those who have a right to worship God in their parish church.'(41)

This, indeed, falls short of total condemnation of the system. However, his uneasiness with the manner of its working is plain. And this is underlined when he goes on to admonish the churchwardens that it is their duty to ensure that parishioners are not deprived of that accommodation to which their residence entitles them.

Phillpotts sounds a note of caution for those who may contemplate precipitate action, but manifestly they do not want for his sympathy. 'Now this is a general evil, which requires to be gravely dealt with. I do not advise a sudden and violent breaking in upon an inveterate(42), however unjustifiable usage. But I strongly urge it on my clergy to do their utmost quietly to induce a better state of things.' He rejoices that not all of the parishes of the diocese have capitulated to the system. 'In several of the very handsomest of our parish churches, the old and proper arrangement prevails - that of open seats in part or throughout the church; with great addition to the beauty, as well as to the devotional character of the buildings.' In one parish the process had even been reversed, for at Chittlehampton 'the pews were removed, about 70 years ago, by the good feelings and exertions of the chief landed proprietor of the parish.'(43)

That pews were removed as long ago as the 1770's makes Chittlehampton a remote standard bearer for that campaign which made such faltering and disjointed progress in the next century. Phillpotts's insistence that such a clearance enhances the devotional character of a religious building must refer to the social

and spiritual isolation that this furniture imposed upon its occupants.(44) Some of them would even have been facing away from the altar, the lectern and the pulpit, the normal focuses of public worship. Moreover, the tendency of copious pews to clutter up a church and to block those vistas which the architects wanted open to the eye, is a stricture which not only the Cambridge Camden Society would endorse.(45)

As a High Churchman the Bishop of Exeter has no doubt as to where the blame for this 'evil' belongs. It is laid at the door of the Puritans who 'in the day of their brief triumph in the seventeenth century perverted these hallowed edifices into little better than preaching houses.'(46) As we remarked earlier, pews marched with the extension of the sermon as a substantial ingredient of worship, and Archbishop Laud suspected them as coverts for Anglicans who would not fully participate in the outward gestures of the service.(47)

However, Phillpotts's gravamen is not yet expended. Like Bishop Sumner, he castigates those who profit by the system. He yearns for them to perceive 'the incongruity of making the very worship of God an occasion of injustice to man - of usurpation of the rights of the poor.'(48) The profit he has in mind does not seem primarily to be the financial gain from the buying and selling of seats. Rather it is the plundering of space in the quest for social advancement.(49) For those who connive to sustain the system carry 'worldly distinction into that house, where all they see and all they hear, all they want and all they pray for, ought to remind them that there "the rich and poor meet together".'(50) It is, however, possible, as we mention elsewhere, for worship according to the Book of Common Prayer to transmit a

different signal: the order of the world may seem to be sanctified rather than overturned by the rituals of the Establishment.(51)

Those of his clergy who favoured leaving things as they were, may have enjoyed a moment of reassurance during his peroration to this section of the charge. Worshippers, Phillpotts contended, are not 'equal, indeed, in God's sight'. This unexpected conclusion from what he had been saying, seems to have been a shock tactic. The friends of the system may breathe again. But what follows is worse than any assertion of equality would have been. For when God surveys the congregation they are 'distinguished by qualities, which will make many who think themselves to be the first to be the last, and the last first.'(52) So the Gospel has the last word, for this is the preaching of Christ (Mark 10.31). The values of the world, which even the arrangement of people in church reflected, are only interim. God brings his own criteria to his assessment of human worth.

When his charge was printed, the Bishop of Exeter appended a quotation from the charge of the previous year, 1841, of his archdeacon, Robert Froude of Totnes, in which the pew system was unsparingly denounced.(53) It seems probable that archidiaconal influence played some part in Phillpotts's intervention on behalf of the least favoured of his flock. But even if he were then so minded, had he spoken thus at the beginning of his episcopate, as Howley and Sumner in their respective sees, his solicitude may have had a somewhat hollow ring. The bishops, Overton suggests, were generally under a degree of psychological restraint in their oversight of the clergy during this period, because of the example which they themselves afforded: had he inveighed earlier against

'the incongruity of making the very worship of God an occasion of injustice to man', the mote in Phillpotts's own eye might have somewhat neutralised his admonition. 'But the fact is, bishops, as a rule, were not in a position to be over-strict; they were wont in their Charges to make some faint general protests against the incumbents' non-residence in, and consequent neglect of, their parishes; but it was not likely that their protests would be of much effect when some of their own body were among the most glaring offenders. Thus the rich living of Stanhope had been held by three successive prelates when its rector, Dr Phillpotts, was made Bishop of Exeter.'(54)

Notes to Episcopal Concern

(1) Chap. I, The Problem Arises p.20.

(2) Chap. I, The Problem Arises p.13.

(3) William Howley (1766-1848). Son of a Hampshire incumbent. Educated at Winchester and New College, Oxford. Regius Professor at Oxford until his consecration to the see of London in 1813. Translated to Canterbury in 1828, dying in office in 1848.

(4) Joshua Watson (1771-1855). A London wine-merchant who retired from business at the age of 43 to devote himself to serving the Church through his support of all its main societies, and widespread charitable works. A High Churchman, he belonged to the 'Hackney Phalanx', a company of like-minded friends specially concerned with the cause of Christian education. Cf. Joshua Watson A.B. Webster. SPCK 1954 Chap.V.

(5) A History of the English Church in the Nineteenth Century F. Warre Cornish. MacMillan 1910. Pt. I p.78.

(6) A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of London William Howley. Luke Hansard 1818.

(7) Ibid. p.17.

(8) Few were quite as restrained as Howley in his evaluation of such an egress, though they did not gauge the prospect to be so doom-laden as an incumbent in the diocese of Worcester. 'The energetic Dr Booker, Vicar of Dudley, took a gloomy view of the prospects of those who could find no room in his church. They have to go without God, he wrote, "or go to some of these Sectarian places of worship, which are so promptly open to receive them: places, I am grieved to say, whither Traitors and Murderers think they may resort as to a Sanctuary from their crimes, and blaspheme a God of Righteousness and Purity by their addresses to his throne"'. The Town Labourer J.L. and Barbara Hammond. Longmans 1925 (New Ed. 1978) p.190f. In the same year as Howley's charge, the advance of dissent was offered as a reason for seeking aid, in a letter to the Church Building Commissioners from Charles Jervis, the vicar of Cheltenham. The lack of free sittings was 'the means whereby the evil of Dissent has extended in a very considerable degree, as is manifested by the rapid increase in Dissenting Chapels'. Cheltenham's Churches and Chapels 773-1883 Steven Blake. Cheltenham 1979. p.10.

(9) Charge p.19.

(10) Ibid. p.19. Cf. Chap. III Priestly Initiatives, Hook's appeal to the better instincts of pewholders p.62.

(11) Ibid. p.20.

(12) Ibid. p.21



(13)Ibid. p.21.

(14)Charles Richard Sumner(1790-1874). Educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge. Bishop of Llandaff from 1826 until the following year when he was translated to Winchester where he remained until 1869 when he resigned through ill health. A brother of John, Archbishop of Canterbury, he was Evangelical in his sympathies.

(15)Primary Charge to the Clergy of the Diocese of Winchester, 1829 Charles Sumner. Hatchard 1829. p.9.

(16)Life of Charles Richard Sumner DD G.H.Sumner. Murray 1876. p.171.

(17)Ibid. p.249.

(18)Ibid. p.150.

(19)Ibid. p.250. That Wellington was able to achieve so radical a reform without a parochial rebellion must be due to the vast authority and charisma of such a parishioner. But equally significant, perhaps, was his willingness to share the cost('some expense and at some sacrifice of personal convenience') of the great upheaval himself.

(20)Ibid. p.251. In churches without fixed seating, armchairs for the congregation are very rare today, though often available in dual-purpose halls.

(21)Ibid. p.251.

(22)The duke is reported to have told Lord Stanhope that family pews were 'quite contrary to the system of a Church Establishment.' By this he presumably meant that they were inappropriate in a Christian body which claimed to embrace the entire community and not simply a particular segment of it. His remark is quoted by Webster *Op.cit.* p.73 from Notes of Conversations with the Duke of Wellington Earl Stanhope. For examples of a similar point see Chap. VI, *Frontal Attacks*, pp.148,168.

(23)*Op.cit.* p.251.

(24)Ibid. p.252. Sumner's biographer does not explain the meaning of this esoteric allusion. These two Spanish cities offered stubborn resistance to the French during the Napoleonic Wars. It seems that the bishop was giving support to the duke and expressing the hope that no pew in the new churches will be a fortress for its occupants, but will be open for any requiring a seat for worship.

(25)History of Deal Stephen Pritchard. 1864. For this story I am indebted to the Right Revd John Cavell, sometime Bishop of Southampton, who comments in a letter that 'Pritchard, a local radical and well-known "worthy" of the town, has obviously enjoyed telling this story'.

(26) The ancient site of this graceful gesture was replaced in 1888. Contrary to what the duke would have wished, the new St Mary's (though in the Gothic style according to the doctrines of the Cambridge Camden Society) was yet supported by pew rents. Fifty years later the vicar still received £60 of his stipend (£529) from that source. (Crockford 1938). The writer visited the church in its centenary year, 1988, and happily found no visible relic of the system as the congregation prepared to celebrate with the Queen Mother, a successor of Wellington as Lord Warden.

(27) Charge p.6.

(28) The system existed in the Free Churches also. John Wesley, in his Journal for December 24, 1787, rejoices that the committee at Newington reversed a previous decision and resolved that 'none should claim any pew as his own, either in the New Chapel or West-Street.' (In accordance with his wishes the sexes continued to be separated.) But Nonconformity usually offered the poor a warmer welcome. Comparing the provision for them in the chapels an archdeacon, though noting improvement, is ashamed at 'how meagre, how lamentably insufficient has been the accommodation provided for the poorer classes hitherto been in our churches'. Charge to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of Stafford George Hodson. Hatchard 1833. p.35. Cf. Ch.VI, p.182, and, for the practice in the Free Churches Sheffield, Wickham Op.cit.pp. 57f, 72f.

(29) Charge p.5.

(30) p. 29 above.

(31) Charge p.9f.

(32) Cf. Chap.I, The Problem Arises p.26(17).

(33) Charge p.42. Cf.p.27(23). Bills for the building of a church could be drawn up by individuals and presented to Parliament (cf.Ch. III, p.59; Ch.VII, p.207), and seats awarded to subscribers. In the case referred to above, the Dean of Arches was dismissing an appeal against the refusal of the Diocesan Chancellor, in September 1983, to grant a faculty for the removal of pews at Banbury. The complicated argument ranged over the intentions of the two architects who planned the church and its extension, as well as the legal issues. The Dean noted that the pews 'were a necessary and integral part of the original Cockerell design' and concluded, 'I am satisfied that the pews cannot be permanently removed without the consent of the owners - any other decision would be inconsistent with any form of ownership - and that no faculty may destroy the statutory rights created by the Act.' Weekly Law Reports 2 October 1987. pp.721, 724.

(34) At the time the diocese of Winchester included Surrey, which now falls mainly in the Guildford diocese. A parish in the county which must have given Sumner no satisfaction was Egham. When a new church was built there in 1817 the 'committee allotted pews to all subscribers of £100 and upwards, and others were set apart and labelled for the tenants of the Crown lands. Three hundred seats were set apart for the poor, whilst the servants of the local gentry were made comfortable in the galleries, where square pews with tables in the centre, like the compartments of the old coffee houses were provided for them. These remained until the church was re-seated at the close of the last

century. Special arrangements were made for the "select academies" of the town.' Egham, Surrey: A History Frederick Turner. Box and Gilhan 1926. p.173f. As late as 1938 of the thousand sittings available only 250 were free according to Kelly's Directory of Surrey 1938. Charge 1834 p. 17.

(35)Charge 1837 p.33, Charge 1841 p.11f.

(36)Charge 1845 p.23.

(37)Chap. V, Collective Disquiet, p.113.

(38)The Victorian Church Owen Chadwick SCM Press 1966. Part I p.516.

(39)Henry Phillpotts(1778-1869). Educated at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. Bishop of Exeter 1831-1869. The Gorham Judgment ensures his immortality. In 1847 he refused to institute G.C. Gorham to the living of Bramford Speke as he was dissatisfied with that priest's view of baptismal regeneration. Gorham appealed to the Privy Council's Judicial Committee which pronounced in his favour.

(40)Quoted in Prelates and People Richard Soloway. Routledge 1969. p.89.

(41)Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Exeter Henry, Lord Bishop. Murray 1842. p.87. Phillpotts was one of the few members of the bench to join the Cambridge Camden Society which, as we shall see in the following chapter, had the abolition of pews as one of its aims. However, in 1845 he resigned when alarm 'on the score of extreme ritual as expressive of extreme doctrine was spreading, and articles in Ecclesiologist did not tend to alter it.' A Memorial of the Cambridge Camden Society E.J. Boyce. G Palmer 1888. p.12.

(42)All three bishops treated in this chapter used the word 'inveterate' in this connection. pp.30,31,above.

(43)Charge p.88.

(44)The devotional damage that large, ostentatious seats can do to a building was deplored by James Fraser in a letter to a friend from Cholderton in Wiltshire, where the future bishop was incumbent. Writing in 1858, he declares, 'One does not wish to attribute to externals more weight than they deserve; but with me there is always a heavy pressure on my spirits, quite crushing all attempts to be devotional, when I am in a dilapidated, dark-green, square-pewed church; while all seems harmony, and one's soul can soar a little, when one worships in such a church as I have got here.' James Fraser: Second Bishop of Manchester Thomas Hughes. MacMillan 1887. p.97. We have more to say on Fraser in Chap. III.

(45)George A. Birmingham recounts his pleasure at finding a 15th century church from which the pews had been removed in the process of restoration. 'There was no doubt about the original intention of the builders...The pews by dwarfing the pillars had injured the whole proportion of the building.' The Legacy of England Batsford 1935. p.174.

(46) Charge p.89.

(47) Chap. I, The Problem Arises p.6f.

(48) Charge p.90.

(49) It seems that Bishop Phillpotts entertained a baleful vision of the churches as microcosms of the Enclosures which had been proceeding for roughly the same period as the pew system (viz. since Tudor times). Acts to guard against these incursions were passed in 1837 and 1845, though the 'usurpation on the rights of the poor' was not finally checked until some 30 years after his charge.

(50) Proverbs 22.2. Cf. Personal Preamble p.1.

(51) Cf. Chap. VI, Frontal Attacks p.183(31).

(52) Charge p.91.31.

(53) In Froude's view 'the sale or letting of church-seats for money, is an act of injustice for which no defence can be found. Its effect must be, to drive the poor from that place of worship which has been provided for them free of all expense. It would exclude them from the house of God.' And why are pews so let? The motive is 'a love of ease and senseless distinction, in a place where no such feeling ought to be found'. The erection of 'long seats whether open at both ends or not' in place of private pews would have the practical result of increased accommodation. But the more important effect would be to 'promote those devotional feelings which should ever be found to accompany social worship.' He explains that this is because the occupants would be 'kneeling side by side, with the eyes of the congregation rich and poor, turned to one object in all lowliness of heart', whereas 'pews do but keep up those distinctions of rank, which in the presence of God we should desire to lay aside.'

In box pews it was inevitable that worshippers faced in different directions including turning one's back to the altar or to the officiating priest, while screens, according to their height, could make the structure an island within the church. (A case, Gibson v. Wright showed it to be illegal 'if any seat be built so high as to hinder those that sit behind from well hearing the minister, or the churchwardens from well observing the behaviour of those that sit in them'. A Practical Guide to the Duties of Churchwardens Charles Prideaux, QC, Shaw and Sons 1868. p.322.) Froude clearly saw that when a congregation focuses upon 'one object' a feeling of unity, and even of equality, is more likely to arise.

In addition to these social and religious objections Froude cited greed as a support of the system. The dealing in seats was a device by which the wealthy subsidised their duty (the duty presumably being the Church Rate or the obligations to maintain the building inherent in the ownership of certain property) to 'keep the churches in repair'. So they 'relieve themselves and others from a charge which the law of the land lays upon them.' Charge to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of Totnes Robert Froude Broche 1841. p.108.

The following year, 1843, a book appeared in which another

archdeacon, Robert Wilberforce, Archdeacon of the East Riding, denounced the pew system. He went further back for a comparison than the Enclosures which we suggested may have been in Phillipotts's mind.(49)above. The worst deprivations of history are now re-enacted in the churches. 'But the lawlessness of the middle ages, driven from our hills and wastes, has taken sanctuary in the area of our Churches, they are occupied by a set of petty fastnesses, and it will not be the work of any ordinary reformer to reconquer them for the common good.' So the poor stay away, while their superiors hear but 'a chilling dialogue' between the minister and the clerk, for 'there is nothing to remind them that the house of God is the place of federal meeting for the whole Christian family.' His concern is with village churches and the encroachment which he laments 'owes its existence to the want of a Church Legislature.'

Church Courts and Church Discipline Robert Wilberforce. Murray 1843. pp.128-130.

The comments or actions of archdeacons are noted in this project, in general chronological order, as they occur. Cf. Chaps. I, p.16(29); II, p.45(28); III, p.89(76); V, pp.119,122, 134(61),136ff; VI, pp. 146ff, 169f; VIII, p.233.

(54)The English Church in the Nineteenth Century 1800-1833  
 J.H. Overton. Longmans 1894 p.7. Phillipotts's desire to retain the living of Stanhope was challenged immediately after his consecration, and the matter escalated to the point of a question in Parliament. The income of the see was £2700, and he contended that he needed the stipend from the benefice of nearly £5000 to meet his expenses as Bishop of Exeter. A compromise was eventually reached by which he exchanged the living for a canonry of Durham which yielded only some £3000 and which, by 1841, through the work of the Ecclesiastical Commission had fallen to £565. Whatever he felt in 1831, fresh from his resistance to the extension of the franchise which the Reform Bill promised, and embroiled in the controversy about his income in which some of his own clergy formed ranks against him, 1842 was certainly a more propitious year for this particular exhortation. See Dictionary of National Biography and Clerical Directory 1841.

### III PRIESTLY INITIATIVES

Bishops who were unhappy with a seating method which discriminated between worshippers were, notwithstanding their final authority in this matter, able to do little about it. This was not only because of the moral constraint upon at least some of them, to which Overton draws attention; but because the law, if not expressly then with the force of precedent and habit, stood between them and the clergy whose submission to the system they may desire to challenge.(1) Moreover, there was the freehold enabling the incumbent to pursue his own sweet way immune even to episcopal pressure, provided any misconduct fell short of the most grievous offence.(2) Howley, Sumner and Phillpotts, as we saw, however passionate their convictions about the question, exhorted rather than commanded.

However, while bishops could only utter, some priests in this first half of the century showed that action, as well as words, was possible at the parish level. But we must not conclude that others did not also find the system repugnant. We may wonder why, in the circumstances, they stayed in their parishes. An agonising dilemma faced them. They depended on pew rents for the maintenance of their families and themselves. Furthermore, for many clergy the call to the ministry included the obligation to serve in the least favoured places. And these were often the very parishes made viable only by the income which the rents provided.(3)

We now consider five clergy, working in the first part of the century, who took action in various ways. Yet all responded to the same pastoral impulse, to make their churches houses where rich and poor could find an equal welcome. Not all of these

priests sought, at least openly, to universalize the reform they effected.(4) For the present they were content to improve that small corner of the vineyard which they had been given to tend.

#### Edward Burton(5)

The role of Edward Burton might have been overlooked altogether were it not for the acknowledgment of his work by the system's most prolific opponent, John Neale.(6) Born in 1794, Burton was appointed to the Regius Professorship of Divinity at Oxford in 1829. Annexed to his canonry of Christ Church was the rectory of Ewelme, a village near the university city. At his own expense, he restored the church and, turning to the interior which was fully pewed, he persuaded the pew owners to surrender their rights, and installed open seats. That a priest holding high crown office, especially at this period of the Church of England's history, should have given such venturesome and sacrificial care to his rural flock makes Burton's achievement particularly noteworthy. Doubtless the income from the three posts which he held spared him the anxieties which may have beset other like-minded clergy. For them the cost of an open church may have been its closure, and even destitution for themselves and their dependants. Nevertheless, that does not detract from the courage and imaginative generosity which Burton brought to this aspect of his ministry, soon to be cut short by his untimely death.

#### John Mason Neale(7)

When he first indicted the pew system John Neale was a layman.(8) However, while at Cambridge he came under the influence of the Oxford Movement.(9) But, unlike the Tractarians, he was concerned not so much with matters of doctrine as with retrieving the ancient symbolism of the Catholic faith in its Anglican expression, dormant in the Church's architectural heritage.(10) Neale was

only twenty-one when, in 1839, he helped to form the Cambridge Camden Society.(11) The difference between the interests of the Tractarians and of the Society is pointed thus by Chadwick. 'The Tractarians were concerned first for truth and then for the issue in worship. The Camdenians were concerned for decoration, ritual, the structure and seating of churches, because these affect the way in which men worship.'(12)

Seating takes up incomparably more space than any other item of church furniture. Consequently it has more power to mar the visible beauty of holiness. It is no surprise, therefore, that pews should become a target of the Camden Society. So, in 1841, we find Neale dreaming of an ideal church in Cambridge called 'St Alban the Protomartyr', the style of which is to be 'decorated with lofty cathedral spire' but, before mentioning any other features, he specifies 'open and magnificent wood seats.'(13)

However, for Neale, the objection to pews was not simply aesthetic, nor even simply liturgical in that they restrict ceremonial movement. In him apparently divergent objections, which may be broadly classed as social and spiritual, are held together. (14) Neale found everything wrong with pews. In 1841 he set out his case with his classic History of Pews, which was followed in the same year by a pamphlet, Twenty Three Reasons for Getting Rid of Pues[sic].(15) His social concern is made clear even at the beginning of his History. 'For what is the history of pews', he asks, 'but the history of the intrusion of human pride and selfishness, and indolence, into the worship of God?'(16) And this social dimension of the issue, which is our concern, he stresses in the pamphlet. Thus, 'they were invented at first by people who thought themselves too good to pray by the side of their neighbours: and who were in those days too proud to join in the service of God



with such as were poorer than themselves.' By 'those days', of course, he means the 17th century for, like Phillpotts(17), he lays the blame on the Puritans.(18) Unlike the bishop, however, Neale, in his antipathy towards the Puritans, moves lightly from the allegation that they felt themselves 'too good' to imply that their wealth was the cause of the desire to detach themselves from other Christians at worship. Like the bishops, whom we have cited, Neale was worried about the destination of persons excluded by the pew system, but for him their doom was wholly spiritual. 'Because, from the room they take up, the poor, who have no Pews, have often been tempted to leave off going to church, and to go to meeting instead: thus becoming guilty of the fearful sin of schism.' The consequences rather than the system itself seem to dominate his anxiety here. On the other hand, a further reason for eradicating pews is all-embracing: 'the system of pews is a selfish and unchristian system.'(19)

But a question may persist: was Neale merely bolstering a case, which for him rested entirely on aesthetic or liturgical grounds, with other convenient arguments? It is not impossible to suspect that of the co-founder of the Camden Society the first 'Law' of which runs, 'The object of the Society shall be to promote the study of Ecclesiastical Architecture and Antiquities, and the restoration of mutilated Architectural remains.'(20) Such a statement does not suggest a pre-occupation with questions of social equality. And, in April 1841, we find him briefly at Shoreham writing to his friend and co-founder, Benjamin Webb, about the 'two hard battles' he is fighting there. The two seem to share the same ideal, to restore the parish church of Kingstone to its pristine beauty so that the north aisle of 'this singularly holy Church' ceases to be

used as a potato cellar. At Shoreham, he wants the pews removed because 'we think their retention a shocking piece of taste.(21)

But it appears that taste is not his exclusive concern when he writes to his friend, Edward Boyce, from a holiday in the Quantocks in March 1842. 'Yesterday morning I spent with Trevelyan in his Church - a fine building - and from which he is going to eject all the pews, in number seventeen.' Whether aesthetic or social factors, or even both, gave rise to his satisfaction is not clear. It is likewise when, the following evening, he reports that the local clergy 'seem disposed to do all they can, and the strong feeling arising everywhere against pews, it is delightful to behold.' (22) However, notwithstanding his amusement, the human objections are paramount when, in the same letter, he describes a bizarre custom at Tong Church. 'The Squire has built a pew in the Chancel; when the Commandments are begun, a servant regularly enters at the Chancel door with a luncheon tray!'(23)

It is during Neale's extremely short tenure of the parish of Crawley, from June to July 1842, that his abhorrence of the system for social and spiritual reasons is most convincingly observed. In a letter he tells his fiancée on June 13, 'I have changed my pew with the one next to me and shall probably pluck it away tomorrow.' Those cryptic words, 'pluck it away', would soon receive practical expression. He goes on to make a significant comment. 'Oh, my pew-less Sarah! how will you get on? the only person with any pretensions to gentility who has no pew!' The pew as a token of rank grants accreditation to those least sure of having it.(24)

That Neale's attitude sprang from motives besides the aesthetic meets that most reliable of tests - his pastoral practice. His first sermon dealt with the nature of ministry. Towards the end

he said, 'And my poorer brethren I wish to speak particularly to you. Living among you, as I hope to do, it will be my pleasure, as it is my duty, to help forward your welfare temporal or eternal, by every means in my power. I hope when you need advice or comfort you will never hesitate to come to me, and by God's grace, the best assistance I can give shall be yours.'(25) In the dark confines of the pews, remote from the 'poorer brethren', that message must have come as an uncomfortable word. Nor was it only a word. Although sickness drove him from the parish in no more than three weeks, in that short space he began to fulfil the promise of that inaugural sermon. He sought out children for the Sunday School, reconciled two sisters who were at odds, visited the cottagers in their ramshackle dwellings.(26) In a letter of July 1, he describes to Sarah such a visit that he made after dining one evening.

'Among other things I called on a woman of the name of Bollen in the "Magazines" (the worst part, as you will soon, I hope know) of our parish.' Previously used for a horse shed, 'one long room, with mud floor, constitutes the whole.' In a heavy storm, the night before, the thatch let in the rain and the door would not shut 'and the woman's ingenuity was almost exhausted in keeping it off her husband, who still slept on.' Neale confronted the landlord and admonished him with the 'cruelty of keeping people where I would not keep a horse, and charging them eighteen pence a week for their house.' But subsequently, for one aroused to passionate strictures against any action of which he did not approve, Neale displayed a wholesome degree of balance and sensitivity. For the owner of the property also had his cross to bear as he too was poor. Neale would, therefore, try to get him time off work to make the place habitable.(27)

This digression, it is hoped, establishes the pastoral heart of this devout and scholarly priest who, nevertheless, in the shortest of incumbencies found his wrath so kindled as to lay about the pews of Crawley with an axe.(28) Weighing the sentiments of his sermon and the style of his ministry, we may believe his biographer when she declares that he did it because he regarded pews 'as representing worldly distinctions out of place in the house of God.'(29) Unless the role of Neale as pastor is fully apprehended, the temptation to interpret his social concern as a convenient prop for his aesthetic ideals may be strong. This is a risk to which a campaigner is always exposed when he allows more than one reason for his mission. The 'single issue', or in this case the 'single reason', crusader may be on a safer enterprise.

The juxtaposition of these different springs of motivation in Neale may illuminate the fact that only two days after his mediation in the matter of the crumbling cottage 'he had a very pleasant day cutting down three more pews.'(30) In the parish it was, perhaps, the pretensions of rank which was the stronger incentive, while the impairing of beauty may have been the initial cause of his hostility to the system.(31) However, there he had to leave this particular concern, for his precarious health made withdrawal from Crawley inevitable. As warden of Sackville College at East Grinstead, which he became four years later, and of the Sisterhood of Saint Margaret which he founded there, painful conflict awaited him in another arena. The ritual practices and the ornaments which he introduced at the College led to his inhibition by the Bishop of Chichester from 1847 until 1863, three years before his death at the age of forty eight.(32)

The present writer visited Crawley Church in the summer

of 1986. He found nothing to indicate that the cure of souls of that parish had once been entrusted to a priest who, though he won more renown for bequeathing to English-speaking congregations everywhere translations of ancient hymns to link them in spirit with the early Church, once carried the standard for the freedom of worshippers to sit where they wished unhindered by the criteria of class or wealth.(33) Indeed, the name of John Mason Neale cannot even be included in the roll of holders of the living in the back of the guide book, for he was never legally numbered among them. However, the uniform low-backed seats that spread throughout the building are undoubtedly open to all. That is except for one near the entrance, which reasonably and unobtrusively has, for a single place only, the device, 'Verger'. Of that restriction surely even Neale would not have disapproved.

Walter Hook(34)

In his famous thesaurus, A Church Dictionary, published in 1842, the same year as Neale's ministry at Crawley, W.F. Hook defines with scholarly detachment a multitude of ecclesiastical terms. But when he arrives at the word 'Pews' impartiality forsakes him. 'These are', he explains, 'enclosed seats in churches, which enable people to attend church and hear sermons comfortably and luxuriously.' We saw earlier that the effective reason for the provision of pews, or even of any seating at all, was the advent of the sermon.(35) Of course, no special merit belongs to the audition of sermons in conditions of discomfort. On the contrary, attention may benefit from tolerable facilities for the hearers.(36) But the word, 'luxuriously', prepares us for what is to come. Pews 'destroy the ecclesiastical character of a church...they encourage pride...they make a distinction where no

distinction ought to exist...and they must be erected at a loss of twenty per cent church accommodation.'(37) As with Neale, the entry encompasses a variety of criticisms. By 'ecclesiastical' we may assume that he means the aesthetic and devotional damage that is done. The feeling of the building as a house of prayer is compromised by such intrusive appendages. Indeed, he may imply that private pews are not inherently ecclesiastical furniture at all, but that they belong more appropriately to the theatre whose patrons pay to enter.(38) For Hook preferred to call the places which worshippers occupied 'kneelings' not 'sittings', and was unhappy with the idea of going to church to listen to a clergyman perform.(39) Important as these objections are, however, from the remedy applied at Leeds it seems that 'pride' which the system nurtured and 'distinction' which it advertised, were to him its most offensive aspects.

Hook became vicar of Leeds in 1837. The Dictionary, with the entry we have quoted, appeared while he was engaged in his epic struggle for the rights of all parishioners to an assured place in their church. He took up the cure of souls there at a time when the population of this manufacturing town, like other such centres of industry, was rapidly expanding: in the decade from 1831 it grew by some thirty thousand to a total of 152,054.(40) Most of the inhabitants were poor(41), though some areas of the town housed sufficient leaders of industry, and others of comfortable means, to ensure that the problems connected with their distribution in church would not be lacking. The whole of Leeds, together with a number of its suburbs, constituted a single parish which was administered by the incumbent of St Peter's, the medieval parish church. The problems inherent

in that building were augmented by the astonishing response of the parishioners to Hook's ministry, and provided the immediate occasion for his practical contribution to the history of our subject.(42) Within a few weeks of his arrival even standing room for the services was at a premium.(43)

The church was huge. But much of its space was consumed by voluminous pews, and by the galleries which were also rented. One of the galleries was built across the east end of the nave thus, together with bulky piers and arches, insulating the extraordinarily long chancel from the rest of the church and making united worship virtually impossible.(44)

From his arrival onwards Hook did not admire the architecture of the parish church. In the very month of his institution to the benefice, July 1837, he told his sister in a letter, 'I am also busily employed with an architect, devising some plan to make decent my nasty, dirty, ugly old church.'(45) At the same time Samuel Wilberforce, the future Bishop of Winchester, was provided with a comparable description of its defects; while to another friend Hook is explicit as to his own sentiments, 'I really loathe it.'(46)

The original scheme of alteration, worked out by Hook and the architect, simply involved removing the pews and the galleries. However, the drawbacks that would remain after such a development, together with the discovery that parts of the fabric were insecure, propelled the vicar to a more radical solution. At a large civic meeting which he called for November 1837, he made public his dislike of the existing structure, and we see the nerve, for our purposes, of his complaints. The miscellaneous modifications to the church over the centuries had studied

'the convenience of individuals rather than the accommodation of the public.'(47) Such an observation tersely encapsulates the underlying motivation of the entire pew system.

Hard facts, however, had evidently persuaded Hook that the day of total abolition had not yet dawned. The plan for which he sought approval and support would raise the number of 'kneelings' from some 1500 to 2700.(48) But of the extra 1200 places he has to concede that only 700 will be free. In view of Hook's forthright denunciation of pews as expressed in his Dictionary we might have expected the additional provision to be open to all. However, the realities both of finance and of contemporary social assumptions seem to have led him to settle, at this stage, for a more limited objective.(49)

Meanwhile, a further survey of St Peter's revealed that it was so unstable that demolition was the only option. In 1838 not one stone remained upon another. Given this uncovenanted opportunity Hook instructed the architect, as throughout, to make in the new church 'the accommodation of a large number of worshippers his first consideration and aim.'(50) This could only be achieved by inserting galleries for private use above the aisles although, as we have seen, he had intended to eliminate such enclaves from the original building. They were, however, designed so that they would be as unobtrusive as possible, for Hook had also charged the architect that, notwithstanding the instruction regarding accommodation, provision for worshippers should not be at the expense of architectural merit. And although every portion of Leeds Parish Church is not yet available to everyone without any restriction, there is justice in the challenging enquiry of his biographer who asked where else 'is the church to



be found in which nearly 3000 worshippers can with equal ease see and hear and take part in the celebration of divine service?'(51)

This was a large claim, and it implied a significant, if incomplete, erosion of the traditional pew system. For the penalty for the occupants of free places was not only their humiliation and discomfort. The siting of their seats hindered them from taking an effective part in the service. But in the new St Peter's, which was consecrated in September 1843, all could do that with 'equal ease'.

However, in the vast parish of Leeds, which as we saw included some of its suburbs, there were some twenty other Anglican places of worship for all of which the vicar of Leeds was ultimately responsible. And it was his frontal assault upon the pastoral disaster which this dispensation represented that enabled Hook to realise a greater portion of his ideal. Eighteen of these churches were perpetual curacies, but not in the sense that we might infer from that title. Paradoxically it was precisely the cure of souls, in any meaningful form, from which the holders of these offices were perpetually exempt. They were usually non-resident, and to conduct a service on Sundays and on holy days was the sum of their priestly duties. That some went beyond the bare requirements of their contracts and voluntarily cared for the districts assigned to them by the vicar does not mitigate the fundamental weakness of the strategy.(52)

The seating in these churches was largely reserved for those who could pay, and two of them had no free seats at all: Holy Trinity which had been erected by a special Act in 1729, and St Paul's by such an Act in 1793. In the case of the latter

even the building itself was privately owned, and the perpetual curate derived his stipend mainly from pew rents and held a benefice elsewhere. The incumbent of St George's was one of the few clergy in Leeds who did have a cure of souls to its predominantly working-class district. Yet the church had been placed at the extremity of that district and, because the scanty seating for the poor was 'mean and inconvenient' it had become overwhelmingly the resort of the wealthy.(53) Similarly St Luke's, though provided for the poor, was sited away from where they lived. And there was practised a kind of creeping exclusion of such working people as ventured to enter its portals by reducing the number of free seats and offering them at low rents.(54)

This was the scene of spiritual desolation to which Hook turned his attention once the new parish church had been established. By the end of that year, 1843, his plans had taken definite shape and he communicates them to a friend. 'I propose to constitute all the existing churches parish churches; and I will give up £400 out of my £1200 on condition that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners will purchase the pews of all the churches and make them free.' In January 1844 he took the parishioners into his confidence in a letter addressed 'To the Parishioners of Leeds'. The proposals, to which the first Bishop of Ripon, Charles Longley(55), 'expresses himself most sanguine', include, 'The floor of every church to be free and unappropriated' and no church 'to become a parish church until the floor shall have been declared free'. And the deep purpose behind it all he summarises. 'I am most anxious thus to secure for my poorer brethren the privileges of a free and unrestricted participation in the sacraments and ordinances of our holy Church: in making each church a parish church I have in view the conferring upon them a right to a seat or kneeling therein.'(56)

In this endeavour Hook was, of course, doing no more than affirming the position that obtained at common law, despite its frequent breach, in respect of ancient buildings. But to procure the freedom of those of more recent foundation would demand supreme gifts of persuasion and tact. For those in possession had the law on their side. So, as at the parish church, in order to achieve something he has to accept a situation less than what he desired and believed to be right. 'The galleries will still be reserved for private pews'. However, to the tenants or owners of seats elsewhere in the church he looks for a sacrifice. 'I trust that the occupants of pews on the floors of the several churches will be ready to sell them at a fair price, or, where they can afford it, to give them as their contribution to this important measure.'(57)

At St Peter's the 'enfranchisement' of the floor had been assisted by fate so that the custom was simply not revived in the new building.(58) But here, in the other churches, it is the eradication of what continues to exist, 'hallowed' by custom, that is the idealistic task. So the vicar goes on to reinforce his appeal to the higher instincts of those whom he asks to divest themselves of privilege. 'In almost all the churches which have hitherto been built the convenience of the wealthy and middle classes has been too exclusively considered, and we shall not be able fully to restore the parochial system until each poor man feels that he has as much right to take his place in the new parish churches as he has now in St Peter's.' This right to a place, therefore, is asserted as nothing less than a vital constituent in the working of the parochial system. The territorial organisation of the Church of England is mocked when the residents of its pastoral areas are kept out of those churches erected, theoretically at least, for their particular

use and comfort. Consequently he does not regard the change that he is seeking as in the nature of an innovation. On the contrary he is attempting 'to restore that ancient parochial system and that personal relation between each pastor and his flock'.(59) It will be a return to what was the condition before that evil spirit arose which he castigates in his Dictionary. Nor should Hook, despite his vision of a Christian community worshipping unfettered by the differentials of worldly wealth and status, be understood as politically egalitarian. Notwithstanding his strictures and even his reference to the 'enfranchisement of the floor'(60) he remained a Tory and the gradations of society, at least beyond the walls of the churches, are not at issue. He strove tirelessly to ameliorate the material conditions of working people and avowed their equality before the throne of grace, but revolution was not on the agenda.(61)

Hook's vast scheme of reorganisation, which as we have seen involved the raising of the other churches of Leeds to parochial status, could only be effected by Act of Parliament. So the Leeds Vicarage Bill 1844 was drawn up. Besides the endorsement of the Bishop of Ripon the Bill found eager approval from his colleagues on the episcopal bench, and from other leading churchmen. In Parliament, the Earl of Eldon, in moving the Address to the Queen at the opening of Parliament in February 1844 'strongly commended the scheme' and subscribed £50 to the expenses of the Bill. Furthermore, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, without whose co-operation all would be lost, shared the general enthusiasm.(62)

It was, nevertheless, on what his biographer calls, 'one of the most vital points of the measure', the freeing of the floors, that the scheme almost foundered. The Commissioners, though happy with other aspects of the scheme, hesitated on this particular

proposal. But for Hook it was the precious corner stone of the entire project, and unless conceded that project might as well be abandoned. As a practical reformer we have noted his readiness to compromise over the matter of galleries so that at least there may be some forward movement. We do not therefore look for an explanation of his inflexibility at this stage in terms of a Utopian idealism which will have all or nothing. But in a letter to the secretary of the Ecclesiastical Commission he is forthright about the consequences of failure at this point. He declares his conviction that unless 'the Church of England can be made in the manufacturing districts the church of the poor, which she certainly is not now, her days are numbered, and that her very existence would be scarcely desirable, that I am willing to make any sacrifice to accomplish my object'. However, he is 'certainly not prepared to make any sacrifice whatever, if the great principle to which I have alluded be not conceded.' Having won consent to a massive change in the status of the twenty other churches and the responsibilities of their ministers, divesting himself of the prestigious office of vicar of Leeds to become, as he put it, 'incumbent of St Peter's', it may have seemed bizarre that he was prepared to put the whole scheme in jeopardy for this one item. That he was so prepared indicates how central he felt it to be for the credibility of the Established Church among the urban masses of Yorkshire.(63)

The objection which he encountered in the Commission was stimulated by the opposition of low churchmen. For he tells his friend, Gladstone, in a letter, that 'the leaders of the Evangelical party are endeavouring to prejudice the wealthy against my measure'. Their activities became sufficiently serious for Hook to defer a visit to London. Whether the clause concerning the pews especially incensed the Evangelicals is not clear, though the movement generally

attracted more help from the catholic wing due to its hostility to lay control which pew rents, as the source of income for the clergy, tended to sustain. In the same letter to Gladstone, Hook magnanimously acknowledges that his opponents, though sadly misguided, resist him 'because they love God, whose enemies they suppose us to be.'<sup>(64)</sup>

Prompted by a different motive the Free Churches initially campaigned against the Bill even distributing pamphlets proclaiming, 'Dissent in Danger'. Their anxieties sprang from a perfectly logical suspicion that the proposed reforms would necessitate an increase in the church rate. This tax was levied upon all parishioners of whatever religious allegiance or of none. Already resentment smouldered in many parts of the country often bursting into bitter protest and even defiance of an impost which, however seemingly unjust, was lawful. Non-Anglicans often had their own chapels to finance and yet were required to subsidise an institution to which they never intended to have recourse.<sup>(65)</sup> Hook had had the issue brought forcibly to his attention at his first Vestry Meeting in 1837. A tumultuous assembly of some 3000 parishioners were incited by a vitriolic harangue from a Baptist preacher to reject the proposed halfpenny rate which was fixed to meet the expenses of church maintenance of £355-11s-6d anticipated for the forthcoming year. The vicar extricated the church from this crisis by pointing out that if the parishioners did not pay the rate as set, then the law would extract the money from the churchwardens whom they had just elected. The eirenic tone of Hook at this meeting endeared him to the people, and was crucial for the success of his ministry in Leeds, and the rate did not become an issue again until this protest in 1844.<sup>(66)</sup> Hook, however, had no intention of gaining his end at the expense

of the ratepayers: voluntary offerings were to make good the deficit to which purpose, as we have seen, a substantial part of his own stipend was to contribute. Thus re-assured the opposition lapsed into silence, and the Leeds Vicarage Bill became an Act of Parliament on August 9, 1844.(67)

James Fraser(68)

No setting for the ministry of James Fraser could have been less like the industrial heartland, where he was later to win renown as an outstanding pastoral bishop, than the parish to which he went in 1847. 'At this time, probably in all Southern England,' his biographer comments, 'you could scarcely have hit upon a more secluded place than Cholderton.'(69) At this tiny hamlet, lying some ten miles north of Salisbury on the Plain, the new rector arrived at a peculiar juncture in the history of the parish. The medieval church had become dilapidated, and the previous incumbent(70), at his own expense was erecting, but had not quite completed, its replacement. Among the challenges facing Fraser, 'First, as was natural, came the great pew question, the dissentient if not hostile column of parishioners being led, as was also natural, by Mr Paxton, the resident squire who had leased the Manor House from Lady Nelson and her son.'(71) The fact that the manor house had been leased and a right conveyed is an example of a pew attached to property(72) and the consequent likelihood that such an occupant may be particularly zealous to uphold the tokens of his standing in the local social register.(73)

The genteel, and at times slightly acerbic, exchanges between Fraser and the squire are recorded in the correspondence between the young incumbent and his predecessor. At the root of the crisis, one may confidently surmise, is the loss of face which Paxton fears he will suffer when the old building is evacuated. There his right to a pew,

that advertised his supremacy in the parish, was not questioned however reluctantly it was allowed. Now he fears that he must wait on the pleasure of those, the churchwardens, who have the power of assignment.(74) Thus he tells Fraser, who negotiates the matter, in December 1847 of his determination 'not to accept a pew or anything else at your hands'.(75) But Fraser assures him that it is 'a pewed church to the parish' that is being offered and 'his particular seats would be assigned by other authorities'.(76) The squire insists that his demand is not for a square pew, but he does want to know forthwith what arrangements are being made for him, and should they not be satisfactory he will withhold his consent for the consecration of the new building.

A week later Fraser reports to Mozley that Paxton has revealed 'his chief objection, to wit, that he will not have anyone sitting behind him who "could breathe on his back" '. And though he repeats that he does not demand a square pew 'a door was a sine qua non.' (77) Now Paxton delivers his master stroke. He hints that 'shortly he may be obliged to repair his servants' pew' which is in the old church. The import of this apparently innocuous enterprise is not lost on Fraser. It is 'a merely vexatious proceeding to embarrass me'.(78) Obviously one does not repair what is soon to pass into disuse, and should that be done by one so influential people would draw adverse conclusions as to the prospects for the new church. We detect a degree of panic, for Fraser immediately begs his predecessor to make some concession to the squire's sensitivities. 'If anything could be devised by which, without making a distinction in the seats, or departing too widely from your original plan, or putting you to extra expense, Mr Paxton could get his back to the wall according to his wish, I should be truly thankful.'(79)



The prospect of litigation now arises to reinforce Fraser's desperation. The squire 'maintains that he has a prescriptive right.....and this right he shall insist on if driven to law.'

(80) And in March 1848 a lawyer duly makes an entrance when Fraser endures a painful interview with the squire. That the issue is whether one pew should differ from another in glory is now quite evident. 'I told him what your intentions were, to make all the seats alike, after the pattern he had seen in the shed. This will not satisfy him at all.' Again, Paxton's pew is to be so positioned that the occupants will avoid the respiration of other worshippers and 'he is peremptory about a door.' Should such adjustments not be permitted he will have to choose between legal action or 'building a place of worship for myself, where I can be free from these annoyances.'(81)

Mozley's intention had been that all the seats, as well as being uniform in structure, should face eastward. But in the teeth of Paxton's resolve, Fraser wonders 'if the two or three last rows on the north side were placed so as to look southward (like the stalls in college chapels)(82) Mr Paxton might get his back to his favourite wall, and avoid the annoyance he considers so insupportable.'(83) Mozley, however, was not willing to make such an amendment to his plans. In the meantime the squire had withdrawn from the worship of the Cholderton community. But in May the rector joyfully reports that 'he returned to church with his family, after an absence of more than four months.' There is, however, a cloud on the horizon which tempers the celebration. Paxton has vowed that 'when the new church is finished he will be prepared to establish his rights to the fullest extent.'(84)

The dénouement was that the squire got what he demanded though doubtless not everything upon which he had set his heart. For

that would surely have included a box pew such as he enjoyed in the obsolescent building. In the new church seats were allotted to parishioners and Paxton was among those who grumbled although, as Fraser observes, 'we gave him exactly what he asked for.' Having made his point the squire determined to 'let the matter rest where it does for peace and quiet.'(85) Nevertheless, he could not bring himself to add his name to the petition for the consecration which, despite the absence of both his signature and his person, took place on April 10, 1850.

The story of Paxton and Fraser indicates another area of tension between parson and squire as the clergy of the nineteenth century recovered a higher sense of the seriousness of their calling. While the former church stood the unspoken assumptions as to rightful precedence were tolerably secure, and a priest, whatever his private reservations, might let them continue unchallenged in the interests of tranquillity. For division between the leaders of the village may have dire results especially for the poor who depended on the generosity of the manor. But a new building served as a catalyst to call in question what had been taken for granted. Were the conventions of the past to be reproduced, or was the pattern to be one that reflected new insights about the meaning of the Gospel? External emergencies in any sphere may activate a re-casting of settled opinions and policies, which might otherwise survive undisturbed into another generation.(86)

From his correspondence with Mozley we cannot gauge with certainty how strong, at this stage in his career, was Fraser's own ardour for the project as regards its specific social implications. However, he did place a notice in the church which read thus, 'No seat in this church is held either by faculty or prescription, but

simply by allotment of the churchwardens.' This could be construed as mildly inflammatory, for Squire Paxton had claimed a 'prescriptive right'.(87) Moreover, his general consent may be inferred from his uncomplaining acceptance of the difficult relationship with the squire as the necessary cost of his perseverance. More interesting would be to know how the common people of Cholderton reacted to this partial breach of the social pyramid. We learn that the Miss Knatchbulls were so displeased with their allotment of the front row in the chancel that they considered it was 'as good as telling them to go to some other church.'(88) It may have been that that location was too public for ladies who had previously reclined in dignified seclusion. Did the rank-and-file lose some sense of security now that the order of the world was not reflected in church so accurately as it had been hitherto? For though each was allotted a place in the new dispensation the quality of the furniture did not reflect /the quality of the occupant, and doors there were none. Against the possibility of an identity crisis among the ordinary parishioners we may set Fraser's joyful message to Mozley. 'The church has been so full that we have been obliged to make the most we could of the room.'(89) And the following year the census of religious observance enables him to provide some substance for that statement. On Sunday, March 30, 1851, the day chosen for the count, at Cholderton Church from a population of 183, eighty six attended in the morning and ninety five in the afternoon. And the latter figure, according to Fraser, was 'rather below the average.' Clearly if the two congregations were comprised of different persons then Cholderton could claim that virtually one hundred per cent of the parishioners were present on that Fourth Sunday in Lent.(90) Accepting, however, that that is unlikely, nevertheless all seems more than fair

after so much upheaval in that hamlet on Salisbury Plain.

The task that faced James Fraser when he assumed charge of the Diocese of Manchester 20 years later was not that of replacing ruinous churches, but of building churches where they had never been. And there the Cholderton principle was applied on a scale incomparably larger. In 1872, in his primary charge, his clergy heard that 'faculties professing to give pews as a piece of real property to a man, his heirs and assigns...are, I believe, simply worthless.'<sup>(91)</sup> His diocesan conference was told in 1877, 'I will mention two abuses urgently needing amendment - the abuse of patronage, and the pew-system. What we need in these and all other questions, is to get rid of narrow, selfish views; and to regard the Church as a great national institution to be used for the highest purposes of the nation.'<sup>(92)</sup> By the end of his episcopate 'the bishop of all denominations', as he was affectionately called, had consecrated 'ninety-nine new churches, containing fifty-seven thousand sittings, nearly all free'.<sup>(93)</sup>

The present writer has visited Cholderton a number of times, and attended the early service. There is no restriction as to where one sits in those remarkably handsome pews with their carved bench ends. Mr Paxton's seat, though of the same quality, presses its back against the north wall ensuring to anyone who wishes to occupy it the same immunity for which he contended.

This, in fact, is his only memorial in the building. And Barrow's Parish Notes make no mention of his name, but its absence from the list of subscribers to the new church, which Barrow reproduces and which includes even a donation of ten shillings, tells its own story.<sup>(94)</sup> However, there is a tablet above the controversial

pew. It commemorates his successor at the big house who was, indeed, also his successor in that seat, Henry Stephens, M.P., founder of the great ink empire who, in 1889, purchased the Cholderton Estate from its historic owner, a descendant of Admiral Lord Nelson. (95) Paxton, as we noted, only leased.

Outside, in the churchyard, the numerous tombs of the Stephens' family are tended. But the elegant mausoleum in which repose the mortal remains, in the words of the inscription, of 'Archibald Paxton, Esquire of 5 Devonshire Place and Cholderton House' is engulfed by rampaging shrubbery, for the Paxton connection with the parish ceased with the death of his wife in 1887, twelve years after his own.

#### William Bennett (96)

Fraser's church at Cholderton opened a few weeks before St Barnabas', Pimlico, which has the distinction of being the first entirely new church in London to accommodate its congregation in seats free of all restrictions. The church at Cholderton, on the other hand replaced an already existing building; and though all charges were abolished and the seats were of uniform quality, contrary to the wish of the rector the squire did at least manage to gain a south-facing aspect for his own apartment. No such concession seems even to have been mooted at Pimlico. But, of course, as we shall see, the circumstances were so different as to limit the validity of comparison.

William Bennett was ministering in a fashionable part of the capital when he first declared his disquiet. He was preaching at the Portman Chapel (97), of which he was in charge, in 1837, when he exclaimed, 'How constantly we see in our churches in this

metropolis the servant attending upon his master or mistress, carrying with him their Prayer-books and Bibles and waiting upon them to their pew doors; and then quietly and in the face of God and of the congregation retiring from the walls of the church as if he had no part nor lot in the matter of Christian worship!' (98) At this stage it does not seem that the pew question, as symbolic of social division, was a matter of primary concern to Bennett ~~however~~ closely, in this emotive passage, he approaches to it. Rather it was the failure of employers to grant a space on Sunday for their servants to use for worship that troubled him. So now he only insists upon 'the necessity and the duty of providing and taking personal precaution that each member of your household have the opportunity of attending divine service as well as yourselves, "knowing that ye also have a master in heaven." '(99)

It is not entirely surprising, therefore, that when in 1840 he is appointed incumbent of a church that is planned to be built in Knightsbridge, he has no evident qualms that pew rents were to be the source of its support. As his biographer remarks, neither 'Mr Bennett nor anyone else it seems in 1840 had any vision of the free and open church of the future.' (100) Thus St Paul's, Knightsbridge, financed by the pew system, was consecrated in 1843 to be followed by the controversy between Bennett and Bishop Blomfield which, for the present, must fully have extended the vicar's energy and passion. (101) But when there was a need for another church we find that his position has developed. He wants to draw in to worship the burgeoning population of the area, but he is now persuaded of the deterrent effect upon them of rented sittings. Opulence and destitution are juxtaposed within the parish of St George, Hanover Square out of which St Paul's district had

been carved, and this phenomenon has influenced Bennett's thinking. 'Many an evening walk', he was to write years later after St Barnabas' had been built, 'in the still hot summer of London, has brought me, in some pastoral duty, in a moment of time, from the one extreme right into the midst of the other. I have gone forth from the lowest degradation of misery and filth into the glittering display of festivity and magnificence, I have come forth from the sound of wailing children wanting food, and sat down in the brilliant assemblies of joyous, thoughtless, self-indulging creatures without a desire ungratified, or a want unsupplied.'(102)

But, in practice, the solace of religion was available to only one of these groups. 'What was a church filled with a mere colony of the inhabitants of Grosvenor Square, tied up in pews and shackled with payment for every inch of sitting room, to do for poor men and women who had not a shilling to pay?' he asks in a reference to St George's, Hanover Square. So, he explains, St Paul's, Knightsbridge came into existence; but, in fact, it did nothing for the dispossessed. Now he appears almost to regret that it was ever conceived. That church 'arose with all the odious system of pews and pew rents; the rich exclusiveness of the fashionable and the great, as though a man could not pray unless he were locked in and fenced around with a wooden box, and as if he could not adore his God unless he were free from the intrusion of his brother'. (103) Nevertheless, at that stage, he confesses that he could still wonder why the poor stayed away, and perhaps it was his pre-occupation with the quarrel with Bishop Blomfield over ritual and ornaments that allowed him to ask so naive a question. 'Will you show us where we can go? was the answer. 'We turned aside acknowledging the rebuke.'(104) There was nowhere they could go.

In 1846, that is only three years after St Paul's had been established by this 'odious system', Bennett has spurned any thought of the additional church, which he now plans, being similarly dependent. Any hopes he may have entertained that the splendid ceremonial at Knightsbridge would entice the working-classes from their hovels to be uplifted, have now been shattered. 'Look round for the poor. In which of the churches are they?' he asks the congregation in a pastoral letter of that year. 'They have been driven from the pews to the open seats, and from the open seats to the door, the door of God's house - they have been driven to the conventicle, or worse maybe, to the preaching of the infidel in the parks and open places of the streets; or, worse may be still, to the depth and darkness of despair in their own uninstructed hearts; discontented, ready for rebellion, alone, friendless, unloved, unloving.' (105)

These are the worshippers for whom Bennett seeks. And he is aware, at least in part, of the novelty of the enterprise in which he invites the congregation to join him. 'There has never yet been in the whole parish of St George's, Hanover Square, either in its original extent or in its present sub-division, any church or chapel built upon a principle of alms-giving.' In his appeal he charges the wealthy that it is their needs that have brought so many destitute inhabitants to the parish. 'It is you that have brought them here, from the magnificent dwellings in which you live, and the houses and carriages which you keep, and the many servants whom you require to minister to your wants.' (106) Bennett discloses that there are 367 'magnificent dwellings' in the district of St Paul, and shows how the £14,000 needed for the project can be raised from the pockets of householders whose incomes range from



£100,000 to £1,000 a year. And when the church is completed the maintenance both of the fabric and of the clergy will be secured by the offertory taken there and a contribution from the offertory at St Paul's.(107) We shall frequently notice the offertory as an alternative to pew rents, a transition which congregations in general were remarkably loth to sanction. Indeed, well into the next century the abolitionists were still trying to reassure defenders of the system that a voluntary offering may generate funds sufficient to ensure the survival of their churches.(108)

Bennett's appeal was a triumph. 'It pleased God', he wrote afterwards, 'to bless what I had said.' And he goes on to point those factors which may have led him to expect or fear a rather different outcome: 'the suspicions naturally belonging to the idea of a free church, the want of personal interest in a work from which no personal benefit was to be derived.'(109) He does not specify what these suspicions were. But we may assume that his background gave him enough empathy with those whose subscriptions he sought, to understand their anxieties. St Barnabas' was being provided for the poor; but if there were no gradations there, might not the same principle at some future date be applied also to St Paul's? The ordering of society, after all, depends on distinctions right the way down. To turn the matter another way - was Bennett being a trifle naive, disingenuous, or excessively charitable when he claimed for the donors an act 'from which no personal benefit was to be derived'? The descriptive phrases that Bennett used about those for whom he sought to provide accommodation were shrewdly chosen. Not only the usual consequences of poverty are tabulated, but its victims are 'discontented, ready for rebellion.' And when such forebodings are uttered in the context of the Chartist disturbances - not to mention other working class agitation -

which culminated in the great demonstration planned for 1848, when the government was so disturbed that the defence of London was entrusted to the Duke of Wellington, we may believe that their effectiveness was greatly increased.(110) Bennett was not commending religion as an 'opium of the people'. But his deft allusion may have aroused sufficient unease among his affluent parishioners to enable them to combine evident generosity with a measure of self-interest.

The new church of St Barnabas was consecrated, albeit with some misgivings about the 'high' nature of the ornaments and ceremonial, by Blomfield of London, on its patronal day, June 11, 1850. An anonymous witness to the occasion doubtless spoke for many when he marvelled at the social heterogeneity of the congregation. 'They mused as they saw - how different from their wont - not the rich only pouring in, but the poor; not pew door fencing off and dividing, but joining and giving common space to all; no rich to be in this blessed sanctuary but those rich in good works; no poor but those poor in spirit'.(111) However, later in the octave of celebration an ironic incident occurred. It may indicate both the increased sensitivity, as well as the residual suspicion, of the poor even towards Bennett, their friend and champion.

Luminaries of the catholic cause in the Church of England had been summoned to preach at the weekday evening services following June 11.(112) The climax of this succession was reached with the presence of Dr Pusey, whose name had attracted a congregation so large that the church could not contain all who wished to enter. 'Carriage after carriage was obliged to drive away without being able to set down their occupants'.(113) Despite this exclusion of the higher orders a number of inhabitants of the district were not convinced that admission to St Barnabas' on that festal evening had

been even-handed. For they, 'suspecting a preference for the rich, became somewhat threatening' apparently to Bennett himself, who 'went to the door and explained that there was absolutely no such preference.'(114) Thus the situation was defused, and a passage from Pusey's sermon referring to the strange mingling during the days of rejoicing was not invalidated on that final evening. 'And, then, to crown all, the poor joyfully meeting with the rich; and Dives cheerfully sitting down to meat with Lazarus; and Belgrave Square literally coming down to the lanes and alleys of the poor and joining with them in common festival.' (114).

Only nine months after the consecration, Bennett resigned his cure at the instance of Blomfield who invoked a promise that Bennett had previously made.(115) These were months of tumult and distracting worry as the worship at St Barnabas' was violently interrupted by Protestant activists freshly inflamed by the 'Papal Aggression'!.(116) There is, however, no doubt that many of the ordinary people of the district of St Barnabas' rose with enthusiasm to the opportunity of practising their religion in a church where there was no respect of persons. On Bennett's last Sunday in Pimlico, 'The services', The Guardian reported, 'were crowded to suffocation'(117) and on the day his resignation took effect, Lady Day, Tuesday, March 25, 1851, there were some 500 communicants at 11a.m.(118).

Those who later were to organise themselves to eradicate the pew system could have drawn some encouragement from Bennett's achievement at St Barnabas'. To some, at the time, the problem of the alienation of the poor from church seemed patient of a simple solution: free seats for all, though, of course, such a solution would depend upon devoted pastoral care such as

the parishioners of Pimlico enjoyed. However, by the time the objectives of the abolitionists were attained the picture of working people thronging to enter, such as we have glimpsed above, had become a fond illusion. The tide, if indeed in a full sense there was one, was not taken at the flood.

Bennett did not pass immediately from St Paul's and St Barnabas' to another benefice. For over a year he was without a pastoral appointment. Then, in 1852, came an invitation from the Marchioness of Bath, as patron, to the vicarage of 'Froome' in Somerset.(119) There his liturgical ideals did not desert him, nor, indeed, did those with which we are concerned. At his first Vestry meeting in 1853 he announced not only the abolition of pew rents but also of the church rate, thus at a stroke depriving the parish of two assured sources of income. Initially his faith in the generosity of his new parishioners was not entirely vindicated. So, as in his appeal in London, he set out a suggested, graduated table of giving related to one's personal income. In 1861 he reported that 'All the expenses of the public worship of the church, together with the supply of the schools and other charities of the parish, and the formation and support of the choir, with many other incidental things, have been supplied by the voluntary offerings of the faithful within the walls of the House of God, and laid every Lord's Day upon the Altar.'(120)

The present writer walked through the parish of St Barnabas, Pimlico, in the spring of 1989. Like other areas of London, much of the housing that once sheltered the poor has

been 'gentrified', and much of the neighbourhood around the church has a bright and hopeful atmosphere. St Barnabas has weathered the vicissitudes of an age of rapid and profound change, and still functions with an offering of daily worship. The priest still lives in the clergy house, the school still operates at the other side of the church so that the three institutions together form a single architectural unit.

The day of the vandal had ensured that the door of the church was locked when the writer called. But the courtyard and the porch were open. The latter contained a proud illuminated text which recalled that 'Fr Bennett, the then vicar of St Paul's, Knightsbridge, gave the whole of his private fortune towards the cost of building.' Moreover, St Barnabas 'was certainly the first church to be built in London with the avowed intention of carrying out in practice the religious and pastoral ideals of the Oxford Movement', and attention is drawn to the glory within. Pews are not mentioned but perhaps we may take them to be comprehended in those 'ideals' for which Bennett struggled. The courtyard felt agreeably remote from the turmoil of the twentieth century. One could easily imagine the Victorians, having emerged from their hovels, streaming across that space secure in the knowledge that only the happy circumstance of congestion could exclude them from their parish church.

At Frome Church, which this writer also explored, its famous incumbent is honoured in an introduction which the present vicar, Geoffrey Wrayford, wrote in 1986 for a re-print of the Bennett booklet in the series, Heroes of the Catholic Revival.(121) In Frome, as well as in London, he opposed pew-rents, which ensured the wealthy of a seat in church, whereas those who were unable

to afford the luxury stood where they could.' Wrayford also records a further achievement of Bennett. He built a daughter church at Ennox Hill. When it was consecrated in 1864 he was able to tell his 'dear parishioners. All the seats are Free, and whoever enters first may take his place as he pleases'.(122)

## Notes on Priestly Initiatives

(1) Cf. Ch. I, The Problem Arises p.20.

(2) The security of the parson's freehold could protect the intellectual independence and so the moral integrity of the incumbent against the tyrannies of party rule and spiritual bigotry in high places; unfortunately it could also protect sloth, incapacity, eccentricity to the point of madness, and immoderate addiction to fox hunting or liquor, in fact almost anything except open immorality, complete neglect of duty or absence without leave'. The Making of Victorian England G. Kitson Clark Methuen 1962. p. 154.

(3) Cf. Ch. VI, Frontal Attacks (Debate Widens) p.171. Chadwick cites the church of All Saints, Camberwell where in 1872 an endowment of £34 together with pew rents formed the stipend of the curate-in-charge of this new church. 'Indeed the chief argument against those who wished to abolish all pew rents was that it would make expansion impossible.' Op.cit. pt.II.p.239. A substantial proportion of the incumbent's stipend continued to be derived from the pews up to the time of the Second World War.

(4) Cf. Bishop Swayne's via media: the system may be right for some places but not for others. Ch. VIII, The Long Twilight, p.246.

(5) Edward Burton (1794-1836) Educated Westminster and Christ Church, Oxford. Regius Professor from 1829 until his death at Ewelme, 1836. Wrote a number of theological works and at the time of his death was engaged on an edition of Eusebius which was published posthumously.

(6) Neale credits Burton with striking the 'first stroke' in the campaign. History of Pews p.48.

(7) John Mason Neale (1818-66) Educated Sherborne and Trinity College, Cambridge. Joint founder of Cambridge Camden Society. After an extremely brief pastoral ministry at Crawley he became warden of Sackville College, East Grinstead where he founded the Sisterhood of St Margaret.

(8) In 1841 he called pews, 'These abortions of a puritanick age'. History of Pews p.48.

(9) Cf. The Cambridge Movement Ch.2; John Mason Neale-Priest Extraordinary A.G.Lough. Pub. Privately 1976. Chap.IV.

(10) We have noticed that seating in any substantial form owes its origin to the sermon and is, therefore, virtually a post-Reformation phenomenon. (Ch. I p.5f) So, by extension, free seats might be deemed to be a High Church institution. Evidence for this view is to be found in the predominance of Catholic clergy among the advocates of abolition. That thesis is, however, somewhat obfuscated by the varied motives that prompted both supporters and opponents of the system. Nevertheless, the general perception of those who looked for ecclesiological significance is illustrated by the activities of Henry Manning (later Cardinal Manning) when he was Archdeacon of Chichester in the 1840's as interpreted by his biographer. 'In those days,

high boxed-in pews, like the "black-gown" in the pulpit, were outward and visible signs of Evangelical righteousness, beloved of low-churchmen; whereas, to their jaundiced eyes, open benches, like the white surplice, betrayed a "Romanising" tendency. Manning raised his axe, sharpened, like every instrument he made use of, to the finest edge, against curtained pews and hat-pegs.' Life of Cardinal Manning Edmund Purcell. Macmillan 1896. p.177f. Besides his tribute to Burton, Neale included one to Manning before whose exertions pews fell 'like heroes in Homer before Achilles.' History of Pews p.48.

(11) The role of the Society in the agitation against the pew system is summarised in James White's, The Cambridge Movement CUP 1961 pp. 106ff and references elsewhere. 'Perhaps the most intensive campaign which the Society ever waged was the long battle against pews, a crusade of which it was evidently the originator.' In the sense of a corporate movement it was indeed the 'originator' though, as we have seen, influential protests were to be heard decades prior to the formation of the Society. Thus in that sense it merits the accolade that the Free and Open Church Association was later to bestow. 'The pioneers of the movement were undoubtedly the Cambridge Camden Society who, about the year 1840, commenced a vigorous crusade against pews'. (Association's Report Church of England Year Book 1883. p.153). The freedom of the churches is the third of the Society's three main principles (the others being the demand for authentic materials in constructions, and a distinctive chancel) set out in its publication, Few Words to Church Builders (3rd Ed. 1844 Camb.). 'The absolute inadmissibility of pews and galleries in any shape whatever.' White, having cited some of the critics who shared the Society's views, continues, 'With such support, the battle against pews was largely victorious although some parishes withstood the onslaught.' p.108. Having regard to the protracted struggle that lay ahead this is a very generous estimate of the Society's achievement in this particular branch of its programme. However, as White shows, by 1854 the Society had become so confident that its protests through its periodical, the Ecclesiologist, could become less strident. Indeed, in the issue for that year the editors looked back with some amusement to that of twelve years before 'with its solemn proses about the inexpediency of pews.' (p.108) Further witness to the Society's achievement is offered by Kenneth Clark who, in a somewhat caustic chapter acknowledges that its influence was such that 'for fifty years almost every new Anglican church was built and furnished according to its instructions'. He could scarcely find a Gothic church, whether medieval or Victorian, that had not been affected by the teaching of Neale and his colleagues, and had seen few 'which contain all their box pews and galleries.' The Gothic Revival Kenneth Clark. Murray 3rd Ed. 1962 p.174. In this same chapter (viii) Clark indicates how the doctrines of the Camden Society were absorbed and practised by organisations which arose elsewhere. In particular the Oxford Architectural Society 'as large and almost as active, can be considered under the same head as its Cambridge counterpart'. (p.161) It too held the extinction of pews among its objectives, and Clark tells of the price in financial terms that an incumbent at Yeovil paid for his obedience. In a desperate letter he pleads, 'I tell you, in confidence, that unless I get substantial help by Friday I am utterly ruined here.' Clark found no record of any help being provided. Although the Camden Society's objections to pews were social as well as ecclesiological, and although as funds permitted



they offered some assistance to parishes which sought to implement their ideas, the material consequences for the clergy of submission in the matter of pews may not always have been fully appreciated. (From the Oxford Society emanated what is perhaps the only propaganda in the form of a novel. Francis E. Paget, a member of the Society, was the author of Milford Malvoisin: or Pews and Pewholders in which was traced 'the disgraceful origin and shameful history of a particular pew.' White Ibid.p.108. Paget, a Tractarian and a prolific writer, was rector of Elford, Staffordshire. This book appeared in 1842.)

(12) Chadwick op.cit.pt.I, p.213.

(13) John Mason Neale, DD: A Memoir E. Towle. Longmans 1906.p.47.

(14) Cf. 'It was his (Neale's) solicitude for the poor and under-privileged, which caused him in the first place to campaign against private pews in churches'. Lough op.cit.p.22.

(15) In addition to these two serious literary diatribes, to Neale we may ascribe what was, perhaps, the only effort to bring the cause within the circle of popular protest. There is a whisper of the demagogue in these two stanzas by him which were published in 1843 in a collection, Songs and Ballads for the People:

Come, list to me, neighbours! come, list to my song!  
Our parson is right, and the parish is wrong:  
He wants to take down all the pews, as you know;  
He has plenty of reasons, and good ones to show;  
And I'll make them so clear, that there's none shall refuse  
To join him in crying - Away with the pews!

And then rich and poor, as the way was of yore,  
Will all have the same seats, free and open once more:  
'Twas a rare wicked system; but now it has passed,  
And our country has found out its mischief at last:  
Open seats in all churches! and none must refuse,  
FOR ENGLAND HAS SAID IT - Away with the pews!

The beginning of the second stanza voices Neale's insistence that the freedom of seating would be a return to the situation before the Reformation. The tense at the end of the stanza is a kind of prophetic past, for the system had a hundred years to run - nor did its abolition become a cause that 'England' embraced.

(16) History of Pews 3rd Ed.p.3.

(17) Cf. Ch.II p.40.

(18) Cf. also Ch.I, p.8.

(19) White p.107.

(20) Report of the Cambridge Camden Society for 1842 p.44.

(21) Letters of John Mason Neale Ed. by his daughter Longmans 1910. p.24f. This bizarre facility may have inspired an item in the satirical Rules for Churchwardens 1810 that appeared in The Ecclesiologist (old series) vol.iv, November 1845. p.275f. Thus rule 7 directs, 'Disused chantries and chapels should be used for storing coals, or

for dust, ropes, spades, old lumber etc.' Cit. The Influence of John Mason Neale Lough p.22.

(22)Letters p.33.

(23)Letters p.33.

(24)Letters p.38. Cf. this ch.p.66.

(25)John Mason Neale - Priest Extraordinary Lough.p.38.

(26)Lough Ibid.p.38

(27)Letters p.43.

(28)Memoir p.66. Chadwick mentions that the famous Corrish priest, Hawker of Morwenstow, used a similar instrument when a farmer declined to surrender his pew. op.cit. Pt.I p.521.Cf. this ch.p.83(10),Though Manning's axe may have been allegorical.

(29)Memoir p.65.

(30)Memoir p.66.

(31)Cf. Sir Christopher Wren who objected to pews for architectural reasons, but added, 'A church should not be so filled with pews but that the poor may have room enough to stand or sit in the alleys for to them equally is the gospel preached.' Cited, Life in the English Church J.H. Overton. Longmans 1885. p.202.

(32)An account of the inhibition may be found in, for example, John Mason Neale - Priest Extraordinary ch.XIV.

(33)The visitor seeks in vain for some allusion but, in view of the connection which we have seen between pews and the sermon, the preacher may hear an oblique whisper of our subject for, as he enters the pulpit, he sees carved in the woodwork the device, 'Be Brief. Acts 20'. There we read that even a Pauline sermon, when protracted, may have a catastrophic outcome.

(34)Walter Farquhar Hook(1798-1875).Educated Winchester and Christ Church, Oxford. Vicar of Coventry, 1829-1837, Leeds 1837-1859. Dean of Chichester 1859-1875.

(35)Cf. Ch. I, The Problem Arises, p.6f.

(36) Cf.Ch.I,Problem Arises p.7. In mitigation pewholders might have pleaded the duration of sermons in their day. Of a distinguished London preacher it was reported that when he had spoken for an hour, 'The congregation trembled lest he should stop.' But we may surmise that such an anxiety was not general in the churches of the Establishment.

(37)Dictionary - 'Pews'.

(38)In Pepys's time the word was used for the seating in either place. Thus his diary for February 25,1668, 'At the play; my wife sat in Lady Fox's pew with her.'

(39)'I use the word in preference to the term sittings, that persons may be reminded that they come to church not to sit and hear a sermon, but to kneel before their God in prayer.'Life and Letters of Walter Farquhar Hook W.R.W Stephens. Bentley 1878. vol.I p.381. In a letter to his great friend, William Page Wood, in July 1837, he likewise shows his uneasiness about the inspirational element taking precedence to the devotional. 'But here, all that is thought of is preaching' and this is encouraged by the physical peculiarities of the building which is 'so arranged that to perform the services well and properly is almost impossible.' Ibid.p.405.

(40)Ibid. vol.II p.160.

(41)Leeds was singled out by Edwin Chadwick in his report Health of Towns in 1844 as even more degraded than the prisons about which John Howard had written. 'More filth, worse physical suffering and moral disorder than Howard describes are to be found among the cellar populations of the working people of Liverpool, Manchester or Leeds and in large portions of the metropolis.' Cited, English Social History G.M. Trevelyan. Longmans 1942 p.529.

(42)Hook was not hitherto indifferent to the needs of the poor. Among his achievements at Coventry was the provision for them of a dispensary and a savings bank. Stephens Ibid. Vol.I p.177.

(43)Stephens vol.I p.378. See for his preaching, p.394f. If the preacher is the progenitor of the pew system, is it not the great preacher who puts it under pressure? George Rudé in a comment on religion in London observes that the pew system was a deterrent to the attendance of the poor, and continues, 'The system, therefore, worked best when services were dull and unattractive. Conversely, it tended to break down whenever a popular preacher drew an unexpected influx of attendants; as when, in 1780, John Newton's preaching at St Mary Woolnoth, in the City, drew such crowds that not only were the aisles congested but the pew-holders, to their intense disgust, found their appropriated seats occupied by strangers!' Hanoverian London 1714-1808 Secker and Warburg 1971. p.106. Such 'trespassing', however, was not the rule. The picture seems normally to have been that of scantily occupied pews while the poor stood or sat wherever else they could. (See Wilberforce on the 'modesty' of the lower classes ch.Vp.124.) At Leeds the problem was neither scantily occupied pews nor their seizure by the eager multitude, however, but for the eloquence of the vicar the system may not have become a momentous issue so quickly.

(44)Stephens vol.I p.378f.

(45)Stephens vol.I p.401.

(46)Stephens vol.I pp.403,405.

(47)Stephens vol.I p.381. The architect was Robert Dennis Chantrell (1793-1872). He designed the Philosophical Hall and the Court House in Leeds. 'But it was as a designer of Gothic (and occasionally neo-Norman) churches that Chantrell was best known in Yorkshire.' In 1829 he was appointed surveyor to York Minster and in 1846 architect to the Incorporated Church Building Society. A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects Howard Colvin. Murray 1978.

(48)Stephens vol.I p.381.

(49)The Dictionary appeared five years after the speech we are quoting so his entry for 'Pews' may represent a development of his abhorrence. But in 1837 when he spoke trade 'was in a deeply depressed condition' so although those who heard him had 'wealth more than sufficient for the purpose' Hook may have judged that this was not the moment to rend the system entirely. (Cf.Stephens vol.I p.380.)

(50)Stephens vol.II p.87.

(51)Stephens vol.II p.88.

(52)Stephens vol.II p.160ff. The extra-obligatory work was by private arrangement with the vicar. Such clergy 'were not legally responsible for it, nor could he dismiss them if they neglected it.' Ibid.p.163.

(53)Stephens vol.II p.163. In the 1930's the crypt of St George's was utilised much as that of St Martin-in-the-Fields, and today still practises this ministry among the unemployed and others in special need.

(54)Stephens vol.II p.164.

(55)Stephens vol.II p.169. Ripon had been formed out of the Diocese of York in 1836. Longley became Archbishop of York and later of Canterbury in which capacity he was somewhat lukewarm concerning the freedom of the churches. See Ch.V, Collective Disquiet,p.126.

(56)Stephens vol.II p.170.

(57)Stephens vol.II p.171. Ironically the incumbent of Stanningley Church, a perpetual curacy, continued to receive £10, 2.5% of his annual stipend of £398, until the Second World War.(Crockford 1938 and previous editions).

(58)However, some pewholders were equal to such an emergency. Cf. Ch.VI,Frontal Attacks,p.171.

(59)Stephens vol.II p.166.

(60)Stephens vol.II p.172.

(61)'Yet there was nothing in his teaching ad captandum. His political heroes were Peel and Gladstone.' Church and People S.C Carpenter. SPCK 1959 p.393.

(62)'The Ecclesiastical Commissioners also cordially approved of the measure as a whole, although the Vicar was much harassed by the objections and difficulties raised by them upon a variety of points.' Stephens vol.II p.174.

(63)Stephens vol.II p.174.

(64)Churchmanship as a crucial factor in the pew controversy was explicitly claimed by Beresford Hope, an ardent member of the Camden Society. Of the system he wrote, 'Its being right or wrong is a question of religious character. The solution depends upon the

degree in which the Christian Church is realized as "the communion of saints" '. And this was why High Churchmen 'have been the foremost in the fight for free and open worship'. Hope as 'DCL, Letters on Church Matters: Reprinted from the 'Morning Chronicle'' (London 1851-2) vol.III 60 (From White op.cit. p.108.).

(65) Stephens vol.II p.176f.

(66) Chadwick deals extensively with this complicated matter of the church rate. Op.cit. vol.I p.146ff. et al.

(67) In the judgment of his biographer this was not the only cause for the cessation of Nonconformist opposition. In the spring of 1844 Hook had publicly endorsed Shaftesbury's Factory Ten Hours Bill which further increased his popularity with the working-classes of Leeds on whose support his Free Church adversaries depended. On the other hand he risked much in taking this course for it meant not only opposing the government of Sir Robert Peel with which he was in sympathy, but also the possibility of alienating the manufacturers of Leeds whose financial contributions were critical both to pay off the residual debt on St Peter's, and to implement the provisions of the Leeds Vicarage Act. Even in an appeal to their generosity after the Bill's passage through Parliament, he contrasts their donations with the actual 'wealth of those who monopolise the pews in our churches'. Stephens vol.II p.179f.

(68) James Fraser (1818-1885). Educated Shrewsbury, Balliol, Oxford. Bishop of Manchester 1870-1885. Known as the 'Layman's Bishop' he was to be seen about the streets of his see city carrying his robe bag.

(69) Bishop Fraser: Second Bishop of Manchester Thomas Hughes. Mac-Millan 1887 p.52.

(70) Thomas Mozley (1806-1893). A prominent Tractarian, he left Cholderton to devote himself more fully as a contributor to The Times.

(71) Hughes Op.cit.p.59.

(72) Cf. Ch.VII Rebuff in the Lords App.p.207.

(73) In a recent study of the church of St Mary the Virgin, Barnes, Surrey, John Whale, the distinguished journalist, has an intriguing explanation of why the building was enlarged in 1838, though it was ill-attended and the population of the parish small. 'The clue to all this church expansion seems to have been financial. In an age when pews were still rented, the church was in a position to sell social standing to families who could afford higher rents than their neighbours; but if there were to be these profitable gradations in pews there must be plenty of pews.' One Church, One Lord John Whale SCM 1979. p.79. It is a reasonable assumption that those who traded in pews in our period were not unaware of the social dividend to which Whale refers. Moreover, were we able to investigate, we might discover that respect was not the only earthly reward of an investment in the parochial seating arrangements: one's professional and business contacts widened as a consequence quite apart from any promise of integrity which possession of a pew may foster. Ironically the church at the time was in the Diocese of Winchester and its

extension occurred during the episcopate of Charles Sumner. See Ch. II Episcopal Concern, p.31ff.

(74) Cf. Ch. I The Problem Arises, p.20.

(75) Hughes Op.cit. p.60.

(76) Hughes Ibid. p.60. The reform might have been encouraged by the archdeacon's claim that during the last 9 years the diocesan ministrations of the Church have been extended chiefly by means of free sittings for the poor'. Charge to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of Sarum Francis Lear. Broche 1846 p.11.

(77) Hughes Ibid. p.61.

(78) Hughes Ibid. p.61.

(79) Hughes Ibid. p.61.

(80) Hughes Ibid. p.62. The 'prescriptive right' which Paxton claimed evidently dated from the last days of the Commonwealth. An entry in the register of Cholderton Church reads thus: 'The parish church of Choldrington (sc. Cholderton) being repaired and the Seats of ye church new erected, the Seats were disposed of by ye Minister, Churchwarden, Overseer, and other ye parishioners in manner following September 24 1659.' A plan of the allocation follows. In view of its present position (p.71) it seems that the squire's place was on the north side, described thus: 'The seate adjoining to the Chancel belongeth to ye Upper Farme.' Parish Notes E.P. Barrow. Brown & Co. 1889. p.10f. The involvement of the Overseer is of special interest. This official, appointed under the great Poor Law Act of 1601 or one of the previous such Acts of the Elizabethan period, would presumably have responsibility for the seating of the inmates of the workhouse or other destitute parishioners. So the allocation both on the north and south side of the west nave runs thus: 'The lowest seate behinde the Church door is for such women of ye parish as the minister and Churchwarden shall adjudg fit to sit there. The 3 uppermost seats of this side are for men and ye other for women.' Furthermore, only the front two seats on the north side actually belong to their users; the others are all allocated.

(81) Hughes Ibid. p.63.

(82) In his biography Mozley is not precise about the motivation of his proposals for the seating at Cholderton. On arrival in the village he found that 'half-filled pews occupied half the church, though there existed an award, made in the Commonwealth, putting the men on one side, and the women on the other, and their servants lower down, there being at that time space enough for all.' That may have provided the first impulse for reform. But there was also a sense of guilt. 'My visitors chaffed me on my church, and made invidious comparisons between it and the new rectory, which I had enlarged for my pupils.' Reminiscences Chiefly of Oriel College and the Oxford Movement T. Mozley. Longmans 1882 vol.II p.162.

(83) Hughes Op.cit. p.64. Congregational pews facing north or south are, of course, the rule in transepts so that worshippers at least do not stare at a wall, which they would do if the pews were in line with those in the nave. But elsewhere in the building such an arrangement detracts from the corporate atmosphere of worship. The reason for the orientation of stalls in a college chapel is explained by Beresford Hope in a passage in which, while acknowledging (in 1874) that

all is not well in the matter of seating, he concedes that 'at all events, the seats are usually arranged so that they face the most sacred part of the building.' However, 'In chancels or choirs the seats or stalls are longitudinal, because those who fill them are looked upon as taking a direct part in the performance of worship, and particularly in the antiphonal singing; and as college-chapels are, in fact, choirs, in them also the old practice of longitudinal seats has rightly been respected down to our own days.' Worship in the Church of England A.J.B. Beresford Hope, MP. Murray 1874. p.42. As Paxton performed no special liturgical function we may surmise that his desire to face in a different direction from the rest of the congregation had a somewhat worldly basis. (Our remarks, of course, apply to the traditional lay-out of a church. Today many are designed so that the worshippers gather round a central altar, but though they may face in different directions, they face, from their different positions, towards that focus of devotion).

(84) Hughes Ibid. p.65.

(85) Hughes Ibid. p.65.

(86) A twentieth century example of such a sequel in the life of the Church is the creation of Guild churches in the City of London each with a specialist function such as healing or social involvement. The opportunity and incentive for such a transition were provided by the ravages of the Second World War, so that a choice had to be made between restoring the previous structure of largely sinecure incumbencies or devising a form of ministry more useful and relevant to the age.

(87) Barrow Op.cit.p.23.

(88) Hughes Op.cit. p.75.

(89) Hughes Ibid. p.75.

(90) Also Mothering Sunday. Today we would expect more people at worship, for the celebration is used as an opportunity, with posies and floral cards, to reach out to the community. But in Victorian times the emphasis was on visiting one's parents so that gains and losses in church would probably make the day, as far as attendance is concerned, no more than an average Sunday.

(91) DNB vol.8 p.650.

(92) The Lancashire Life of Bishop Fraser John Diggle. Sampson Low 1890. p.168.

(93) DNB vol.8 p.650.

(94) A generous subscriber toward the building was Mozley's brother-in-law, John Henry Newman, who first sent £50 from his own pocket and then £44 being a collection held at his church, Littlemore. Barrow records, 'Cardinal Newman was present at the laying of the foundation-stone of the church, but had been received into the Roman Communion four years before its consecration.' Op.cit. p.22.

(95) Rear Admiral the Hon. Maurice Horatio Nelson. By coincidence,

as we shall see, a member of this family was an ardent advocate of the freedom of the churches. Cf. Ch.VI, p.175f,Ch.VII,p.197

(96)William James Early Bennett(1804-1886). A Tractarian whose advanced churchmanship and practice brought him into conflict with his bishop, Charles Blomfield, and aroused the wrath of Protestant zealots. A public letter to Pusey on the subject of the Real Presence led to a series of legal actions. His periodical, Old Church Porch, was a precursor of the parish magazine.

(97)Now St Paul's, Portman Square.

(98)The Story of W.J.E.Bennett F.Bennett. Longmans 1909 p.24.

(99)Bennett Ibid. p.24. He quotes Colossians 4.1.

(100)Bennett Ibid. p.28.

(101)At this stage it is probable that the plans of Bennett for a free church would have been an aspect of his ministry of which his bishop would have approved. In 1832, in his evidence to the Committee on the Observance of the Sabbath, the bishop had said, 'It is the object of the Commissioners for building new churches, as far as they can, to intermingle the seats of the rich and the poor, so as to afford the latter nearly the same facilities for hearing as the former enjoy. We have found considerable difficulty in realizing our own wishes in that respect, on account of the objections that were made by the richer classes to too great an admixture of the poor among them, objections to which it was absolutely necessary to attend to because the whole income of the Minister depends on the pew rents accruing exclusively from the richer classes.' Quoted by J.L. and Barbara Hammond. The Bleak Age Penguin 1934. p.120. Later he expressed some disappointment as to the effect upon the attendance at worship of the poorer classes. In a letter dated September 21, 1854 he reflects that 'it has certainly not answered my expectations in Bethnal Green, where there are no pew-rents nor appropriated sittings in the new churches.' A Memoir of Charles James Blomfield Alfred Blomfield. Murray 1863. vol.II p. 169.

(102)Bennett Op.cit. p.48.

(103)Bennett Ibid. p.50.

(104)Bennett Ibid. p.50.

(105)Bennett Ibid. p.50.

(106)Bennett Ibid. p.52. Again there is common ground between Bennett and his bishop. In 1846 (the same year as Bennett's pastoral letter) Blomfield in his charge urged his clergy to support the Metropolitan Churches Fund. 'Remind them (sc.the rich) that the want it is intended to supply, is in great measure occasioned by those very causes which augment their own resources, or contribute to their pleasures. The labourers and artisans who form the bulk of that population whom we desire to bring under the Church's teaching and care, minister to their wealth and comfort.' Blomfield Op.cit. vol.I p.249f.

(107)The offertory at St Paul's from which St Barnabas was to be assis-



ted would presumably be the 'Alms for the Poor' received in accordance with the rubric of the Book of Common Prayer at Holy Communion. Running expenses came from pew rents.

(108) Cf. Ch.VIII, *The Long Twilight*, p.219ff.

(109) Bennett *Op.cit.* p.54.

(110) Bennett *Ibid.* p.54f. Again we find a resonance with Blomfield's approach to the higher classes. In 1836, writing of the shortage of clergy and churches in London he declares that the situation cannot be contemplated 'without the most serious apprehension, when it is considered, in how great a degree the stability and prosperity of a country are dependent upon the principles and habits of those classes which form the basis of the social fabric.' And he is more explicit than Bennett about the dual motives which should impel the rich to subscribe to the building of more churches. 'It is a work of prudence not less than of charity, to impart to the multitudes who are scarcely acquainted with the first principles of Christianity, a knowledge of its duties and consolations, its motives and restraints.' Blomfield *Op.cit.* vol.I p.233f. In his final paragraph he links religion and public tranquillity even more directly. Those who give will promote 'at once the cause of social order and true religion' and will be blessed by 'Him who is the author of peace, and lover of concord, and the giver of national as well as individual prosperity.' *Ibid.* p.235.

(111) Bennett *Ibid.* p.62.

(112) John Neale was among the preachers, and we may be sure that he approved of the seating arrangements, though it would have been his churchmanship rather than the issue of pews that led to his invitation.

(113) Bennett *Op.cit.* p.77.

(114) Bennett *Ibid.* p.77.

(115) Bennett had given Bishop Blomfield the option of invoking his resignation whenever he wished in a letter of July 1850 in which he answered the bishop's accusation of improper liturgical practices. Bennett *Ibid.* p.89.

(116) The Roman Catholic hierarchy was established in England in September 1850, and was popularly known as the 'Papal Aggression'.

(117) The Guardian was a Tractarian weekly that existed from 1846 until 1951.

(118) Bennett *Op.cit.* pp.117,137.

(119) This is how Bennett spelt the name, Frome, as he had 'something of an affection for phonetic spelling'. Bennett *Ibid.* p.178.

(120) Bennett *Ibid.* p.214. The Rubric to the Holy Communion service requires the provision of a 'decent bason' for the alms to be brought 'to the Priest, who shall humbly present and place it upon the holy Table.'

(121)Published by the Catholic Literature Association.

(122)Ibid. p.2.

IV  
EXTERNAL PRESSURES

The claim of the Church of England to be the Church of the nation ensures that the pressures upon it will not come entirely from within. This is true, of course, in a more limited sense of any denomination. But in particular the ties of Anglicanism with the State bring both the privilege of attention as well as the vexation of censure from the secular institutions of the nation. Even the seating arrangements of the parish churches were certainly a legitimate subject for comment from such sources. The bishops, after all, were servants of the Crown and owed their elevation to the government of the day. And the allocation of sittings was ultimately their prerogative.<sup>(1)</sup> In addition the Act of 1818 not only provided money from the Treasury for the building of new churches, but required that a fifth of the accommodation therein should be free. So the State may have an interest both in the use that is made of the facilities for public worship, and the consequences for the health of the body politic of any factors which may repel. We now observe two examples in the 1850's of a concern with our problem arising from outside strictly ecclesiastical circles.

The Census

In 1851, the year following the events at Cholderton and Pimlico, the first, and so far only, official attempt was made to compute the spiritual condition of the country. The Whig government of Lord John Russell, through the initiative of Sir George Lewis, under secretary at the Home Office, included in the census enquiries due that year statistical questions to the clergy regarding the churches or chapels in their care. Our concern is not with the number of persons who attended public worship on the appointed

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day, March 30, which the returns divulged. That more than half of the people who were able to do so, made their devotions that day now seems a startling proportion of the nation. That there should have been shock at the number of absentees reminds the latter-day churchgoer that all things are relative. But our interest must centre on the comment that Horace Mann, an assistant Registrar-General, who organised the operation, published three years later.(2) For among the questions addressed to the clergy had been some about the availability of sittings in their churches. And from letters received from some clerical respondents Mann formed certain conclusions about the role which pews play in the estrangement of the working classes from the Church.(3)

The estrangement, Mann believed, was not due to the rejection of Christianity as a doctrinal system. But the poor had turned their backs upon that form of it mediated by institutionalised religion. Four main causes are suggested. There was a want of sympathy from professing Christians for the tribulations of the poor; the selfish motivation of the ministers; the environment of the destitute masses against which the feeble ministrations of the Church's agents could not prevail.(4)

That many clergy were prompted by unworthy impulses it would be idle to deny. But that others led sacrificial lives in the wastelands of our great cities, and were anxious about the multitude who stayed away, is equally true. And it is the evidence of such concerned ministers that persuaded Mann to give as his first cause of deterrence the institution that we are considering.

'Working men, it is contended, cannot enter our religious structures without having pressed upon their notice some memento of inferiority. The existence of pews and the position of free seats

are, it is said, alone sufficient to deter them from our churches; and religion has thus come to be regarded as a purely middle-class propriety or luxury. It is therefore, by some, proposed to abandon the pew system, and to raise by voluntary contributions the amount now paid as seat rents.'(5) Moreover, clergy have drawn attention to 'the Rubric, as the specific mode in which the voluntary contributions should be gathered'.(6)

Other clergy who wrote to Mann took a different view. They were equally exercised about the situation acknowledging that social distinctions were 'a potent cause of the absence of the working classes from religious worship'. They were, however, sceptical about the proposed solution. In their view those distinctions inherent in society for six days of the week 'cannot be effaced on Sundays by the mere removal of a physical barrier.'(7)

We do not know whether this second group of clergy were troubled by what they evidently judged to be the inevitability of projecting the gradations of society into the setting of divine worship.(8) They seem to have engaged only with the practical problem of getting the poor to come to church. And they began with the premise that segregation was the only way forward. But they make out a plausible case for that premise. The 'labouring myriads, it is argued, forming to themselves a world apart, have no desire to mingle, even though on ostensibly equal terms, with persons of a higher grade.'(9) This concept of 'forming to themselves a world apart' is expanded. The significant assertion that it is the poor who wish to be left to themselves is reinforced thus avoiding any implication that the feeling may be mutual or even that the initiative may lie elsewhere. 'Their tastes and habits are so wholly uncongenial with the views and customs of the higher orders that

they feel an insuperable aversion to an intermixture which would bring them under an intolerable constraint. The same disposition, it is said, which hinders them from mixing in the scenes of recreation which the other classes favour, and induces their selection preferably of such amusements as can be exclusively confined to their own order, will for ever operate to hinder their attendance at religious services unless such services can be devised as shall become exclusively their own.'(10) So it does not matter what is done to democratise the seating arrangements, the poor will not wish to worship in the assembly of their betters.

This counsel of despair has at least the merit of a realistic evaluation of the constraints within a rigidly structured society. It assumes that people whose entire lives are expended in isolation from each other cannot gather for a common activity without unease or tension. Or, at the very least, preparation of great magnitude will be needed before such a temporary breach of the class structure can be effected in an atmosphere conducive to public devotion. Was the time ripe for such a venture? Moreover, the removal of 'physical' barriers is a fraud: it signifies nothing. And by such a gesture even the briefly promoted worshippers, in the opinion of the respondents, are not taken in. They would perceive such a coming together with their masters only as 'ostensibly on equal terms.'

So Horace Mann dismisses any reform of the pew-system notwithstanding its pernicious function as a 'memento of inferiority'. It may be the principal cause of the absence of the poor from public worship, but the remedy for that situation does not lie with its abolition. It lies with persuading the poor 'gradually to establish places of worship for themselves.'(11) The words breathe a spirit of long-term planning rather than of urgent necessity. The skill of

the Methodists is admired as an example of this kind of outreach, as is also the experiment of the Ragged Churches which 'are in several places making a successful start.' (12) However, even among some Free Churches evidently experiencing similar social tensions in their congregations to those of the Establishment, 'special services in halls and lecture rooms are being held, intended wholly for the working class'. And the attendance at such services 'seems to prove that multitudes will readily frequent such places, where of course there is a total absence of all class distinctions, who would never enter the exclusive-looking chapel.' (13)

Mann's sympathy for the oppressed and his dismay at their absence from church are doubtless reactions both as sincere and as ambivalent as we may expect from someone in his position at this particular period. Proclaiming the Gospel in its absolute form as a simple revelation of divine love, and worship as an unconditional response, is never easy. We are not, therefore, taken unawares when we find Mann bolstering his plea for action with a warning about what may happen if nothing is done and religion is entirely lost for the lower orders. His readers would share with others of his class a nagging anxiety about the form in which the simmering discontent of masses of the people might eventually find an outlet. The uprisings of 1848 in the capitals of Europe had nearly, but not quite, been replicated in England. However, the danger of some future upheaval could not be entirely discounted. And any influence that may diminish that danger will appeal to those whose interests are identified with the status quo.

So, in conclusion, Mann, having duly acknowledged the transcendent element in Christianity ('those exalted and immeasurable interests with which religion is connected in the destinies of all'),

contends that 'no inconsiderable portion of the secular prosperity and peace of individuals and states depends on the extent to which a pure religion is professed and practically followed.' Thus the government must ponder 'the inappreciable value of religion even to a nation's physical advancement'.(14) As for those who believe that, alternatively, education may be the antidote for the disaster they fear, they are informed that 'increased intelligence may only furnish to the vicious and the criminal increased facilities for evil.' But, on the other hand, religion 'controlling conscience rather than refining taste' seldom fails 'in addition to its higher blessings' to promote 'those fixed views and habits which can scarcely fail to render individuals prosperous and states secure.'(15)

Finally, Mann is not without biblical endorsement of this double function of religion. 'It is thus that religion "has the promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come" '.(16)

#### A Select Committee

In 1856, two years after the publication of Mann's reflections on the religious implications of the Census, the House of Lords appointed a committee to consider the 'Deficiency of Means of Spiritual Instruction'.(17) As part of its remit it probed the question of seating the poor in church. Among its members was John Sumner, Archbishop of Canterbury, whose <sup>brother's</sup> comments made nearly thirty years earlier we have recorded. (18) The committee interrogated five witnesses in our area of interest and the questions themselves disclose a surprising awareness on the part of the peers of the issues involved. Although no national body had yet been founded to seek the abolition of the pew system(19), clearly sufficient information had reached them through



observation or report, such as Mann's comments, as to kindle some measure of disquiet.

An intriguing factor, to which three of the four clerical witnesses testified, was the preference of the poor to pay for their accommodation.(20) Thomas Stooks, secretary of the London Church Building Society, when asked whether the working-classes desired that all seats should be free, replied that they perceived a rent as 'establishing their property'.(21) He mentioned a new church in a neighbourhood largely populated 'by mechanics on very fair wages' whom the clergy believed got a feeling of 'independence' and 'proprietorship' from pews for which they paid. The rector of St George the Martyr, Southwark, William Cadman, believed that this wish for independence was to be found even among the very poorest who could only afford 6d per annum: it was, he declared, a matter of possessing a 'right'. In a school-room used for worship he had found that people wanted to pay half-a-crown so as to have their own chair. Asked by the Duke of Marlborough whether payment may even be an incentive to attendance, he agreed, for one wanted to use that which one had purchased.(22) The theme was developed somewhat differently by John Burnet, the vicar of Bradford. He agreed that the poor wanted seats of their own, but he was not wholly convinced that only a rent could satisfy such a requirement. Appropriation without payment, he suggested, might achieve the same result, to which he added the interesting explanation that a worshipper likes 'always to be seen at his own post'. However, when pressed, even Burnet conceded that the poor would probably be happier knowing that they had paid something for the right to sit in church.(23)

The contrary view, supported by long experience, came from John Molyneux, the incumbent of Sudbury.(24) No one, he declared,

should be made to pay anything for the privilege of occupying a seat. That was the arrangement in his church where he had installed 'movable chairs',<sup>(25)</sup> which could be shifted about so that families could sit together and 'are not inconvenienced by their next neighbour as they might otherwise be.' Molyneux perhaps believed that the very static nature of pews undergirded the possessive instinct which he deplored, while the very mobility of chairs, with the lack of any fixed position for them, encouraged a sense of community. But does that community include the neighbour beyond the nuclear family for again an additional recommendation for this form of seating is the feeling of 'independence' which the occupants enjoy? The same word was used by Stooks and Cadman in their defence of payment.<sup>(26)</sup> For them a rented place in a pew achieved this desirable object.

Today, with the emphasis on the parish church as a building where the Church as a family gathers for worship, a yearning for independence is not encouraged. Worshippers do not sink their individuality, but it is the sense of belonging to each other, and the corporate nature of the activity of devotion that are stressed.<sup>(27)</sup> However, in the thinking of these witnesses of the 1850's the family nature of the Church may have had little place. What we venture to infer, however, from the evidence of the witnesses, was the need of the working classes for some affirmation of their human dignity. Though such phrases as 'self expression' or 'personal identity' were not then in vogue (if it is not too fanciful so to extend the meaning of the word 'independence') the churches seem to have been the places where such categories may be celebrated; where compensation may be sought for an increasingly anonymous existence amid the sprawling conurbations and the monotonous routine of the factories. It is interesting, moreover, to reflect that in the middle of the nineteenth century, a period which saw numerous

efforts both to expand and to curtail the facilities for recreation on Sunday of the urban masses, the churches appear to have provided an opportunity not entirely unrelated where the individual, with his reserved seat, could be himself. He enjoyed, for an hour or two, his 'independence'.

This area of the committee's enquiries also led Stooks - though again the words are not used - to disclose something of the concepts of working-class 'solidarity' and working class 'snobbery'. He insisted that payments from the various strata of the working-class should not be so diverse that one stratum could feel itself to be inferior to another. Nor should facilities be so situated that such a division was apparent; on the contrary the poor of London preferred to be 'mixed up with richer neighbours.' (28) Moreover, he elaborated this statement to declare that the 'actual' poor are not tormented by traumas about social precedence. It was those just above them 'with 30 or 40 shillings a week' who did not relish being identified with 'paupers'.

Continuing his evidence Stooks also touched on the question of the visible uniformity of seating provision: in churches recently erected the only difference between free seats and others was that the latter were entered through low doors. His remarks seem to imply that the repugnance to free seats would diminish if all the furniture looked and was the same. He seems, therefore, to retreat slightly from his previous position: as we saw, he believed the poor desired to pay something. However, it is possible that he here permits himself to dream of a remote future when all seating will be liberated, and there will be no incentive for the lower orders to vie among themselves for pre-eminence for even their masters will be subject to the same democratic constraints. Indeed, a layman, William Rivington, who was

called to give evidence out of a long record of service to many societies connected with church extension, had no doubt that the objection to free seats stemmed from their humiliating distinctiveness. Where there was general uniformity he found the poor more ready to accept those seats provided specially for them.(29)

The relationship between pew rents and the independence of the clergy was another issue that emerged from the peers' questioning of the witnesses. Stooks explained that without such income many churches would be unable to meet their expenses for which the incumbent himself could then be held liable. For no reason that he could determine, there was great opposition to a voluntary offertory.(30) The great danger, should such a method replace pew rents, was that it would make the minister 'entirely dependent, as in many instances at present, upon the prejudice or caprice of his congregation' as was the lot of dissenting ministers.(31) However, Stooks did not believe that a priest should be entirely immune from the judgment of his parishioners, and his ideal would be a ministry sustained partly by endowment and partly by offertory. 'I think it is very undesirable to leave any man entirely independent of his congregation; the feeling between them is strengthened by his not being so.'

In its recommendations, the committee, at least by implication, signalled its preference for the abolition of pew rents. But it made plain that the complete enfranchisement of the churches was not, anyway at this stage, part of its vision. 'The Committee must not be understood as condemning altogether the appropriation of seats.' But, in what must have seemed a compliment to Molyneux, it cited his own quotation from a judgment of 1825 concerning an application for a faculty (Fuller v Lane 2Add. Eccles. Rpts.425).

'All the pews in a parish church are the common property of the parish; they are for the use, in common, of the parishioners, who are entitled to be seated orderly and conveniently, so as best to provide for the accommodation of all.'(32) The committee evidently hoped that the system would die a natural death which, where possible, should be accelerated. So it wanted no more faculties, which accorded exclusive rights in a pew, to be granted to the occupants of a particular building in a parish. Moreover, claims to a pew for which no documentary support was available were to be investigated by the archdeacons and should no one appear to prove a claim 'we can discover no hardship in precluding them from asserting a title hereafter'.(33)

The committee's work is of interest mainly for the information it provides about the attitudes and practices of the time, for nothing in the form of legislation crowned its labours. When Bishop Magee of Peterborough spoke for the Parish Churches Bill a quarter of a century later it was, in effect, to resume an adjourned debate.(34) However, as we have seen, the committee found that the proprietorial instincts of a new breed of skilled worker had been stimulated to impose a fresh complexity upon the controversy. And even paupers desired to contribute their mite. Nevertheless, Rivington's opinion that uniformity of appearance would overcome the objections of worshippers who found free seats humiliating pointed at least to an interim solution. Clearly the time for Hook's 'enfranchisement' of the naves of England was not yet, although doubtless he would have found allies among the noble members of the committee.

## Notes to External Pressures

(1) Cf. Ch.I The Problem Arises p.20.

(2) Religious Worship in England and Wales Horace Mann Esq.Routledge 1854.

(3) Only a few days before the census there was considerable agitation displayed in Parliament over the questions about sittings. On March 14 Lord Stanley enquired why only the churches of the Establishment were asked about the number of free sittings, while other churches only needed to give 'the amount of standing room. What was the reason of the distinction?' The answer of Lord Granville, vice-president of the Board of Trade, does not seem wholly enlightening. 'As to the enquiry respecting the Church of England and Dissenters it must be observed the latter maintained their places of worship by subscriptions from year to year, which was not the case with the former.' Parliamentary Debates 3rd Series. cols.1305f. In the Commons on the same day, the Home Secretary, Sir George Grey, was asked why the questions relating to the churches did not require, by law, an answer as the other questions did. Such questions, Grey replied, were 'calculated to procure valuable information....but the withholding of answers to that class of queries was not subject to a penalty.' Ibid col.1316. The fact that there was no obligation to make such returns and the consequent fear that a false picture of the religious situation of the country would be recorded, led to a petition being presented in the Lords as late as March 27. The petition from the rural deanery of Newbury was brought by the Bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce. The clergy complained 'of their being called upon to answer certain questions contained in the papers issued from the Registrar General's office in connection with the census and praying that it may be made imperative to reply to such queries, or they might not be made at all.' They feared that 'the incorrect information thus obtained would be made available to the prejudice of the great interests over which the ministers of the Church were bound to watch.' Lord Granville did not appear fully to appreciate the anxiety of the clergy. 'He believed that if the returns were made at all they would be of a generally correct and ample character.' The Bishop of Salisbury, Edward Denison, endeavoured to clarify the objection: the returns 'would be necessarily incomplete.' Moreover, 'from their imperfections inferences would be drawn, unjust, mischievous, and dangerous.' The exchanges concluded with Wilberforce vigorously denying the charge of the Marquess of Breadalbane who 'could not attribute it to anything but laziness to find this opposition on the part of clergymen of the Established Church.' Parliamentary Debates 218 cols.629ff. Despite the inertia which the non-mandatory questions produced among the clergy, Chadwick shows that the persistence of Mann eventually left only 989 defaulters out of 14077 Anglican places of worship.(Op.cit.pt.I p.364.) Though the statistics became 'the missiles of a new controversy called the "arithmetical war" ' and much scorn was heaped upon them, there was, nevertheless, 'something about his report which was inescapable, and which made it a landmark in the history of England.'(Ibid p.368) And John Gay, having considered the objections to the reliability of the figures, adds that two 'recent investigations into the Census by K.S. Inglis and W.S.F. Pickering both agree on the general reliability of the results, and this research has not produced any facts to throw doubt on their conclusion.'The Geography of Religion in England Duckworth 1971. p.49.

(4) Of these three causes of estrangement Mann appears only to accept the first at its face value in that he speaks of 'the insufficient sympathy exhibited by professed Christians' without qualification. For the clergy who work amid scenes of 'vice and filth' against hopeless odds, he does not lack admiration for they fail 'after much exertion' and the charge of selfish motives against the clergy is a 'hasty inference'. Mann Op.Cit.p.94f.

(5) Ibid. p.94. In his Preface to this work Mann showed his awareness of the ambiguity of the word 'free'. A sitting may not be paid for, but the poor may still be excluded from it when the churchwardens set it apart, 'appropriated', it for a superior member of the congregation. So Mann reduced the total of 'really free' sittings to 3,947,371, and found that 4,443,093 'either from money payment or from customary occupancy, are not accessible to anybody indiscriminately.' Preface p.viii.

(6) Ibid. p.94. In fact the Rubrics only provide for collections at Holy Communion and The Churching of Women. As Morning and Evening Prayer were the services generally attended, obedience to the Rubrics would not have helped the financial position very much.

(7) Ibid. p.94.

(8) Cf. Ch.V, p.136ff Wilberforce was plainly haunted by the contrast between the Church's practice and the spirit of the New Testament, although he supported division. This, for him, was a present necessity but did not reflect the final condition of Christian brotherhood.

(9) Mann p.94.

(10) Ibid. p.94.

(11) Ibid. p.94.

(12) Ibid. p.94. In a footnote Mann apologises for using the term 'Ragged Churches' and explains, 'The objections to this term are felt as much by the founders of these institutions as by others; but considerable difficulty is felt in providing any substitute.'

(13) Ibid. p.94.

(14) Ibid. p.167 In commending religion as a means to material prosperity or as an instrument of social control Mann was not alone. When he proposed the first Church Building Act in 1818, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nicholas Vansittart, as reported in Hansard for March 16 'might indeed almost say that the reformation for which he pleaded was not less important to the security of property and the civil order of society, than to the higher considerations of religion and morality.' (Quoted by Webster op.cit.p.63). Nor did Bishop Blomfield refrain, in his plea for funds for church extension in the diocese of London, from highlighting the effect of Christianity in the service of public order and stability. Cf. Ch.III Priestly Initiatives p.92 note(110). And later Bishop Magee dropped dark hints of a similar nature. Cf. Ch.VII Rebuff in the Lords p.195.

(15) Ibid. p.167.

(16)Ibid. p.168.Mann may have heard sermons on this text, I Timothy 4.8, offering this interpretation, or other sermons which made the same point. It would sort well with a period of great national confidence and optimism, and a utilitarian evaluation of human endeavour. The words, however, are construed by scholars to refer to the spiritual blessings, such as forgiveness, assurance, peace, which the Gospel can confer here and now. As one commentator remarks, 'That "religion has a promise of life here" is a common Old Testament teaching (Psalm 91.16, etc) but it is not New Testament language'. The Pastoral Epistles B.S. Easton. SCM Press 1948p.145f. Easton is commenting of this verse.

(17)Parliamentary Papers 1857-1858. Select Committee, House of Lords, Appendix s.

(18)Cf. Ch. II, Episcopal Concern p.31ff. Before his translation to Canterbury in 1848, Sumner was for 20 years Bishop of Chester. Although the pew question was not actually mentioned, in a Charge to the clergy of his diocese he drew very near to the subject. He referred to the absence of the working classes from worship, and especially the hand-loom weavers impoverished by the introduction of steam. Such 'are naturally reluctant to mingle themselves with the richer; they are unwilling to exhibit poverty and rags in contrast with wealth or splendour. The very act, therefore, of attending the house of God requires in them something of an effort; and they are, moreover, continually and importunately tempted to withdraw themselves: for their life is one of labour, and the Lord's Day is inviting as a season of amusement: their families clamour for bread, and its sacred hours are invaded by the pursuit of gain.' A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Chester John Sumner. Hatchard 1838 appendix p.62f.

(19)Cf. Ch. VII, Frontal Attacks p.160f. The National Association for the Freedom of Worship was formed in Manchester in 1859, but not until 1866 with the formation of the London Free and Open Church Association, did the work become nationwide.

(20)Cf. Chap. VI, Frontal Attacks, p. 176. The similar report of Close about the weavers who wished to pay for their seats is also matched, to some extent, in the qualification (p.402 above) cited by Stooks that the working classes did not wish the differentials to be apparent.

(21)Parliamentary Papers p.58f.

(22)Ibid. p.156.

(23)Ibid. p.419. Bradford Parish Church provided 1400 sittings of which only 200 were officially free, but Burnet and the churchwardens had succeeded in extending this proportion.(p.417).

(24)Sir John Molyneux (he inherited the baronetcy only two months before his death in March 1879) was vicar of St Gregory with St Peter, Sudbury in Suffolk from 1855 until he died in office. He wrote a letter to his bishop, Thomas Turton of Ely, in 1856 (the year in which the Select Committee was formed) on The Rights of the Parishioners to the use of the Church. And two years later, 1858, produced a book, Preaching the Gospel to the Working Classes impossible under Pew System. Cf. Ch. VI Frontal Assaults, p.146ff.



(25)Parliamentary Papers p.317.

(26)The Duke of Wellington favoured the use of chairs, but his purpose was to provide more accommodation.(Cf. Ch.II,Episcopal Concern p.33). Though the Cambridge Camden Society was initially committed to benches in place of pews, from 1845 chairs were favoured 'on the grounds that they were more ancient, cheaper, and less formal'. James White op.cit. p.109.

(27)In the Rite A Eucharist of the Alternative Service Book the Nicene Creed begins, 'We believe'.

(28)Parliamentary Papers p.59.

(29)Ibid. p.60. For more on the question of the uniformity of pews and free seats cf. Ch. VI, Frontal Attacks. pp.158,176.

(30)James Obelkevich shows that both clergy and laity shrank **from** the idea of an offertory in mid-Victorian Lincolnshire. John Jackson (Bishop of Lincoln 1853-1869)'had to assure his clergy that it was not Romish, but he had also to warn them of the greater difficulty caused by lay opposition to the practice. In the well-regulated parish of South Ormsby, F.C. Massingberd found it hard to introduce the custom even on days when the sacrament was celebrated. In many parishes it was impossible to make collections for any purpose. Farmers, having already paid tithe or tithe rent-charge or rent for the glebe, as well as church rates, considered themselves sufficiently taxed by the Church. And the poor looked to the Church for benefits, not for further demands on their meagre wages. It was paradoxical that the clergy should ask the laymen for money when the differential between their income and their average parishioners' had never been greater.' Religion and Rural Society Oxford 1976. p.146. The poor of Lincolnshire had no wish to pay for their sittings.

(31)Parliamentary Papers p.61.

(32)Ibid. p.xvii. Cf. Ch. VI, Frontal Assaults, p.152, Ch. VII, Rebuff in the Lords, p.210(12).

(33)Ibid. p.xvii. Cf. Ch. VIII, The Long Twilight p.235.

(34)Cf. Ch. VII, Rebuff in the Lords.

COLLECTIVE DISQUIET

Even in Tudor times we have found bishops enquiring anxiously about the arrangements for seating the congregations in their dioceses.(1) And in our own period we have recorded not only the express disquiet of such leaders as Howley, Charles Sumner and Phillpotts, but have also noted the support of Longley for Hook's revolution at Leeds, the strictures upon the pew system of Fraser reflecting in episcopal office the beliefs evolved as a parish priest, Blomfield's initial approval of reform, and the implications of the charge of John Sumner delivered when he was Bishop of Chester.(2) These, however, were isolated protests. The bishops together could not take counsel/for the Convocations of Canterbury and York, except for formal business, had been in abeyance since 1717. Not until 1852 was the right of the Canterbury Convocation to debate restored with the result that our subject became a legitimate item for discussion in the official forum of the Church of England.

Convocation of Canterbury 1859, 1860

In 1859, seven years after the revival of Convocation, the item appears on the agenda of the Upper House. The primary initiative was not the bishops'. A group of six clergy(3) had prepared a petition which the Bishop of Lincoln(4) presented on their behalf. Its terms were uncompromising urging the bishops 'to remedy the evil, and to restore to the people of this realm the free use of their respective parish churches so that the poor may have the gospel preached unto them.'(5)

The petitioners were not in doubt as to the law: 'every inhabitant of a parish has a right to the free use of the parish church'. And they were equally forthright about the effect of the

pew system for it excludes 'the people at large from the worship and public religious instruction of the Church' which in turn has produced 'irreligion and immorality'.(6)

The six clergy were less than fortunate in their presenting bishop. Jackson informed his brethren that though he brought the petition to them he did not 'entirely agree with it' and, extraordinarily, not all the petitioners did so either for it did not 'represent their own feelings.'(7) The law, the Bishop of Lincoln continued, contrary to the claim of the document, did not grant the right to every parishioner 'to the free use of the parish church.'(8) It was the duty of the churchwardens, as the officers of the bishop, to seat the congregation according to the places available. The churchwardens could 'appropriate' seats and appropriation was 'the principle of our Church', and this should be restored by 'increasing church accommodation.'(9) Jackson, in fact, separated the question of private rented pews from that of the freedom of the remainder of the building. And his insistence that the two issues had been confused in the petition was enough to forestall any discussion. As we shall see, the distinction turned the controversy to a new focus.(10)

The following February another petition arrived borne this time by the Bishop of Oxford.(11). It came from 'a considerable number of clergymen', made the distinction to which we have referred, but vigorously denounced both methods of discrimination. The bishops were asked to consider 'the evil inflicted on the Church of England by the system of pew-rents in churches'.(12) Though 'the appropriation of pews' only caused 'dissatisfaction' it is 'notorious' that such pews are 'considered as the absolute property of their possessors.' Together, the petitioners explain, they form 'the pew system by which one half of the population are deprived of the use of their churches', and worship elsewhere or become 'wholly irreligious.'(13)

But all persons of whatever quality are 'equal before God' and possess 'equal rights and privileges in the church'. And in the fashion of the petitioners of 1859 it is stressed that this is in accordance with 'the common law of England' by which 'the free use of their parish church' is guaranteed to the parishioners.(14)

Once more the complainants were unfortunate in the bishop who handled their business. Wilberforce was silent about the proposition that people were equal before God. But whatever his inward thoughts about that, he entirely discounted the corollary that there should therefore be no preferential seating. He found nothing about this in the 'law of God' for he was not 'the God of confusion but of order'(15) who had laid down no rule 'that there ought to be no distinction of classes in the house of God.'(16) An abrupt transition at the end of his speech, in which he deplored the lack of provision for the poor in the church he attended when in London, gives us our first hint of the appearance in a new form of the problem with which we are concerned.(17) Briefly it is that the freeing of pews may lead not to more ample accommodation for the masses, but may even increase the extent of their exclusion.

Bishop Jackson of Lincoln, who had presented the earlier petition, followed Wilberforce and drew attention to St Luke's, Berwick Street, which had been founded to serve the London poor. Wilberforce agreed that it had been built for such a purpose. But he had observed that those who used it 'are generally above the rank of those for whom it was intended.'(18) And the reason was the awe in which such persons were held by those beneath them who 'do not attempt to push them out'. The root of the problem lay with the Incorporated Church Building Society(19) whose rule that 'a certain portion of the church' should be set apart for the use of the poor, has been somewhat unfortunate in its application.' This rule has removed from the

churchwardens their authority to seat the worshippers. And where everyone, high or low, is given the same chance then the inequalities which are the background to the rest of their lives will re-assert themselves. Attitudes of subservience, a legacy of generations, do not evaporate at will, particularly when for the remainder of the week they are expected to be resumed.(20) No wonder, then, that the Bishop of Oxford pleaded for the churchwardens to use the powers they held as officers of the bishop. 'What I want to see is the poor residents of the parish placed in a good part of the church by the churchwardens on their own authority.'(21) Such a policy today might be dignified by the term 'positive discrimination'.

Other members of the Upper House supplied evidence of this perverse outcome to a measure conceived to draw people in. The Bishop of Lincoln related his vain quest in Paddington for a free seat for himself. All such places were occupied 'but certainly not by the poor.'(22) In Cheltenham(23) things were no better, and in desperation the Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol (24) had defied the rule of the Society which forbade the churchwardens to allocate seats in the free area. He had urged them 'to assign to the poor, from Sunday to Sunday, the sittings they were in the habit of occupying.' Another remedy had been devised to counter the depredations of the Brighton élite. At a church in that resort, St Stephen's, which the Society had helped to erect, one shilling a year was paid by the humbler inhabitants to secure a place at worship.(25) In a manner similar to that of the Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol, the Bishop of Chichester(26) went on to describe how he had tried to persuade the churchwardens in a 'watering-place' to perform

their duty in a church where the affluent residents had 'entirely shut out the poor from the free seats.'(27) However, he had been frustrated by lodging-house keepers. And he believed that wherever there were 'fashionable visitors' the free seats will be 'usurped by the rich, to the exclusion of the poor.'(28) In the opinion of the Bishop of St David's(29) the Society's veto upon appropriation had been imposed for the support of timorous churchwardens. When under pressure from powerful persons to grant them rights in the free area they would be emboldened if they were able to reply that they were simply not allowed to do it. (30) But, in the event, the worst had happened: 'the utter exclusion from those free sittings of the very class of persons for whose benefit they were designed.'(31) More evidence of a like kind came from Charles Sumner(32), Bishop of Winchester, whose complaints of some thirty years before we have discussed.(33) He reiterated the point that the adherence of the Church Building Society to its rule regarding the free area perpetuated the very offence it was framed to remove. Moreover, Sumner disclosed that episcopal representatives on the Society's committee had repeatedly tried to get the rule amended, but to no avail; and even to appropriate for a Sunday at a time, and without a rent, for the benefit of the poor, would be an infringement. Here we see the dilemma which faced the bishops on the committee, and curbed the extent of their rebellion. For the influential laity, Sumner warned, would deem any alteration to the rule to be 'absolute sacrilege' and forthwith withdraw their support. (34) And the loss of such support, we may assume, could jeopardise the very existence of the Society on which the Church of England relied for the supply of new buildings to meet the requirements of a rapidly expanding population. The Bishop of Norwich(35) brought the same news from his diocese. He had wanted

to allow some sittings in a new church to be available at 'a very small nominal rent', but that was not permitted. So, yet again, 'the poor are virtually excluded from the seats intended for them.' (36)

That bishops sought to circumvent, or even infringe, this rule of the Society is a measure of their frustration. Even Wilberforce, whose resistance to the doctrinal sections of the petition we noted, rose again at the end of the debate to announce that he stood with his defiant brethren in this matter. 'I have instructed the churchwardens in my diocese to violate the rules in such cases (sc. where the poor are in danger of being crowded out) and required them to seat the poor.' (37) Doubtless the Bishop of Oxford would have argued that the duty of a churchwarden, as an officer of the ordinary, to assign places outside the enclave of rented pews takes precedence over the rules of an ad hoc organisation. On the other hand the Incorporated Church Building Society was an agency administering the provisions of the first Church Building Act of 1818, and subsequent Acts, awarding its grants on the plain condition that the free area of the church would be unappropriated. Extreme desperation alone may explain Wilberforce's call to his churchwardens to breach a regulation so well-intentioned, but so disastrous in its application.

What happened, one may ask, to the petition which was the reason for the debate? It appears to have been forgotten as the bishops concentrated their indignation upon this one aspect of the situation. However, before passing to next business, the Bishop of St David's expressed his pleasure at 'the statement of my right. rev. brother the Bishop of Oxford respecting his practice.' And he desired the nation to know that the rules of the Society would not override the 'common law of the Church' by which the bishops delegated to the churchwardens the duty of allocating seats in that area

of the building which could be used without charge.(38)

Convocation of York, 1861

The Convocation of York did not effectively revive until 1861, nine years after its sister in the southern Province. That our subject found a place on the agenda of its first session, and was extensively debated, indicates the significance of the issue for the clergy of the north. There is no hint that the choice of subject owed anything to the debate of the Canterbury bishops in the previous year. Neither, indeed, is Hook's achievement at Leeds invoked, nor Bowers' recent initiative at Manchester,<sup>(39)</sup> <sup>no</sup> for/allusion was made to them. Whatever the influence of these events, the clergy spoke primarily from their own experience and observation.

The debate was generated by a motion in the Lower House, not by a petition to the bishops. John Bell, vicar of Matterdale, a village in Cumberland, proposed, 'That it appears to this House that pews in Parish Churches are a great impediment to the working of the parochial system.'<sup>(40)</sup> Obviously the word 'pews' is used here for rented or appropriated seating. The motion plainly did not imply that Convocation had any authority to dispense with them, but only the influence of such persuasion as its members could exercise. The reference to the 'parochial system' as threatened by the institution indicates the pastoral concern of the motion's advocates, and may owe something to the teaching of Hook.<sup>(41)</sup>

Bell offered a critical conjecture as to the origin of such seating. 'It appeared that their (sc.pews) general introduction took place in the reign of King James, when it was ordered that a reading Pew should be made for the Minister. That seemed to have given rise to a sort of jealousy on the part of the more



opulent inhabitants, and they wished to have the privilege conceded to them also.'(42) Nevertheless, Bell understood the anxiety of some of the less intransigent defenders of the system who may possibly have been amenable to argument. Their fear was that 'respectable persons' would be 'inconvenienced and insulted by those who were not so respectable as themselves.' The words jar today. But Bell attempts to meet these forebodings for they were real to their subjects, and need to be noted. The churchwardens, he points out, already have the authority and it was up to them to ensure that a decent order was maintained so that the dreaded scandal may not ensue.(43)

Returning to the substance of the motion, he asks what the result would be if the pew system were ended. Then the Church itself 'would then be practically what it was now only in theory, the poor man's Church.'(44) Thus the implications of Liberation Theology and the ethics of 'option for the Poor' were aired a century before they became the currency of ecclesiastical activism. Bell was right to say that the Church of England was in essence the 'poor man's Church'. By definition a Christian body which claimed to be all-inclusive must embrace the poor - and everyone else as well, of course. That was its foundation charter. But the contingencies of history had set it on a different course. The Church was geared for a society that was overwhelmingly rural, and the Industrial Revolution presented a challenge to which the venerable parochial system could not effectively rise. The pew-system compounded the difficulties by alienating such of the working masses as might yet be inclined to worship with the Establishment.

Charles Cator, rector of Stokesley in Yorkshire, who seconded Bell's motion, related the trials which beset him in the parish when he attempted to thwart the sale of a pew. Not altogether

surprisingly the would-be vendor had ceased to attend church.(45) But Cator had also been notified that if he did not desist from obstructing the will of his adversary then Stokesley would be made 'too hot' for him. However, the rector believed that the freeing of the pews would bring 'thousands of people into the Church' who stayed away because of them.(46) A century was to elapse before the conditions obtained for that belief to be tested, and such a consummation did not occur. But we cannot be confident that even at the time Cator's optimism would have proved justified, and that Hook's triumph at Leeds would be but the beginning of a general awakening. Whether the receding tide of working-class piety could have been checked at this stage by the removal of this single cause of offence, must remain a matter of conjecture. Even among the poor, no less than in sophisticated circles, Matthew Arnold might have caught the 'melancholy, long, withdrawing roar' of his 'Sea of Faith'.(47)

A more cautious approach to the problem was made by Charles Dodgson, Archdeacon of Richmond and chaplain to the Archbishop of York. His brother priests were right, and he too 'felt the immense evil arising out of the system of pews as now existing.'(48) But that, he insisted, was the point: it was the abuse, rather than anything inherently wrong with the system that caused scandal. He gave an instance from his own experience. The churchwardens called him to their parish to register their disquiet about a pew belonging to a lawyer which had to be kept unoccupied although he seldom availed himself of it. This situation, in Dodgson's view, was monstrous indeed. Nevertheless, to correct such malpractice he desired a solution less radical than that which Bell and Cator had in mind. So he would lend his weight to a motion that would condemn malpractices,

but not strike the system root and branch. Moreover, referring to the Church Building Act of 1818, he believed that this statute had done much to regularise the system and bring its ramifications within bounds, and he pleaded the advantage which the rents offered in meeting the stipends of ministers. Finally, and appropriately for an archdeacon, he gave a fresh reason for leaving things as they were: the legal turmoil that abolition would cause. 'We could not get rid of pews altogether without first annulling these provisions made by Acts of Parliament.'(49) As a general proposition, the complexity of the Church of England's connection with the State is one with which we may be able to feel at least some sympathy.

Opposition more overt though still qualified, came from Edward Hornby, the rector of Bury. The letting of what he called 'square boxes' found no favour with him, though he did not specify why. Perhaps he thought that objection to be axiomatic. However, if Bell's aim was to substitute seats 'which were at the mercy of any individual who chose to come into them' for the present dispensation, then he would vote against the motion.(50) Hornby liked the tradition of pews attached to families, but this approval did not extend to profiteering by the individual. And he had demonstrated his revulsion. He had ordered that plates denoting ownership should be removed from the doors of such pews in Bury parish church. Persons who applied to sit in them were directed to the churchwardens for details of the rent: thus the church itself, not individuals, benefited.

The perpetual curate of Hickleton,<sup>John Armitage,</sup> near Doncaster, explained that he could not vote for the motion on grounds which suggest an outlook of despair: the elimination of one evil may be productive of another. For in his eyes the system was 'very bad indeed', but evidently the invasion of the rights of the incumbent and the church-

wardens, that its eradication promised, would result in a situation even worse.(51) We do not learn why he felt as he did. However, clergy until quite recently have cherished, and even jealously guarded, the autonomy of a benefice. Armitage may therefore have construed the freeing of his church as not so much providing space for the less endowed of Christ's flock, but as a dangerous extension of lay control. More speculatively, even the dignity and mystique of the priestly office may be put at risk.

Neither the arguments of Armitage nor those of Dodgson and Hornby mollified the prolocutor (i.e. chairman) of the Convocation, Charles Thorp, the Archdeacon of Durham. The system was so bad as to be beyond any hope of improvement. And it mattered not who gained from the income it generated. 'Nothing could be more monstrous, or dangerous to the Church, than to provide for the stipend of the clergyman by the letting of pews.' (52) Presumably the danger to the Church which Thorp meant was that the livelihood of the parson would be at the mercy of whatever congregation he was able to attract. So though both he and Armitage were prompted by the same wish to uphold the independence of the clergy; each evidently saw the erosion of that independence as a consequence of entirely opposite causes. For Thorp it was the system of rented pews that circumscribed that freedom: for Armitage it was the abolition of the system that would constitute the threat. The fervour of the prolocutor in the pursuit of his objective was boundless. Thus he elevated the subject to 'the most important practical question' that Convocation had to deal with.(53)

When Bell's motion was put, it was carried.(54) This is cause for little surprise in view of the reservations even of defenders of the system, and the influential advocacy of Thorp. The voting figures are not given.

Reading the account of this debate now, one may be tempted to conclude that the pastoral dimension of the issue was of concern only to Bell and Cator, the proposer and seconder of the motion. Dodgson and Hornby are reasonably plain in defending the system because of its financial advantages. And such a concern could be understood as relating at least principally to the welfare of the clergy. But Armitage and Thorp leave no room for doubt as to their main purpose: it is the protection of the clergy, though they seem to differ diametrically as to how that protection may best be secured. However, it would be rash to assume that such a motive entirely explains their contributions to the discussion; and likewise with Dodgson and Hornby. The independence of the parochial clergy may have been, in varying degrees, the criterion by which all of them assessed the matter and adopted their positions. That Armitage and Thorp could not both have been right about the best way of promoting that cause is neither here nor there. Rather, the point is that, at its best, the independence of the clergy may be reckoned as crucial for the effectiveness of their ministry. Such independence, it is contended, provides the freedom to preach the Gospel according to the dictates of conscience though it may distress the powerful, and to embrace without compromise the cause of the weaker brethren.<sup>(55)</sup> Thus the incumbent's 'freehold' as it is called, and which is now obsolescent<sup>(56)</sup>, has been commended. Of course, the privilege presupposes a general loftiness of character and intention, and it may be, and, alas, often has been, abused. Nevertheless, the complexity of the relationship between parson and people, and the difficulty of determining where the interests of the one overlap or threaten the interests of the other, make the identification of motives a cause for abundant caution. So though the

protest of Bell and Cator was expressly provoked by pastoral considerations, it would be unfair to deny to the other participants some share in the same generous impulse. (57)

We have seen that much was made in the debate of the contrast between pews traded for the profit of individuals, who may regard them as no more than an investment, and pews let for the benefit of the Church as a community. We, from our vantage point, may see the former as an indefensible misuse of a sacred building, but the latter as an acceptable expedient. But we have to imagine the perceptions of those humble worshippers who were not allowed access to these privileged compartments whether of the one sort or the other. For them it was standing or squatting or suffering the torments of crude and unwelcoming benches. It is doubtful that for them the distinction between pews for which individuals charged and those for which the churchwardens collected the rent was a material one. This is to assume that communications were such that they were aware of it. The picture presented to them was clear and uncomplicated: only persons who could afford it offered prayer in those awesome enclosures.

#### Convocation of Canterbury, 1867

Six years later, in 1867, the scene moved back to the southern Province where, as we have seen, the pew question had made two abortive appearances in 1859 and 1860. Again the bishops received a critical petition. This time, however, it was the voice of an organisation: the London Free and Open Church Association, which had been founded in the previous year, and the document bore the signature of the chairman of its committee, Lord Wharncliffe. (58) Its spirit was even more militant than that of the York motion, demanding 'the restoration to the parishioners generally

of parish churches now closed to them by private appropriation.'(59) And it proceeds to address the link between the system and the maintenance of the ministry in that it seeks 'the revival of the weekly offering.'(60)

William Emery, the Archdeacon of Ely,(61) presented the petition in the Lower House; there was no discussion and it was sent forthwith to the bishops who debated it the following day, February 14. It can scarcely be said that the cause of the Association was advanced by this its first excursion to the seat of power. Nevertheless, the Bishop of Gloucester, Charles Ellicott(62), who opened the discussion, seems to have explained fairly the objectives of the Association in framing the petition. Principally, he explained, they were the free use of parish churches which implied their restoration to their 'proper use' of those 'virtually closed to the parishioners by private appropriation.' And the weekly offering was to be revived as a 'substitute for pew rates(sic)'.(63)

Why did he himself not belong to that body whose petition he had brought before the House? It was because, in common with other bishops, he feared his membership might lead to the suspicion that he was pre-judging 'cases which might be brought before him as a bishop.'(64) Ellicott went on to quote a perceptive theological assertion from the petition: the parochial system is a 'means of grace', and to exclude parishioners from their churches is to withhold it.(65) In conformity with the parochial system, therefore, the churchwardens should allot seats only for particular services and 'to all classes of parishioners alike.' Rented pews and appropriation on a regular and personal basis would therefore perish. With the broad aims of the petition the bishop seems to have been sympathetic, but its interpretation of the role of the churchwardens,

he confessed, caused him difficulty. The nature of that difficulty was to be clarified in the ensuing debate.

As is often the case, the acknowledgment of the good intentions of the authors of the project proved an ominous augury of what was to come. So it was with Bishop Wilberforce of Oxford, who again was the major influence in the deliberations of the Upper House. 'This petition is aimed to gain so very good an object, and is supported by such exceedingly good men, that I feel quite unwilling to say a single word in derogation of any portion of it.'(66) Notwithstanding, he believed that the measures by which the petitioners hoped to obtain their end were 'objectionable'. Indeed, the Association was wrong even in law when it affirmed that the church 'belongs to all parishioners alike, and that every parishioner has a right to be seated in it.' We saw that the Church Building Society had offended the bishops in 1859 by removing from the churchwardens any function at all in the free area. The Association offended in that it misconceived their function. Contrary to the petition, Wilberforce declared, the duty of the churchwardens was to seat people according to their 'quality': they were not to open the doors and 'let whole masses surge in'. This was evidently the result that the bishop envisaged if they allotted places 'to all classes of parishioners alike'. In terms somewhat reminiscent of the Utilitarians, he insisted that they were so to act as to obtain the most favourable conditions of worship for 'the greatest number having respect to their condition in life.' He even outlined a formula which churchwardens could utter, when indicating a seat, which would on the one hand afford a fair prospect of subsequent availability and at the same time avoid any presumption of a freehold. 'You may sit in such and such a seat until I remove you from it; you may rely on the constant use of it so long as I am in office.'(67) Those who pondered



the two parts of the formula may not have felt entirely reassured.

But Wilberforce ventured upon a rationale of the policy which he recommended. It was devotionally more desirable. Worship was attended with greater concentration and less anxiety if offered from the same assured place. To enter the building only to find 'a good deal of difficulty as to where they will be seated and the like tends to interrupt worship and not to help it on.' People should come into the House of God in 'an orderly and decorous way' and not 'pell-mell and without regulation to take their chance.'(68)

There was, nevertheless, the bishop conceded, a substantial evil to be wrestled with in this matter of accommodation. It lay in the practice of granting in perpetuity to certain persons portions of the building, and in allowing them to erect 'high wooden partitions' to hide them from their neighbours. And the offence was compounded when such places were left unoccupied while worshippers were unable to obtain a seat elsewhere.(69)

Wilberforce ended by standing the case of the reformers on its head. And in terms which recall his speech of 1860, argued that far from enlarging provision for the working classes, the proposal, in effect, would impede its supply. This rested on their sense of inferiority which he called, 'the great modesty of the English poor'. Hampered by this endowment early arrivals at church would permit themselves to be 'thrust out of their seats by better dressed strangers.' Indeed, it already happened in towns like Bath, or Tunbridge Wells, or Cheltenham. For he knew in 'the watering place when the season begins, that well-dressed persons come to occupy seats; the poor...are driven from their seats, perhaps to go to meeting, and, once there, they often do not come back again.'(70) So though he asked the House to hear the petition, members should listen with 'caution and a certain reserve.'

His advice seems hardly to have been needed. The Bishop of Lichfield, John Lonsdale(71), largely echoed the sentiments of Wilberforce. Churchwardens certainly had a duty to find seats for worshippers; but an equal duty to place them 'according to their quality and the number of their family.' But the petitioners 'think, I believe, that the business of the churchwardens is simply to put the comers to church into seats from service to service, or from Sunday to Sunday.' Where the parishioners decided to free the church or where it had been built with such an intention, that was an entirely different matter. 'This has been so in several cases in my diocese, and, I have reason to think with very happy results'. All he deplored was 'an attempt to force the Free Church Movement forward by proceedings which appear to me to be injudicious, not to say illegal.' The bishop's main complaint is clearly directed at the legitimacy of the Association's proposals. But a further remark suggests concern about the effects of a sudden disturbance of that established social order which the Church reflected in the disposition of the parishioners at its services. So those seeking this reform 'defeat their own purpose' not only 'by their misconception of the law' but 'sometimes by want of regard for the habits of the people.'

(72)

The Bishop of Llandaff, Alfred Ollivant(73), had been invited to join the Free and Open Church Association, but had declined to do so. He had some sympathy with its object, but its methods were another matter: they gave him grounds, he explained, for 'a certain reserve and some scruples.'(74) Like Wilberforce, Connop Thirlwall, the Bishop of St David's was a veteran of the 1860 debate. He had yielded to an invitation to join not the Association whose petition was before the House, but a body with similar aims. 'I was induced

to connect myself as patron, vice-president, or something or other, with a general association which calls itself the Free Church Association.'(75) Subsequently he had repented. The organisation was pursuing a legal battle over the ownership of a pew, and the secretary had written to Thirlwall explaining that, as one of its officers, the bishop would be liable for the costs of the court proceedings. So a bishop allowing his name to be used as a token of broad approval may find himself, at some expense, in the forefront of the battle.(76)

The debate was wound up by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Charles Longley. In primatial office the bishop who had been 'most sanguine' (77) about Hook's plan to free the churches of Leeds, has acquired towards our subject that 'caution and a certain reserve' which the Bishop of Oxford had recommended. He too had been approached about joining a campaigning organisation. 'I myself have been repeatedly requested to join a similar organisation, and have as constantly declined on the grounds stated by the Bishop of Lichfield, that I consider their proceedings inconsistent with the law of the Church.' But there was another reason for his response. Like Wilberforce, he saw chaos resulting should the aim of the petition be realised. As the stream of newly enfranchised worshippers surged into the building 'what would become of the aged and infirm?' He had related his anxiety to an officer of the Association and had been told that a chapel could be allocated for such categories.(78)

The session was forthwith prorogued without a vote being taken, and the petition received no more attention.(79)

Two factors, law and method, seem to have been critical for the bishops in their reaction to the aims of those who sought to liberate the pews. The law, it was contended, stipulated that

congregations should be arranged according to the quality of their constituents. As we have seen, Phillimore was upholding this requirement as the law even at the end of the century: the churchwardens should allocate seats 'having regard to the qualities' of the worshipper and giving 'precedence to such as ought to have it.' (80) The method of the Association included encouraging protests where parishioners felt themselves wrongfully unseated; and a readiness to invoke the law against the authorities of the local Church wherever that may be deemed appropriate. So here is the paradox: the campaigners err in the general proposition that the church is available to parishioners without restriction, say the bishops; but where, in specific cases the law has evidently been infringed and the Association would seek redress for the injured party, that is not a method which the bishops wish to encourage. We have seen that the support of Thirlwall of St David's was forfeited as a consequence of such litigation.

But it is not easy to estimate the degree to which the bishops' attitude was determined by these considerations and that to which it was determined by a more fundamental objection to any undermining of the system. Certainly Wilberforce's fear that a free-for-all would ruin the devotional atmosphere of a service is worthy of some credence, though his vision of an avalanche of the lowliest in the land swarming riotously in for Mattins and Evensong according to the Book of Common Prayer, may have seemed overdrawn even at the time.

However, his belief that worshippers from the working classes would be so awestruck by their superiors in the competition for seats that they would surrender what they had won by their early arrival, is a perceptive and reasonable foreboding. Repugnant, indeed

it is to our understanding of Christian fellowship - even a travesty of the Gospel. Nevertheless, the strong, inherited tradition of submission and compliance lends weight to the bishop's argument, as we suggested earlier.(81) Equal opportunity, though a splendid ideal, can be a source of injustice. Those who begin with a disadvantage, in this instance a psychological one, need some adjustment to offset that disadvantage if the freedom to which they are invited is to achieve the aims of its champions. The fate of the 'aged and infirm', which troubled Archbishop Longley, were the race to be wholly to the swift raises similar problems though the drawbacks impeding them would be physical as well as social.

Again, Wilberforce's evident belief that people worship with greater devotion when enabled to do so from a place made familiar by constant use, is one that would find a response in many hearts today. Such a setting, though but material, because of its link with past experiences may aid the spirit in its sense of the divine presence. When the present writer was first ordained he was frequently nonplussed when people - and not always old people - in a large church, which was far from crowded, nevertheless sought out its most remote and inconvenient recesses. Why did they resist clerical exhortations to 'sit up the front', for there was plenty of room. Frequently he learnt that neither shyness nor a desire for solitude was the motivation. Rather it was there that such people sat with their parents when they attended, as a family, many years before. There seems an almost 'numinous' attraction about that special location.

A recollection of Archbishop Lang, as related in his biography, is of how in 1889 he walked over to Cuddesdon from Oxford, and during Evensong heard an unequivocal call to the ministry as he knelt

in the second pew from the pulpit, then on the north side. Always, on his many returns to the village he would sit in that place where 'his perplexities were answered.'(82)

We cannot, of course, assess whether reasons of a devotional character were decisive for the bishops of 1867. These could have been but reserve arguments to support a case for retaining a system which they favoured for social reasons, but which they shrank from defending in such terms. It may be significant that Bishop Wilberforce, in asserting the precedence to be given to the 'quality', claims only to be explaining the law, not declaring his own judgment in the matter. He does not venture upon a theology of social class.(83) Furthermore, whatever the bishops felt in their inmost selves, they would know that should they give the petition their endorsement they would be challenging the assumptions of the generality of churchpeople who probably understood such divisions as part of the divine dispensation. Indeed, they had all been taught that the fulfilment of the second Great Commandment involved the obligation, 'To order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters.'(84) Given such a climate in the Church of England, the caution of its leaders is neither entirely surprising, nor culpable.

## Notes on Collective Disquiet

(1) Cf. Ch. I, The Problem Arises, p.7 f.

(2) Cf. Ch. II Episcopal Concern; Ch. III Priestly Initiatives, p.60, p.70, p.91(101); Ch. IV External Pressures p.107(18).

(3) Evidently an ad hoc group, not acting for any organisation.

(4) John Jackson. Bishop of Lincoln 1853-1868; of London 1868-1885.

(5) Chronicle of the Convocation of Canterbury 1859-1860. p.96

(6) Ibid. p.96.

(7) Ibid. p.96.

(8) Cf. Ch. I, The Problem Arises, p.18f.

(9) Chronicle p.96.

(10) Despite the abortive debate, in retrospect the Free Church movement apparently regarded 1859 as something of an annus mirabilis. In February, St Philip's, Clerkenwell became the first (already existing) church in London actually to abandon the pew system. At its re-opening, the Dean of Ely, Harvey Goodwin, called the system, 'one of the greatest hindrances to the diffusion of the Gospel'. At the same event, Spencer Walpole, the Home Secretary in the Derby-Disraeli government, declared that, 'Of all the plans ever yet devised pews are the most objectionable. If an established Church means anything, in every town in every parish in every hamlet, it ought to be open and free to all.' A meeting was called in London to forward the objectives in the capital of the organisation that had been founded in Manchester. A letter appeared in the Guardian exhorting churchwardens 'to seat all the parishioners not just some'. Though serving the same principle, a contrary view of the function of these officers came from Glastonbury where there had been a dispute over appropriation. The Bishop of Bath and Wells, Lord Auckland, wrote to the church there, 'All the seats should be quite free; people as they come to church should be allowed to sit where they like; the best maxim to be adopted is "first come, first served". And everything in this respect had better be left to the good sense and decorum of the congregation generally, without any interference on the part of the churchwardens.' The Shrewsbury Chronicle applauded the Church of England for repelling enemies without, but the people who come to worship have been 'wrongfully deprived and despoiled of their rightful inheritance.' 'It is a perfect farce, declared the Nottingham Journal, 'boasting of it being a country of open Bibles, when it is not a country of open churches' and this lack of free churches 'caused heathenism to grow up and exist to the alarming extent it now does in our large towns.' At a national level John Bull lambasted churchmen who 'tamely and mischievously acquiesce in the appropriation of pews for a pecuniary consideration from a feeling that they have no remedy'. (This suggests that some pewholders are uneasy about what they are doing, but feel that there is no alternative). Free and Open Church Chronology London 1892. p.32ff.

(11) Samuel Wilberforce, third son of William Wilberforce. Bishop of Oxford 1845-1869, of Winchester from 1869 until his death in 1873. A bishop distinguished for his extraordinary pastoral and administrative energy.

(12) Chronicle p.141f.

(13) Ibid. p.142.

(14) Ibid. p.142.

(15) Ibid. p.142. Evidently an allusion to I Corinthians 14.33 where St Paul is dealing with the confusion caused by the exercise of 'tongues'.

(16) Ibid. p.142.

(17) Ibid. p.142.

(18) Ibid. p.142. St Luke's, Berwick Street was established in 1846 in the parish of St James's, Piccadilly to serve the lower orders in that area. At least the rich were present at Berwick Street to exclude the poor. Often this was done by a kind of remote control. Bishop Howley observed the phenomenon as early as 1818. (Ch. II, Episcopal Concern, p.29). At the other end of London it hampered the ministry of the great slum priest, Bryan King, at St George-in-the-East. 'His work with the poor of the parish, that is with the greater portion of his parishioners, was hindered both by years of neglect on the part of his predecessor, and by the blatant fact that St George's made no pretence of being a poor man's church. A mere ninety of its twelve hundred seats were unappropriated, while many of those to whom the rest belonged no longer lived in the parish or attended the parish church.' Charles Lowder and the Ritualist Movement L.E. Ellsworth. Darton Longman and Todd 1982. p.10.

(19) Chronicle p.142. Founded in 1818, the Society promoted the first Church Building Act of that year, and administered the funds it produced and other money subsequently raised. It is still in existence and, 'from its office in Fulham Palace, depends on gifts which it distributes as interest free loans for church building.

(20) This notion of the pressure that the past exerts upon the individual so that he becomes uncomfortable when his historic place in society, with whatever good intentions, is denied to him, received a forthright statement in Jackson's Primary Charge as Bishop of London in 1871. He argued that one could not make a town church free for working people for all 'old associations, all their prejudices are against it - it never was their church and it never will be. You must supply them with their own place of worship, be it school-room or, much better, church or chapel.' The first existing church to be made free in London was St Philip's, Clerkenwell, in 1859. The vicar, Edward Stuart, made a spirited retort to his bishop's theory and declared that 'if the Church of England is not to continue for ever the church of the rich, a religion for dowagers and dignitaries, who find religion a very convenient thing for keeping their



children and servants in order....then that devilish invention of Mammon, the pew system which provides for the rich and drives out the poor, must be swept away; from among us.' Free and Open Church Chronology London 1892. p.44.

(21)Chronicle p.142. Cf. Bishop Frederick Temple's remark, Ch.VII, Rebuff in the Lords p.203(35).

(22)Ibid. p.143.

(23)The pew system and the problem of free sittings in the town is frequently considered in Cheltenham's Churches and Chapels A.D. 773-1883 Steven T. Blake. Cheltenham Borough Council 1979.

(24)Charles Baring. Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol 1856-1861, of Durham 1861-1879. Diocese divided again in 1897.

(25)Chronicle p.143f.

(26)Ashworth Gilbert. Principal of BNC, Oxford 1822, Bishop of Chichester 1842-1870.

(27)Gilbert fully appreciated the theological implications of the system as is clear from a letter to the vicar of Pulborough written a year before on April 21, 1859. He tells the incumbent that 'the sittings in the church should be free and unappropriated is in entire accordance with the law of the Church of the land' and 'above all is in accordance with the law of the Gospel, which declares that all must be treated alike in God's house at public worship.' But even more than equal treatment, 'A congregation should represent the brotherhood we have with each other in Christ.' Free and Open Church Chronology p.33. It is interesting that in the debate he did not express this absolute denunciation, but confined himself to details of abuse.

(28)Chronicle p.144.

(29)Connop Thirlwall. Bishop of St David's 1840-1874. Chadwick remarks that in 1848 he was mentioned as a possible successor to Howley at Canterbury, and had by 'far the ablest academic mind on the bench'. Op.cit. Pt.I, p.247.

(30)Churchwardens deserve some sympathy. Those whose requests or demands for appropriated seats they received may be their superiors. And in a close-knit community a refusal may have unfortunate consequences for them.

(31)Chronicle p.144f.

(32)Sumner's brother, John, Archbishop of Canterbury and President of Convocation, did not contribute to the debate. But cf. Ch. IV, External Pressures p.107(18).

(33)Cf. Ch. II, Episcopal Concern, p.31ff.

(34)Chronicle p.145.

(35)John Pelham. Held the see for 36 years, 1857-1893.

- (36)Chronicle p.145.
- (37)Ibid. p.145.
- (38)Ibid. p.146.
- (39)Cf. Ch. VI, Frontal Attacks p.160f.
- (40)Chronicle of the Convocation of York 1861 p.122.
- (41)Cf. Ch. III, Priestly Initiatives p.61.
- (42)Chronicle p.116. Cf. Ch. III, Priestly Initiatives p.51 and p.82 (10) To the Camdenians also pride was a cause of the system, and its beginnings lay in the 17th century.
- (43)Ibid. p.116.
- (44)Cf. note (20) above, words of Edward Stuart; and Ch. VI, Frontal Attacks, the claim of Earl Nelson, the 'Church of England is specially the church of the working man.' p.176.
- (45)Op.cit. p.117.
- (46)Ibid. p.118.
- (47)Dover Beach Matthew Arnold (1822-1888).
- (48)Chronicle p.118.
- (49)Ibid. p.119. Dodgson may have had in mind the intricate task which confronted Hook at Leeds.
- (50)Ibid. p.119.
- (51)Ibid. p.120. This possibility, of course, is inherent in any reform. In recent Church history, for example, against the argument that the Cranmerian cadences had become meaningless for the majority of English-speaking people was set the fear that a new prayer book would forfeit a sense of the transcendence and otherness of God. This debate continues at least in the columns of religious periodicals. Various objections were made to the translation of the Bible into the vernacular. After 400 years the controversy seems to have subsided to be replaced by differences about modern versions.
- (52)Ibid. p.120.
- (53)Ibid. p.121. Seeing the infamy that its opponents everywhere heaped upon the system, Dodgson's claim is not implausible.
- (54)Ibid. p.121.
- (55)Cf. Ch. III, Priestly Initiatives, p.82 (2).
- (56) Since 1976 all clergy, other than those instituted to livings before that year, must retire when they reach the age of 70.
- (57)Cf. Ch. IV, External Influences p.103. There is evidently no

relation between the sides which the participating clergy took in the debate and the value of their benefices or other appointments. Bell's annual income was £120 while Cator, his seconder, received £1400. Of the opponents Hornby received £2240 while Armitage managed with £450, and Dodgson, from the two offices he held earned a total of £1100. Crockford 1861.

(58) Lord Wharncliffe (1805-1881). Solicitor General, 1856-1857, in Palmerston's administration.

(59) Chronicle of the Convocation of Canterbury 1867 p.714.

(60) The word 'revival' is curious. In its official chronicle, the Association places responsibility for the lapse on the Puritans. 'The decline of the Weekly Offering crept in during that long night of the Church's slumber, which succeeded to the throes and pangs of persecution in the 17th century. The Rebellion suspended it... To give towards promoting better the glory of God or the good of the brethren is not natural to man; the bad part of his nature rises in rebellion against the demand.' This is because of faithlessness. However, the 'Weekly Offering will become universal, at least as to our congregations availing themselves of it, in proportion as vital religion becomes once more universal.' The Association in its Free and Open Church Chronology is here quoting from The Weekly Offertory, its Obligations, Uses, and Results 2nd Ed. 1843. William Palin.

(61) To Emery, who was Archdeacon of Ely from 1864 until 1907, the Church Congress, which as we shall see often debated the pew system, owes its foundation. The year before the debate he had raised the issue in his Primary Charge. 'The Common Law will be best observed by leaving parishioners to seat themselves from Sunday to Sunday according to their immediate requirements, the churchwardens then only exercising the powers inherent in their office when any inconvenience or impropriety is to be remedied.' Charge to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of Ely William Emery 1866. This advice approximates to that given by the Bishop of Bath and Wells in 1859. (10) above.

(62) Charles John Ellicott (1819-1905). Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol 1863-1897, and after the re-division, of Gloucester until his death in 1905. A considerable scholar. Before his consecration he had been professor of divinity at King's College, London. He was chairman of the British New Testament Revision Company.

(63) Chronicle p.762.

(64) Ibid. p.762. As the disposition of worshippers in church was the prerogative ultimately of the bishop whose agents the churchwardens were at parish level, this does not seem unreasonable caution. Disputes arising from the Association's campaign may eventually have to be settled by the bishop, in which case his membership may arouse doubts as to his impartiality.

(65) Ibid. p.762. Cf. note (41) above.

(66) Ibid. p.762.

(67) Ibid. p.762. The tenure of a churchwarden was, and is, a year though, of course, he may be repeatedly re-elected by the Vestry Meeting.

(68)Ibid. p.763.

(69)Ibid. p.763.

(70)Ibid. p.763. This was not a new phenomenon. 'In May, 1775, for instance, some of the "principal inhabitants" of Cheltenham petitioned the Bishop for a faculty to build a gallery of fourteen pews in the north aisle (of St Mary's) "otherwise our families and lodgers in the season cannot be accommodated with the convenience of hearing the Word of God there".' Blake op.cit. p. 2.

(71)John Lonsdale, Bishop of Lichfield 1843-1867.

(72)Chronicle p.763.

(73)Bishop of Llandaff 1849-1882.

(74)Chronicle p.764.

(75)Ibid. p.764.

(76)Thirlwall's decision to join a body seeking the freedom of the churches sorts well with his liberal outlook. He supported the Maynooth grant, and the removal of the civil disabilities of Jews, and permitted Bishop Colenso to preach in his diocese. Cf. note (29) above, and (79) below.

(77)Cf. Ch. III, Priestly Initiatives, p.61.

(78)Chronicle p.765.

(79)In 1867 the first Lambeth Conference was held and **there was** exhaustive debate in preparation for it as well as on the Colenso issue which was a significant cause of the summoning of the Conference. With hindsight, this may not have been the most felicitous year for the Free Church Association to bring forward its petition.

(80)Cf. Ch. I, The Problem Arises, p.20.

(81)Cf. pp.111,124; and note (20) above.

(82)Cosmo Gordon Lang J.G. Lockhart. Hodder 1948. pp.64 and 226.

(83)Earlier in his life he did attempt such a theology. Cf. Appendix to this chapter.

(84)The Book of Common Prayer answer in The Catechism to the question, What is my duty towards my Neighbour?

## Appendix to Collective Disquiet

### Bishop Wilberforce's Agony

The position of Samuel Wilberforce in the debate of 1867 broadly reflects that of his Charge, as Archdeacon of Surrey, some twenty five years before. However, Newsome shows that between 1842 and 1843 his views did undergo a substantial change.(1) In the former year 'he echoed Manning's reproach on the disfigurement of churches by the building of large, luxurious pews and expressed his indignation at the shocking repudiation of the Christian spirit implicit in the claim to exercise private rights and special privileges within the house of God.(2) The first objection, regarding disfigurement, appears to have remained valid for him even in the debate; but the second, a spiritual or social objection, is, in effect, withdrawn.

Thus in his charge for 1843 he judges pews which 'are nothing more than fixed or settled seats, duly apportioned to habitual worshippers or their families' to be 'beneficial', even if not always necessary. Nevertheless, he ventured to propound a theological basis for the continuing separation of the classes even though situated in furniture of similar quality. In doing so Wilberforce moves rapidly from the observation, 'Diversities of rank and station do exist among us' to the conclusion that 'they are evidently part of God's appointment for maintaining quick and real the mutual charity of all.' These differences, however, are not absolute but 'transient and external; and under them there is in Him a true spiritual equality amongst all the members of Christ's body mystical.' What he meant by 'spiritual equality' we can only surmise: certainly he implies that this world's social distinctions are not to be perpetuated in

the world to come. They are but an expedient, though divinely ordered, by which life in community here is made possible. As he introduces the mystical body of Christ into his argument we are prompted to look to St Paul for a clue.

The apostle's analogy of the Church with a human body teaches that, though the parts are different, the function of each is necessary, and therefore to be equally esteemed as 'all of us, united with Christ, form one body, serving individually as limbs and organs to one another.'<sup>(3)</sup> And to an early Christian community in which self-importance and private ambition threatened disruption, he is more detailed and searching in his exposition of the analogy. 'A body is not a single organ, but many....If one organ suffers, they all suffer together. If one flourishes, they all rejoice together. Now you are Christ's body, and each of you a limb or organ of it.'<sup>(4)</sup> Paul is attempting to win his readers to the view that diversity can exist without the corollary that one is above or below another. <sup>(5)</sup> Some such vision evidently lay behind the justification which Wilberforce sought for maintaining the status quo. However, there is a vital difference: St Paul was not commending a practice that might seem to ridicule his doctrine.

We may agree with Wilberforce that 'spiritual equality', though not visible, may exist, given the model of the mystical body. But he goes further and finds a parallel to this ideal in the common scene of human activity and relationships. For he continues, 'But as the conditions of daily life may co-exist with the true equality which lies beneath them, so in the house of God may this equality combine with the convenient separation of worshippers of different stations.' In this context it is hard to

be certain of what he means by 'true equality'. Perhaps he is thinking of shared humanity: people, as is often said, are all human by definition whatever their material or intellectual endowments. On the other hand, does he mean equality before the law which, to whatever extent actual circumstances made mockery of it, at least existed in theory? The modern democratic symbol of equality, one man one vote, was yet to be achieved.(6)

We are left uncertain, then, as to exactly what the Archdeacon of Surrey meant; though some elucidation follows by contrast. 'To insist on intermixing all, as necessary to it (sc.'true equality') is to aim at an artificial equality which we do not feel, and which would not be maintained, by its most strenuous advocates, in dress and manners.' Wilberforce's thesis is that 'true equality' remains notwithstanding the physical division of the classes in church. To abolish that division when at worship would be to pretend that those social gradations acknowledged by the world were unreal whereas, though ephemeral and superficial, they were present facts. There is a resonance here with some of Mann's correspondents of a few years later.(7) And this resonance increases when Wilberforce goes on to contend that not to recognise these distinctions is insincerity and pretence for we are professing something 'which we do not feel', and do not practise anywhere else. Indeed, he seems to think that such a demonstration in church is worse than it would be in another setting. Thus he continues, 'To attempt it in this single instance would only be to bring affectation into the house and worship of the Lord.'

But is 'this single instance' in the same class as the other instances he gives or, indeed, others that he might have

given? This particular assembly of humanity presupposes an equality: in church people are joint suitors for divine grace, who have together 'erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep'.(8) And the priest at the commencement of the service has addressed the congregation without distinction as, 'Dearly beloved brethren' and invited them to accompany him to 'the throne of the heavenly grace'.(9) However, we see elsewhere that at other points the Anglican liturgy tended to affirm and consolidate the hierarchical structure.(10) Moreover, given that worship was perceived, at least by some of the congregation, as much a social as a devotional occasion then we may excuse Wilberforce for appearing to regard it as just one among many corporate activities in which people engaged. On the other hand it could be maintained that much of what is said in worship may seem to be pretence or affectation. How many are truly persuaded that 'there is no health in us'(11), or felt of their sins that 'the burden of them is intolerable'(12), or accepted as fully deserved the description 'miserable sinners'?(13) But the words of ritual often beckon to what should be rather than state what is. Thus one could respond to Wilberforce that the gathering together in church of those from every station of life without distinction may be a symbolic recognition of the equal worth of every individual and anticipates a condition that may only be realised in the Kingdom of Heaven.

In his speech to Convocation of 1867, the bishop appears to have abandoned the high theological ground which he occupied a quarter of a century before. This invites speculation as to the reason for this withdrawal. Did the argument which he had then deployed with such eloquence no longer convince him? Or did he possibly feel that his episcopal audience was more likely to be persuaded by a less elevated presentation of the case for holding on to



the status quo? From the Church as the Body of Christ with its members equal despite discrimination within its buildings, he had moved, as we have seen, to theories about the feelings of working-class people, to an assessment of the law, and the advantages for good order of each worshipper knowing where to find his place.

In a later utterance, five years after the archidiaconal Charge which we have been considering, a new element intrudes to consolidate his opposition. At his primary Visitation of the Diocese of Oxford in October 1848 his Charge shows him concerned with the estrangement of the 'labouring population' from the Established Church. And they are displaying 'that spirit of rebellious discontent among yourselves, with which so many of you are at this time sadly and wearily striving.'(14) He evidently speaks at a time of increasing awareness in his diocese of the contrasting lots of mankind. And the fortunate ones then included the clergy who may meet their working-class parishioners only in circumstances where those parishioners 'have the worst share' and where they 'see only the difference between you and themselves'.

In the face of such division, to meet with the clergy in church offers the best hope of reconciliation. 'There the highest and the lowest of the parish gather altogether as equals in the sight of God.' The situations in which the poor felt rejected and humiliated now shrink into their true perspectives for they discern 'that in the greatest matter they have as good a share as you.' And 'acts of kindness', previously scorned because of suspicion and defensiveness, will now be acceptable 'from those with whom they have just joined in prayer, or knelt down at the holy table.' He goes on to imply that the resentment of a number has found an outlet

in worshipping elsewhere, or even nowhere at all, and alights somewhat abruptly upon a palliative which will at least 'allow no increase of the evil.' He first reminds the clergy that a pew may not be erected without the authority of the bishop. Apparently churchwardens have imagined that during their year of office they may build or appropriate a pew for themselves. Then, he wants the clergy, the following Sunday, to look round their churches. They may notice 'unsightly pens(sic) which, whilst they minister, not to the convenience, but to the unseemly slumbers or the vain display, of a few, thrust the poor into corners where they cannot see or hear or worship aright'.(15) The duty of the incumbent is plain. It is 'to clear away these encroachments, and to give back, by decently seating the whole church, so as to give to all their share, their best rights to God's heritage.' Nor has Wilberforce overlooked the problem of how all this is to be paid for. 'A small rate will often effect this purpose.'

From the above we might be excused for suspecting that the bishop is advocating an entirely democratic disposition of the congregation. However, he has prefaced his remarks with a statement that leaves no doubt that this was not his intention. 'It is not that the orderly distinction of men of various ranks and manners need be violated within our churches; on the contrary, I believe that such seemly arrangement promotes the comfort of all.'

A recent biographer of Wilberforce, Standish Meacham, has illustrated this acceptance of the class structure as well as his concept of the Church as the one unifying power, with a quotation from a letter to Hook of Leeds. Hook has suggested that the Church could best serve the poor by divesting itself of its wealth. The bishop replies, 'There has always been, I suppose, poverty; always

want; yet God has ordained differences of rank, and intended his Church to pervade all ranks, as she does with us.' In Meacham's words, Wilberforce believed 'that though ranks should not remain divided men should remain in ranks' and this conviction, he continues, led him to be 'less certain than many of his episcopal brethren of the desirability or indeed the efficacy of a pewless or a completely unappropriated church. The ideal was a church in which there was a place for the rich and a place for the poor.'(16) A parochial focus for this view was provided by an appeal in 1862 for the restoration of St Aldate's, Oxford in which only 35 of its 457 seats were free. As Bishop of Oxford, Wilberforce was associated with the appeal but sought only seats which would enable the poor to participate in the service but preserve their separation.(17) There seems, therefore, only one answer to his biographer's bleak question, 'To how many, however, did Wilberforce's insistence that the Church of England was the poor man's Church ring flat suggesting rather that it was the church for the poor man who was willing to stay in his place?'(18)

The task that fell to Wilberforce, then, is one with which the Church of England is not entirely unfamiliar: to walk an ecclesiastical tight-rope. And though he did it with great style and much acumen, we are left a little perplexed. Given that rich and poor are not equal in the world, how can one propose their equality 'in the sight of God', and their having 'as good a share as you' in 'the greatest matter' as a nostrum for social conflict, and at the same time affirm that 'the orderly distinction' is to remain a feature of the parish at prayer? Perhaps we can detect here the ingredients of a dilemma which perpetually harassed the Victorian episcopate: how to welcome the multitude and yet avoid alienating

those on whose material support not only the existence of the parish church, but the good works done in its name depended.(19) However, beneath this dilemma lay a deep unresolved tension: the graduated order of society in which the bishops, as members of the nobility, if not by birth then by promotion, enjoyed an assured place, and the implications of the Gospel of a Carpenter, which it was their vocation as ministers of the Word to preach.(20)

Notes to Bishop Wilberforce's Agony

- (1) The Parting of Friends David Newsome. Murray 1966 p.272.  
Cf. Life of Cardinal Manning Edmund Purcell. MacMillan 1896 p.177f.
- (2) Ibid. p.272 from Wilberforce's Charge at the Ordinary Visitation of the Archdeaconry of Surrey 1842.
- (3) Romans 12.5.
- (4) I Corinthians 12.14,26,27.
- (5) 'Parity of esteem' was an expression used of the ideal of the architects of the 1944 Butler Education Act in respect of grammar, technical, and modern schools. It is not dissimilar to Paul's teaching of varied gifts as complementary rather than hierarchical.
- (6) Though at the time the Chartists were campaigning for reforms of which universal suffrage was one.
- (7) Cf. Ch. IV, External Pressures p.96f.
- (8) From the General Confession of Morning and Evening Prayer in the Book of Common Prayer.
- (9) From the Bidding Prayer of above services.
- (10) Cf. Ch. VI ,Frontal Attacks, pp.152,183(31).
- (11) From the General Confession.
- (12) From the Confession at Holy Communion.
- (13) From the first suffrage of the Litany.
- (14) Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Oxford Samuel Wilberforce Rivington 1848. pp.58-60. In this year there were popular risings throughout Europe, and in London the third and last Petition of the Chartists was presented though their attempt to reach the Palace of Westminster was foiled.
- (15) Cf. Hook's definition of the pew system. Ch. III, Priestly Initiatives p.58f.
- (16) Lord Bishop: the Life of Samuel Wilberforce Standish Meacham. Harvard University Press 1970. Pt.II Ch.4. p.130.
- (17) Ibid. p.131f.
- (18) Ibid. p.133.
- (19) Inglis op.cit. p.302f shows how this need to retain the goodwill of the wealthy members of their flocks led some clergy to adopt an ambiguous attitude towards the formation of an Agricultural Labourers' Union. The dilemma still arises in the life of the Church. An outspoken bishop may find that part of the fall-out from his remarks is the cancellation of covenants even in parishes that can ill-afford to lose them as well as in those amply endowed.

The present writer knows of a diocese where its bishop's comments on fox-hunting had such consequences for the income of some small and remote churches.

(20) Richard Soloway argues that in this Charge of 1848, which he believes was not uninfluenced by the Chartist disturbances of that year, Wilberforce advances to, and then withdraws from, the precipice urgently explaining that he did not intend that all classes should sit together. 'All he meant was that the poor be allowed to use empty pews, and be provided sittings out of the dark corners of the church.' He thinks this is characteristic of the bishop. 'Wilberforce spent a great deal of time talking himself in and out of positions before thinking through the implications of what he was saying.' This judgment does not seem entirely applicable to the case in point. Evidently in the course of composing his Charge, the implications of his reasoning were revealed to his mind, hence the somewhat temperate conclusion. The impatient radical may see no further than the immediate rightness of an action, but the cautious reformer may perceive the ultimate in what he is doing. Both are agents of change, and the characteristics of both perhaps combined in Wilberforce to an unusual degree. Indeed, as Soloway goes on to remark, 'The Bishop of Oxford was nevertheless not untypical in the ambivalence he felt about Church policies.' The tension between knowing what should be done and the supposed consequences of its abrupt implementation is a persistent feature of the subject we are engaged with. However, one does not have to be a hostile student of Wilberforce's many reflections on our subject to discern, even there, some evidence for the award of the sobriquet, 'Soapy Sam', by which this industrious and reforming pastor parvorum has been unkindly immortalised. (Quotations from Prelates and People Richard Soloway, p.277).

A recent study of the Church in Chester during the Tudor-Stuart period touches on the subject of pews and social class. Contrary to Bishop Wilberforce's 'artificial equality' it is argued that, at that time, society's understanding of its pyramidal structure was deliberately fostered by the disposition of families according to the pew plans which the writer has examined. Moreover, he suggests that churchwardens performed a subtle, democratic function when they allocated seats. Having shown how families were located in church he continues, 'This strengthens the inference that placement in church was an order consciously devised to project an artificially conceived social image corresponding to the local community's particular conception of status, just as the wardens' powers to regulate position suggests the importance attributed to communal assent before the marks of status could be displayed.' Parish, Church and People Susan Wright (ed.) essay on Loyalty and Identity in Chester Parishes 1540-1640 Nick Alldridge p.94ff. Hutchinson 1988.

VI  
FRONTAL ATTACKS

It was Magee who spoke of 'pewdom' as if it were a citadel to be assaulted.(1) What we have seen so far is a series of sorties against this great redoubt of social privilege. Thus some bishops are scathing in their Charges, but they lack the power to eradicate what they abhor. Individual priests initiate heroic reforms within their parishes and, through the Cambridge Camden Society, even influence opinion further afield. The Census yields an unlooked-for criticism, and the concern of the nobility for working-class piety produces a Select Committee which discreetly wishes the system dead. But when the Convocations awake after their long, enforced slumber, the northern assembly alone releases a thunderbolt. Meanwhile, the energies even of sympathetic bishops in the south are diverted to rebuke first a body that at least should be a source of support, and then one that should be a positive ally in the struggle.

The previous chapter was wholly concerned with the voice of protest in the 1860's. The present chapter begins in that decade, but moves towards the end of the century reviewing three diverse onslaughts upon the system from outside the Church's formal structures. The first onslaught comes from a solitary lecturer, the second from that society(2) formed to organise the forces of dissent, and the third from the discussion of the subject in a new, unofficial but widely representative forum of the Church of England. We shall note a firm connection, and even co-operation, between the second and third categories.

Broadside from Oxford

In the same year, 1861, in which the Convocation of York passed its critical resolution, the subject was ventilated in an unexpected setting. The Archdeacon of Coventry, John Sandford,(3)

lambasted the system in his Bampton Lectures.(4) His comments appear in Lectures 3 and 7, but of equal interest to any student of our subject are the notes he appended in the following year when his work was published.

Sandford called his third lecture, Hindrances of the Church, and we are prepared somewhat for what he has to say by the text with which he prefaces it. 'Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock? What wilt thou say when he shall punish thee?'(5) Clearly the flock is the English nation in its mission to which the Church of England is failing. Its privileges and opportunities as the Established Church are set beside the grim fact that 'Six millions in England are calculated never to enter a place of worship or make any profession of religion. The National Church has little hold on the operative classes.'

(6)

One cause of such a deficiency is a problem with which the Church continues to wrestle in our own day: the unbalanced distribution of the clergy in the parishes. 'But there is another feature of the case to be considered, but which I cannot pass even now without remark. I mean the scanty and miserable accommodation for the poorer classes in many of our churches. To me this has seemed one of the greatest blots on our Christianity.'(7) Some surprise is permissible, perhaps, at the introduction of such a 'parochial' topic into a discourse which was 'to confirm and establish the Christian Faith, and to confute all heretics and schismatics'.(8) But is not the system, Sandford may have replied, a hindrance to the faith of that flock which had been entrusted to the Church, and therefore an entirely legitimate development of the theme that Bampton had ordered?(9)



Expanding his strictures, he argues that the pew system breaches law both human and divine. Where the Church's legal experts walk delicately, the Archdeacon of Coventry moves with confidence for 'it is an open violation of the law of the land'.(10) In various contexts he repeats this assertion in both of the lectures with which we are concerned. Notably in Lecture 7 he insists, 'The law of the land declares that our parish churches are inalienable and common; that they are for the use freely, and in common, of all the people. It imposes rates and enforces them upon this distinct understanding.'(11) This latter argument would, of course, lose its force seven years on when Gladstone's Bill became law making such Church Rates as survived a matter for voluntary local agreement.(12) But it was entirely relevant at the time and is only adduced as further support for the freedom for which he is pleading. In a similar vein, when denouncing the practice by individuals of treating pews as if they rightfully owned them, he is firm that they are dealing with 'what is legally public property' to which parishioners have 'inalienable rights as citizens.'(13) These and other statements show Sandford's total conviction that the system was unlawful in itself, whether rates were paid or not.

Sandford was not the first critic to observe the special incongruity of the pew system when imposed in the Church of the nation.(14) In consequence an important objection is that 'it militates against our claim to be a National Church.' Thus, in a passage in Lecture 7, having described the baleful consequences of the practice in terms of 'the jealousies, and the feuds, and the litigations, and the deceptions to which it leads' he argues that these have 'tended more than anything else to secularise and denationalise the Church.'(15) The poor, already mortified by their

exclusion, or their confinement to the least desirable accommodation, witness also the acrimony of their superiors as they battle for possession or profit. When a privileged minority so regard the buildings as arenas for their private ambitions and rivalries, how can the disadvantaged majority discern the Church as part of a shared heritage? We may take it that Sandford knew that in many Free Church buildings pew rents flourished.(16) But Nonconformity made no claim to that vast ecclesiastical dominion of the Establishment which, through its territorial organisation, made every acre of the land at least nominally the scene of its ministrations. So surely Sandford is justified in charging that, 'To perpetuate this abuse on any plea, is to neutralise our parochial system, and to abrogate our claim to be a National Church'.(17)

On the other hand it is possible to draw a different conclusion from the notion of a national church. Will not the very inclusiveness of its character mean that the differences of the community will be reproduced in the place where its members worship? You could conceivably have equality in, for example, a Ragged Church or a Labour Church(18) or in a church which professed to edify only the higher echelons of society. But will not an institution that aspired to the allegiance of everyone mirror the diversity which it professes to comprehend? Though he did not stress the national factor, this reproduction of the social pyramid was a phenomenon in which Bishop Wilberforce at least acquiesced. Sandford would doubtless have ridiculed such an argument. For him the veto of Scripture is sufficient. Distinctions in a place of worship 'are forbidden by the Word of God'.(19) And he aptly finds support from the Report of the Select Committee of the House of Lords which we have considered(20). It also implicitly mobilised Scripture when

it pleaded for 'some plan' to be devised 'by which every church in the land may be made, what it ought to be, a common sanctuary in which the rich and poor meet together'.(21) Sandford caps the biblical reference in his comment on the quotation. 'On this point there ought to be no difference among religious men. The Word of God proclaims that if in our assemblies we say "Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou here, or sit here under my footstool, Are ye not...become judges of evil thoughts?" '(22)

Sandford appears to make an original point when he infers that the proximity of rich and poor in church uniquely emphasises for the latter, the reality of their destitution. They are, he declares, 'most forcibly reminded of their poverty just where the distinctions of this earth should cease'.(23) It is a grave charge. The church was the one place where the various strata of society regularly gathered under the same roof. And consequently there was a special opportunity for comparison. The worldly emblems of social difference were compounded by the distinctiveness of accommodation. And all this in the very place where such contrasts should vanish. His message, surely, is that the church should be the setting where the values of the world yield to those of the Kingdom of Heaven: a foretaste of a divine society where worth rests on criteria other than wealth or lineage or position or even usefulness. One almost expects the archdeacon to quote that text so often cited today, 'There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female; for you are all one person in Christ Jesus.'(24) An impartial allocation of seats in a parish church may seem a very small step in the journey to such a consummation. But at least, within its

limits, it does not mock or deny the apostle's vision.

Unlike the bishops in 1860,(25) Sandford denounces appropriation though in the same cause of seating the poor; for he does not regard the churchwardens as their protectors. 'Seats marked "free" are in some instances as much dealt with as private property as pews with doors paying rent.' He tells of an enquiry to a churchwarden by an archdeacon about a church one third of the sittings in which were reserved, by law, for the poor. On being asked to point them out, the churchwarden replied, 'I have one free sitting to one pew.' This consisted of a little bracket. 'But', the churchwarden explained, 'the poor never come here; it serves me to put my hat upon.'(26) He returns to this theme with even more vigour in Lecture 7. The bishops, as we saw, were aware of seats designated for the poor being confiscated by the wealthy.(27) Sandford takes us further back and does not forbear to use the word 'imposture' of the process through which the money for that free accommodation was obtained. So, in the appeal for funds, 'the spiritual destitution of the neighbourhood is set forth, and subscriptions raised for the purpose of Church extension; and grants are secured from charitable societies on the express condition that ample accommodation is provided for the poor; and the seats so obtained are described as free and unappropriated for ever, and then allotted to persons of the middle and upper classes, who perhaps seldom use them.'(28) He is even more scathing when he considers the complaints of people in high places concerning the observance of religion among the lower orders. 'And yet is it not hypocrisy to build churches for common use, and then to appropriate them to a class; to bemoan the ungodliness of the poor, and then to deny them

the means of religious instruction; to prate about the Gospel, and then to exclude those who have most need of it; to make our boast of Scripture, and profess to believe every tittle of it to be the Word of God, and then to ignore some of its plainest precepts?' (29)

We noted earlier a quotation by the archdeacon from the Report of the Lords' Select Committee. He appears to be thinking of that document again in another passage. 'We are indeed told that different ranks will not sit together in the House of God; that even operatives prefer paying a small rent to secure a sitting for themselves.' (30) He has also heard another opinion, which we have mentioned, 'that freedom and equality of worship are not suited to our ritual'.<sup>(31)</sup> All these statements are dismissed without discussion for by them 'we are required to sanction what God forbids, and what is in direct violation of the common rights of Christian men.' (32)

The title of Lecture 7 was Fabrics and Services of the Church. Sandford has evidently regarded pews as part of the fabric. So he permits himself some subsidiary reasons for their abolition. Accommodation will be increased by this 'first practical step in Church extension'. (33) But pews 'mar their [the churches'] architecture' and in terms which recall Hook's Dictionary (34), they 'destroy their character as houses of God and places of prayer'. (35)

Sandford's is perhaps the most trenchant indictment by any critic of the system, and he concludes by summarising with a passion that leaves no room for compromise. 'We have no alternative but to abolish private ownership in what is legally public property; and to restore to the people of this land their indefeasible privileges as Christians, their inalienable .

rights as citizens. All appropriation in parish churches whether by faculty, or purchase, or prescription is indefensible; and ought not to be tolerated in a free land, or by Christian people. We cannot humanise the masses; we cannot preach Christ's Gospel to the poor; we cannot discharge our functions as clergymen; we cannot maintain our Church as a National Communion, if private and exclusive claims are allowed in parish churches.'(36)

Our debt to Archdeacon Sandford is not exhausted by his Bampton Lectures. The notes which he added to them for their publication in the following year form an anthology of relevant contemporary material drawn from a variety of sources. The themes which these notes address may broadly be classified as law, equality, alienation, and the position and physical standard of seating for the poor. However, in effect the themes often shade into each other so our summary will not always follow precisely this sequence.

We saw that Sandford was unambiguous in his pronouncement that the pew system was illegal. So, as did the Lords' Select Committee whose Report he quoted from(37), he cites the judgment of Sir John Nicholl in the case of Fuller v Lane in 1825. 'All the pews in a parish church are the common property of the parish: they are for the use in common of the parishioners, who are entitled to be seated orderly, so as best to provide for the accommodation of all.'(38) This judgment was delivered, of course, long before the first edition of Robert Phillimore's work(1873), which we have looked at, in which he came to a hesitant conclusion.(39) Moreover, Phillimore asserted that pews were assigned to 'some very great

persons' before the Reformation.(40) However, relying on a work called The Parish, Sandford quotes a judgment made in 1516, early in the reign of Henry VIII. (41) which affirmed that 'the church is in common to everyone; and there is no reason why one should have a seat and that two should stand: for no place in the church belongs more to one than to another.'(42) Toulmin Smith, the author of the article, adds a warning that 'the sale or letting of pews in a parish church, whether by churchwardens or by any holder of a seat by prescription is altogether illegal. Nothing can legalise this; unless indeed it is by an Act of Parliament; and any such Act of Parliament would be an absolutely revolutionary measure.'(43) An article in the Literary Churchman includes the same contention. The law is 'that every seat in every church shall be free and unappropriated' and the article goes on to argue that the claim made on the money of parishioners through the Church Rate rests on this assumption.(44) Sandford, as we saw above, made a similar statement in his Lectures. More cautious about the question of illegality is The Christian Remembrancer in an article that appeared in July 1852. It strikes a note of optimism for 'now that the Church is striving to be active in her work, it is marvellous to witness how abuses, which had hitherto been so long established as to form legal precedents, seem to crumble into dust before the obvious and clear light of justice and Christian truth.' (45)Evidently the law is not challenged, for precedent has institutionalised the pew system. But the institution is unjust and cannot withstand a deeper insight into the meaning of the Gospel.

The law may prescribe the even treatment of worshippers but actually to perceive them as such is a more fundamental demand. Sandford quotes from The Law of Pews by Coke Fowler who argues that the poor know that the clergy are appointed for the cure of all souls with 'equal diligence within the limits of their charge; that one soul is as precious as another in the sight of God; and that the accidents of wealth and rank can attach no special value to one above the other.'(46) The description of wealth and rank as 'accidents' can have given no comfort to those for whom the arrangement reflected the divine ordering. Fowler then goes on to imagine the dismay of the poor, when aware of the priestly commission to value all alike, finding 'the churches of England furnished and arranged on a system diametrically opposite to these truths'. The Manchester Weekly Advertiser for January 26, 1856 expressed a view very like that of Fowler: the system 'erects an artificial inequality where all should be equal.' (47) The Literary Churchman in a passage from the article already quoted above declared that, 'The distinction made between those who have pews and those who have none, destroys the equality of all in the presence of their God; a priority of right in the house of prayer clashes with the very notion of "common supplications"'. This is a rare instance of the Book Of Common Prayer being cited for this purpose.(48) 'In the sanctuary, the presence-chamber, as it were, of their common Maker,' the Church Review for June 18, 1861, wanted 'men to forget, as far as possible, the distinctions of the outer world, and to remember that they are brethren, members of one family.'(49) The expression 'family' to denote the Church, or even humanity itself, is so widespread today that the audacity of this claim may not fully be appreciated.(50)



Sandford's Bampton Lectures reflect an attack of equal violence which he delivered in his Charge to the Archdeaconry of Coventry in 1858. Referring to the pew system he told the clergy that they must admit 'that in no place here in England are human distinctions, and the jealousies and feuds these foster, more rife and rampant than in our parish churches'. Moreover, 'in His House before whom all are equal these men [pew holders] must assert their place and precedence'. Such discrimination 'practically refutes the theory of the parochial system' and, in consequence, clergy often have become not so much 'pastors of the nation than the chaplains of a class.'(51)

The concern of Sandford that the pew system served to alienate the underprivileged from the Church is one that we frequently encounter. Again he produces evidence in support. The Record for January, 1856 noted with approval the placards at Exeter Hall announcing, 'All Seats are Free'. The absence of such encouragement in the Church of England was 'one of the foremost causes of the alienation of the working classes from public worship.' This 'vicious arrangement of nearly all our churches' did not belong to antiquity but 'took its rise....in one of the darkest and most deplorable periods of the whole of British history'. This era was the 'first half of the last century' when 'religion, morals, science, and literature were at their lowest ebb' and 'the upper and middle classes built the churches for themselves.'(52) These strictures gain in force from the fact that The Record was a strongly Evangelical newspaper whereas generally the critics were High Churchmen.(53)

'In great towns it is said by those best qualified to speak, that one of the chief hindrances to their work, is the impossibility of getting the poor to feel at home in church,'

The Guardian for September 8, 1852 reported. 'The pews are costing the Church of England the hearts of thousands of the English poor.'(54) On this point the Tractarian journal is at one with its sister publication of the other wing. There is a contemporary ring to a caution in The Literary Churchman: it is the danger of deterring the half-hearted, or others who covet an excuse for abstaining. Pews repel some of the poor who want to worship, but harm most of all the apathetic who can respond that 'even if they want to go to church they have nowhere to sit.' And the lot of such people working away from home is that if they venture to a strange church/<sup>it</sup> is often to feel unwelcome, and so become 'confirmed in habits of irreligion or dissent.'(55) A similar line is taken by The Church of the People which observed that while there is 'special provision for the comfort of the well-educated and better disposed' others 'disinclined to religion' but not wholly indifferent are 'knowingly subjected to all the discouragement of uncomfortable places' or 'even finding no place at all in the House of God.'(56) This periodical was not the only one to insist on the wilfulness of the exclusion but it appears to be the only one to say that it is inconsistent with 'common sense.' This may hint at the subversive implications of keeping the poor from the comforts of religion.(57) Sandford evidently does not recognise the bishops as his natural allies. For their testimony he submits only a letter from Edward Stanley of Norwich, written some twenty years before, deploring the 'injustice and evil tendency of pews', which encouraged 'dissent and irreligion'(58) and, as we shall see, an experience of Phillpotts who, unlike Stanley, was still alive at the time of his Bampton Lectures. The Earl of Shaftesbury, the 'Children's Friend', in a speech, had delivered a

warning of a similar kind. Pews caused the working classes to think themselves 'despised and treated as beings of a secondary order.' And unless they were shown proper respect in the House of God, and felt that 'there at least there is equality, depend upon it, the vast proportion of the labouring population of London will never be brought to attend the worship of the Establishment.'(59)

It is a moot point whether occupants of free seats would have found their use any more congenial had they been of the same quality as those which were reserved. The Select Committee had looked at this question.(60) The Literary Churchman castigated these 'odious benches' whose 'very design and position denote that they are for an inferior class of worshipper.' Such furniture crowded the middle aisles of London churches and only the 'domestics of pew owners' would use them.(61) The writer goes on movingly to describe an even worse condition. For some there is not room even on those 'odious benches' so they bear the 'mortification of being compelled to stand in a crowd during a great portion of the prayers while many sittings are unoccupied'. And why? Because the owner of the pew 'objects to the admission of strangers to his circle'. For another example we return to Lecture 3 where Sandford quotes an instance from the experience in London of Bishop Phillpotts of Exeter.(62) He discovered that the free seats in an unnamed church in the capital were 'in the roof, out of sight of the minister in both the pulpit and the reading-desk' and 'must be reached by an ascent of nearly one hundred steps.' The incumbent was asked how the infirm managed to scale such heights. 'I have never seen more than one person in those places,' he replied, 'though there may have been others out of sight.'(63)

Finally, Sandford printed a letter which John Molyneux, rector of Sudbury in Suffolk, addressed to his parishioners on the subject. As we have seen Molyneux was a witness before the Select Committee.(64) The thinking which he opposes is of the sort to which clergy are often tempted at a period of recession. It is to accept the absence of the multitude and to say that they will come if they want to come, and there to leave it. Molyneux places the blame for this lack of desire upon the pew system which has 'produced indifference and dislike'. The clergy must go out to them for if they 'knew the value of what they had been robbed there would be such an agitation and demand as would soon rescue the churches from appropriation.' Such a missionary outreach by the clergy will make the excluded themselves the agents of reform. It is an approach that differs from that paternalism in which the conditions of the poor are improved by the practical compassion of their betters. The clergy are urged not to wait: waiting would be like expecting 'the heathen to cry out for the Gospel.' The wounded and the reluctant will be drawn by the assurance of a welcome so priests 'must anticipate the demand and by supply create it.' Such a theory with its entrepreneurial undertone may seem hazardous to the economist. But Molyneux rests his argument on the initiative of the welcoming Christ. The Church must open its doors and say, "Ye have not chosen me but I have chosen you."(65)

#### Organised Protest

When Sandford delivered his Bampton Lectures some of the opponents of the pew system were beginning to collaborate. Nevertheless, the cause was not destined to achieve the dimensions of a popular movement. Writers and speakers brought great

passion to their diatribes, meetings of the Church Congress rang with applause as the iniquities of the system were execrated, but there were no outbursts of working-class indignation comparable, for example, with the ritual disturbances of our period.(66) As we shall see, individuals were moved occasionally to invade sittings from which authority would exclude them, or to object when barred from entering such protected spaces. Yet there were no mass sit-ins or occupations à la contemporary manifestations of resentment. England never spoke as Neale poetically believed it 'had'. (67) The decision to incinerate the records of its history by the leaders of that body into which the early collaboration eventually grew seems a poignant appraisal of an heroic endeavour.(68)

That body was the Incorporated Free and Open Church Association whose Chronology, which has mercifully survived, places any student of our subject in its debt. In fact the Association does not claim to be the first in the field of protest as a movement: the pioneers were 'undoubtedly the Cambridge Camden Society'. Neale and his colleagues were, as we have seen, motivated by aesthetic as well as social considerations (69) nevertheless they 'awoke the public conscience'. But IFOCA does not rate their campaign as one of commitment to the same degree as its own. For the Camden Society stopped short of demanding an end to appropriation. The palm for that enterprise is awarded not to a body but to 'the more active town clergy - for instance, Dr Hook at Leeds'. They perceived 'that nothing short of absolute freedom would meet the needs of the day.'(70)

The linear ancestor of the Association was the National Association for the Freedom of Worship. This was formed in Manchester by the Dean, George Hall Bowers(71), in 1856. Ten

years later, in 1866, the London Free and Open Church Association was established in the capital with Lord Wharncliffe(72) as its first chairman. In 1871 'London' was dropped from the title<sup>as its work</sup>/extended nationwide, and in 1881 the Association was incorporated(73)

Though the right of parishioners to occupy the seat of their choice was the first object of the Association since 'the parish church belongs of right to all the parishioners in common', it had two other important aims. The first of these was 'the spreading of sound views with regard to the offertory'.(74) This and the first object are interconnected. The income lost when pewrents are abolished must be made good if the local church is effectively to survive. This aspect of the matter was brought before the Select Committee of 1856.(75) The Association stressed that no half measures about freedom would do if the offertory method of financing a church were to succeed. Experience had proved it. And though the offertory is to be commended as an obligation with scriptural warrant rather than a more productive source of income, in fact 'this happens to be the case'.(76) We shall see that this argument still needed pressing well into the next century.

The third object of IFOCA was 'the opening of churches daily for private prayer'. (77) This is not explicitly related to the previous objects, nor within the formal boundaries of this project. Nevertheless, the availability of the building at times other than those of public worship must encourage a feeling of common possession in the minds of the parishioners and play a subtle part in undermining the assumptions of the seating arrangements on Sunday.

With an entirely wholesome realism it is explained that

the 'principles of the Association are by no means put forward as a remedy for all the ills under which a parish may be suffering.'(78) They are but the conditions in which progress is possible. We may take it that those clergy in the Convocation of York who had such high hopes for the Church's mission if only the pews were freed, were conscientious parish priests. (79) But just as Inglis has suggested that some churchpeople perceived the reform as a 'fairly painless nostrum' that could be applied without too much upset, so, perhaps, it could be with clergy who had not partaken of the new spirit of pastoral responsibility.(80) So the Association warns that 'the freedom of a church is in no sense a substitute for diligent parochial visitation, nor a remedy for ministerial inefficiency.'(81)

In implementing these objects the tactics of the Association were diverse. On the one hand it sought control of particular churches in a manner similar to that of the Incorporated Church Building Society. Its Church Building Fund made grants for the construction or restoration of churches 'the seats in which are entirely free'. The Association would also accept gifts 'to secure the freedom of a church'. These gifts would be applied towards the endowment, augmentation or repair of a church, according to its particular need, but only on condition of the 'receipt of a certificate from the incumbent and churchwardens that the seats remain free.' It also sought the role of patron in respect of benefices. And in disposing of the patronage 'care will be taken to appoint those clergy only who are known to be loyal to the principles of the Association.'(82)

Propaganda aimed at every level within the Church of England was probably the most fruitful of IFOCA's activities.

To get the pew question on the agenda of the Church Congress ensured not only that it would be discussed at the gatherings of that organisation, but that its widely representative membership could take the message back to their parishes armed with literature from the Association's stall.(83) And any clergy or laity expressing an interest were sent reading matter giving information or guidance towards freeing their churches. The extent of this operation is impressive. In 1886 some '97000 publications and leaflets' were distributed to parishes throughout the land(84), and by 1895 the total was more than two million.(85) There were 64 different titles ranging from posters declaring, 'All Seats in this Church are Free', to such booklets as 'How to free a country church' or 'An Address on the Evils of the Pew system'.(86)

The most comprehensive literary production was Free and Open Church Chronology, which we mentioned above and frequently use in this project. Though published by the Association, it only incidentally gives us glimpses of its own history as it chronicles the milestones on the road to freedom from 1793. It begins in that year with a long quotation from a work, Guide to the Church, by Archdeacon Daubeny(87) in which he deplores private or proprietary chapels contending that through such institutions 'we are separating the great body of the people from the Established Church and, in a manner, forcing them to become Nonconformists.' It concludes with a hopeful and characteristically forthright comment from Bishop Hensley Henson, then vicar of Barking, in 1891. 'During the last 40 years, happily, the objection of working men to private rights in church has, in many churches been removed; but it is still vigorous over a large area and works sad havoc, not only in keeping working



men out of church but in breeding Pharisees within it.'(88)

According to the blurb, Chronology was intended for the use of 'Preachers, Speakers, and Writers in the Public Press.'(89) The Association's periodical, The Free and Open Church Advocate, was intended for anyone who was interested in its work for the price of a penny and was sent free to members. There is some uncertainty as to how often it appeared.(90) The issue for January, 1895 reports the outcome for a Lancashire church whose pews were freed in the previous year. From a congregation of four or five hundred the congregation had swollen to 1500, the capacity of the building. Unusually, this pew-rented church had had an offertory: that also had risen from £15 a Sunday to a Sunday in July when the congregation was relieved of no less than £615, though this was in response to an appeal. The Advocate looks forward to the new year when the parish church of St George, Worcester will be consecrated, and will be entirely free unlike the building it replaces. But what about the vicar's stipend which had formerly been serviced by the pews? The worshippers had met and decided that each of them could contribute one pound a year as they had done towards the new edifice. Two items appear which may check any undue optimism. The Church Times is quoted for a warning that in some country parishes where the population has increased sufficiently to put pressure on the available space in the church, the churchwardens were adopting the practice of their urban colleagues and ingeniously hiring out pew furniture (e.g. a hassock) as entitling the payee to a seat. A letter from a worshipper at St Augustine's, Edgbaston, to the Birmingham Gazette, and who describes himself as not a supporter of IFOCA, laments a new policy there. The gentry are being assigned to the best seats while others, including the correspondent, are placed

in the less desirable locations. Meanwhile the verger who allocated seats impartially has been relieved of this function.(91) As we have observed elsewhere the spread of the gospel of free churches is not a story of a glorious, uninterrupted advance.

The cold eye that the bishops cast on the Association in 1867 stemmed, we saw, both from its interpretation of the law and from the method it employed.(92) This consisted of more than the distribution of useful literature and the promotion of discussion at Church Congress and other meetings. Where there were grounds for suspecting abuse, it willingly instituted proceedings in the courts. In 1886 there were three instances of such litigation in which the Association rendered assistance. Eighteen months of legal wrangle on behalf of three parishioners of Bucknall, Staffordshire, came to an end in that year. They had been served with writs of trespass by the owner of a pew into which, being nearly empty, they had dared to venture when the church was congested at harvest festival. Costs were awarded to the defendants by Mr Justice Grantham who had 'come to the conclusion that no right had been shown for the taking possession for so many years of so large a space in the parish church.' At Longdon, in the same county, a churchwarden attempted to allot seats after the building had been declared 'free to the parishioners for ever'. When his colleague would not co-operate in the enterprise the first churchwarden vainly sought the help of the chancellor of the diocese. Eventually the matter reached the Court of Arches where the churchwarden who had attempted to turn back the clock suffered the same fate as the pew owner in the previous case. A legal matter of a different class, which the Association embraced, concerned a 'farm lad' who had been

fined by the magistrates for 'violent behaviour' in contravention of the Brawling Act. The offence was that he attempted to occupy a seat in the church at Ancaster, near Grantham, other than that to which the churchwardens directed him. A notice in the building proclaimed that the church was free and invited worshippers to take vacant seats. The Association appealed on the boy's behalf to the Queen's Bench Division. The outcome is not recorded.(93)

We have seen that in 1867 a petition above the signature of Lord Wharncliffe, the chairman of the London Association, was debated in the Upper House of the Convocation of Canterbury.(94) However, it was received in such a manner as not to inspire faith in that assembly as a vehicle of change. In the years following, the Association continued to spread its message in the ways that we have indicated. However, in addition to this laborious task of gradually changing opinion at every level in the Church, it resolved to solicit the aid of Parliament. So it promoted the Parish Churches Bill which basically sought to re-affirm the principle that the parish church was free for the use of all parishioners.(95) Its report for 1882, when it got its Second Reading in the Commons, rejoices that the members have thus 'accepted the principle'.(96) But to the Association's comment on the Second Reading in the Lords' which led to 'the discussion of its provisions at the Church Congress at Wakefield, at several Diocesan Conferences, and at numbers of Ruridecanel and other Meetings of Clergy and Laity throughout the country', is appended a note of subdued anxiety. For 'whatever difference of opinion there may be among Churchmen as to the desirability of calling in the aid of the Legislature to re-declare the ancient Common Law right of the people to free worship in the churches of the

land, it is clear that the introduction of the Bill has brought the need of reform in this respect before the public in a way which could scarcely otherwise have been done.'(97) The seed of division had evidently been sown.(98)

Whether post hoc or propter hoc pointers to decay in the fortunes of the Association are now discernible. It is true that by the 1880's some bishops were to be found among its patrons notably Joseph Lightfoot of Durham and Edward Browne, Wilberforce's successor at Winchester.(99) Unsurprisingly William Magee of Peterborough, who proposed the Second Reading, is on the list, though his devotion to the Association was not unquestioning.(100) Most promising among the names of the ten English diocesans is the name of Edward Benson of Truro: ten years later he heads the roll as Archbishop of Canterbury, but still only fifteen English diocesans, less than half the complement, are there. Earl Nelson (101) remains the president, the lay patrons are not undistinguished, and among them the name of Lord Halifax, a great pioneer of ecumenism, shines out. However, this caveat must be entered: by the nineties approval of only one of the objects of the Incorporated Free and Open Church Association was required of patrons.(102) So one, for example, may favour the offertory, or the opening of doors in the week, but not be attached to a vision of a church available without restriction. The same liberality was extended to vice-presidents, who were granted that office for an annual payment of only two guineas.(103) The total membership seems slight for a national organisation. In 1885 subscribers amounted to only 876, in 1892 the difficulty of recruitment is, by implication, conceded for there are 'only some 800'. In 1895 the figure is not declared. (104) And there was also the matter of finance.

From £1,140 in 1885 income had slumped to £698 in 1894, marching, apparently, with a diminishing membership. (105) Moreover, the success rate is falling. The average number of churches freed per year between 1880 and 1882 is seventy (106): in the seven years up to 1894 the average is forty two.(107)

Perhaps it was in an effort to revive flagging enthusiasm that in 1894 the Association sponsored a venture which has a truly contemporary resonance: an essay competition. Competitors were to discuss appropriation as a danger to the Established Church, and the following year the three essays adjudged the best were published by the Association as A Danger to the Established Church. If for no other reason the result is of interest in that a woman at last appears on the scene.(108) Miss Mary Lacy, of Blackheath, gained the second prize of £10. Her essay made two points which, as far as this writer knows, had not been made before. She drew attention to the occasional offices, Baptism, Holy Communion and Burial. They are distinguished by a spirit of 'Christian Socialism'. What ever the subject's rank, the text of the office is the same. So of Baptism she wrote, 'prince and peasant are admitted into the same sacred fold with the same simple ceremony.' This is sound, of course, for the attendant pomp of a royal christening, for example, is not an essential part of the sacrament. Her second apparently original point concerned the Church's social service. It was vain for the National Church to boast of its works of charity through alms-houses, orphanages, schools, etc 'until this blot [appropriated seats] is removed she is not, and cannot be, truly national'.(109)

The three top prizes all went to layfolk. A quotation from Matthew Stobart of Newcastle-upon-Tyne makes an intriguing

connection between the pew system and the extension of the franchise. 'Jack is beginning to consider himself as good as his master; and he is in one respect. He has the vote and that vote can disestablish the Church.' The Association may have found some comfort in the fact that 58 men and women deemed the subject important enough to submit entries. Nevertheless, the bright, confident morning of the Association was fading, and we are not entirely unprepared for the terminal traumas that marked its twilight in the next century. Now we turn, however, to one of its indirect triumphs in the wide diffusion of interest in the offence that it was founded to remove.

#### The Debate Widens

The year 1861 saw Sandford's Bampton Lectures, the York resolution, and the birth of the Church Congress. As Archdeacon Emery, a fervent opponent of the pew system, was the 'father' of the Congress and its secretary, a new opportunity for the expression of views on the subject opened for the whole Church.<sup>(110)</sup> In this unofficial, though widely representative and influential forum where lay members had as much right to speak as the clergy, the agenda might embrace any relevant topic from an arcane problem of biblical criticism to social questions such as the right of workmen to form a trade union.<sup>(111)</sup>

The pew question appeared remarkably quickly at the second meeting of the Congress in 1862. Equally remarkable was the place of its appearance: Oxford with Bishop Wilberforce in the chair. We look briefly at that assembly, three subsequent gatherings of the Congress, and at what today might be called a 'fringe' meeting, where the topic was discussed.

The inclusion of a problem over which Wilberforce had

agonised so long, and without conclusions favourable to the reformers, testifies to the courage of those who arranged the programme and, perhaps, also to a sense of urgency.(112) The heading of a section of the Congress suggests a sense of urgency: 'The Means of Recovering the Alienated Classes to the Church'. Within this section was a group which was to investigate 'Free and Open Churches' and was led by Edward Herford, a layman, who was described as President of the Manchester Statistical Society.

Herford was dogmatic. He argued that 'without the removal of the pew system, or the adoption of the open church system, - I use the terms convertibly - no other means of recovering the alienated classes can be effectual.' He dismisses any compromise such as nominal rents for the proletarian worshippers. And he offers a telling definition of the system in legal terms. 'The pew system may be defined as the division of a church into private tenements, and the ownership of such tenements by private individuals in the same sense in which lawyers and others speak of the tenancy or ownership of a house.'(113) His estimate of the spiritual and moral havoc caused is boundless. The system is taxed for being 'the main cause of Dissent, of irreligion, of all the moral and social evils which Scripture, history, our own experience and knowledge of human nature tell us must result from forgetfulness of God.'(114)

The ramifications of the question as well as the concern which it was causing are apparent when it surfaces in two non-cognate sections of the Congress. In the section on 'School Chapels and Supplemental services', William Cadman, who had been a witness before the Lords' committee,<sup>(115)</sup> and is now rector of St Marylebone, complained of the constraints which the system placed on his

ministry. 'The incumbent dependent mainly upon pew rents for his income and for his church expenses, can only with difficulty keep the church doors open, while he can do nothing efficiently for the maintenance of his schools, and is seriously hindered in establishing the usual parochial machinery.'(116) Before the Lords' Cadman was even willing to see the system extended to the lower classes as a concession to their self-respect. But evidently the enormous challenge of St Marylebone has drawn him to a different viewpoint. In that parish of 33,000 with a church that could hold 2,500 but with only one fifth of those places free, he has come to feel the hindrances to his pastoral vocation when he is in bondage to the pew-owners. (117) Cadman was more fortunate than W.H. Jones, vicar of Mottram-in-Longdendale near Manchester. His bid to raise the subject in the section on 'Church Finance' was thwarted. Wilberforce ruled him out of order as it was due to be debated by the full Congress the following day.(118)

When he was able to speak on the matter, Jones was applauded for his claim that all churches should be totally free. He provided an interesting example of how pewholders were facing the threat of the loss of their 'supposed right' when a church was being renovated. A building which he knew was being restored and it was intended to declare it free when the work was finished. But that aim was frustrated. The pewholders simply removed their seats from the old building and placed them in exactly the same position in the new building thus perpetuating their 'supposed right.'(119)

The contribution to the debate of George Denison, the Archdeacon of Taunton, supplies a rare instance of a High Churchman who favoured the status quo. Moreover, the spontaneous reactions to his speech illustrate the divergence within the Congress. When he declared that it 'is not the character of the



Church of England to have a church wholly free and unappropriated' there were incredulous shouts of 'oh! oh!': when he went on to insist that people liked to sit 'always in the same place' and 'according to degree' he was encouraged with cries of 'hear! hear!'.(120) A Member of Parliament, J.G. Hubbard, agreed that people desired to have a seat of their own; but this ambition should not be allowed to be realised. So he recommended a compromise which would avoid the assumption of a freehold. Each year seats should be appropriated anew 'so as never to give persons the right to say, "This is my seat".'(121) The vision of Montague Burrows, who was the Chichele Professor of Modern History, must have caused any among the advocates of reform, who had not fully weighed the outcome of their ideals, to ponder its implications. For not only did Burrows want <sup>the churches</sup> to be freely available to all, but positively relished the resulting commonwealth. 'For my part I should be extremely glad to find myself between ever so many chimney-sweepers and ever so many millers.' It is one thing to rage against an injustice, another actually to sit down and count the cost and to visualise and accept the outcome for oneself and for one's family. And this realism came more properly from a layman: clergy officiating in the chancel were distanced somewhat from that physical propinquity which, as we shall see, was a perhaps hidden anxiety of the upper classes. (122) The examples which Burrows gave were among those whom some would least covet as their neighbours even in the house of God. But he believed that this willingness to sit side by side with fellow Christians of whatever order would yield fruit beyond the walls of the church. 'Nothing so tends to give the poor self respect and encouragement to cleanliness ....as the fact that they can go and sit where they like in

the church.'(123)

The last word, however, came from Wilberforce, who presided. It was another version of that precarious position which he occupied on this question, which we examined earlier.(124)

'I think we make a fatal mistake if we confound together a church in which parishioners are from time to time seated according to their quality, with a church the area of which is occupied by exclusive pews; the one is the Church's true system, the other is the Church's abuse.'(125)

The following year, 1863, the subject was on the agenda again when the Congress met at Manchester, and again penetrated another section. It appeared when the problem of 'Church Extension' was debated. James Murray Dale, a lawyer, accepted pews, but only as an unpleasant necessity. However, 'as the combined exertions of those who oppose, and those who, like myself, advocate their use, are quite inadequate to provide sufficient number of new churches, we must be content to continue to make use of them; at all events for the present.' But another layman, William Cotton, argued that experience had shown otherwise. He spoke of restored churches which were empty where rents had prevailed which had become 'well attended' when the impost had been abolished. (126) Here, then, are two representatives with a common objective, the extension of the Church, and a shared dislike of pew rents: the one, however, believes that they are indispensable to achieve that objective, the other believes that it can be achieved without them.

Of all cities on the itinerary of the Church Congress Manchester was the city where the pew question was most appropriately considered, for there the movement had been born.(127)

It was equally appropriate that the movements's founding father, John Bowers, the dean, should preside over the discussion on 'Free and Open Churches'. His opening remarks, however, embodied a curious qualification. He told the meeting that he 'did not believe the abolition of pew rents was practicable in all places.'(128) Such temporising found no favour with W.R. Wroth, the vicar of St Philip's, Clerkenwell.(129) He perceived the Church Building Act of 1818 in a markedly different light from that which we have suggested. (130) It was no ally of the cause he sought to promote. This law, and its successors, was the cause of 'the divinely ordained mode for the maintenance of the clergy being ignored'. (He presumably has in mind the texts which introduce the Offertory at the Holy Communion service.(131) ) He continued amid applause to argue that the rents denied to the poor 'the privilege of offering their mite', while the clergy, their independence compromised, became 'ecclesiastical pensioners of pewholders and the provision for themselves and their families fluctuates with the Euripus of their personal feeling and prejudices.'(132) He clearly knows that not all his colleagues in the Congress will agree. 'We are sorry that offence should be given, but still the duty of opening our churches to all is so imperative that we must not shrink back, though many be offended.(133)

Ironically, among this group, we may suspect James Atlay, Hook's immediate successor as vicar of Leeds. Certainly he did not share his predecessor's enthusiasm and warned Wroth and others of the 'danger of riding their hobby horse about free and open churches too hard'.(134) F.S.Powell, the M.P. for Cambridge, doubted whether there was a general desire for free

and open churches. Referring to the possibility of legislating for them, he was certain that if such an Act were passed then, within a year, formidable problems would arise.(135) This prediction was never to be tested as the Bill which would at least have gone some way towards free and open churches was never enacted.(136)

The Archbishop of York, William Thomson, presided over a new venture of the Church Congress when it met in his see city in 1866: a 'Meeting of Working Men'. His opening words must be recorded in view of the difficulty he was to find himself in some years later when required to adjudicate in a case concerning the allocation of pews.(137) 'Revelation presents to us, all men are equal; and that all distinctions of wealth and position in the face of the great fact are so minute as to be not worth talking about.'(138) This of course was not a direct reference to our subject but one looks hopefully for some mention of the system when the name of Hook, though now Dean of Chichester, appears among the speakers. Drawing on his Leeds' experience, he extols the intelligence of working men, warns them against drunkenness(not drink as such), and declares that by Christianity they have been 'admitted to equal rights' with other classes. Now, somewhat mysteriously, he tells this audience of working men that it 'remains for you to elevate your great and important class to the level of the classes above it.' (139) But concerning their rights in the context of worship he is silent.

However, Earl Nelson, who was to lead the Incorporated Free and Open church Association, did not forbear to mention the matter. 'I would beg the working men of this

part of the world to demand free access to their churches'. This seems to be the first exhortation to working-class rebellion. But it is based on the premise that the 'Church of England is specially the church of the working man.'(140) Nelson was followed by the Dean of Carlisle, Francis Close, who almost seeks absolution. 'It is, I say, a wonderful thing that they [the working classes] should care for the Church, when, for so long bishops and deans, and dignitaries of all classes have cared so little for them.' Cheers are recorded when he went on to confess, 'If we have not shut the doors of the churches in their faces we have shut the pew doors.' And in the mode of many other Church leaders he feared that they 'have been driven into chapels, and away from the Church, by our system of locked up pews.' Close ended with some words which are an echo of the views of some witnesses before the Select Committee of 1856.(141) He had asked a group of weavers to tell him what their ideal church would be like. 'They said they would not like it all open, but they would like to pay for their sittings.' Though half would be free and the other half rented, the seats would not be distinguished from each other. 'Working men have great delicacy of feeling, and their expression was, "I should not like to do anything to show I could afford to pay for a sitting and my poor brother could not pay." '(142) This last condition is not quite so explicitly imposed by the witnesses of 1856.

The meeting of the Congress at Bath in 1873 deserves our attention if only for the speech of the Rev. A.T. Gurney when the subject was considered under the heading, 'Appropriation of Seats as Affecting a National Church'. Gurney, whose recent pastoral experience had been gained in Paris, recommended 'that system of appropriation of sittings at least for the hours of 11 and 3,

under which the Church of England had become the most cultivated and intellectual of churches'. There would, however, be 'early and late free services, that we may win people where they are not already won.' What was the thinking behind this proposal? It was that the Gospel should 'be preached free of cost to heathens and unbelievers, or half-believers, but not to Christians who are under a religious obligation, as a matter of duty and not of inclination, to support the ministers and the Church of God, and that after such a fashion as to render the former as independent as may be of human caprice.' Like Wroth of Clerkenwell he wanted the lower orders to have a share in the privilege of contributing, though his plea is imbued with a wholly different spirit. 'The working man who truly honours himself, honours a lord or his employer also and is quite willing to give "honour to whom honour is due and custom to whom custom".'(143) His supporter, R.C. Billing, the vicar of Louth, belittled the campaign for freedom in a manner closely resembling of Atlay at Manchester. 'The hobby - pardon me - is being pressed to death.' But he is aware that positions on the issue generally divide on party lines. So he explains that though he is an Evangelical his opposition does not derive from his attachment to that wing of the Church. Indeed, he has a friend, also an Evangelical, who actually belongs to the Free and Open Church Association and Billing only wishes that he were 'here as an opponent today.'(144) Responding, Octavius Hills, a layman and one of the founding fathers of the London Association, reflected Sandford's insistence that a National Church must be free to all, (145) and a priest from Streatham, J.S. Jones, accused appropriation of providing only 'for some and least for those least able to provide for themselves.'(146)

The meetings of the Church Congress show that there were differing views about the pew question among a representative and committed body of churchpeople. However, as no votes were taken at its meetings it is not possible to measure with confidence in what proportion the members were divided for and against the system. While the data drawn from the debates point to a majority against, at the same time they refute any notion that the opposition was unanimous. However, if the pew system divided the Congress as a whole, it was the recourse to legislation that divided even the ranks of the opposition. So the debate on the Parish Churches Bill, at the meeting of the Congress in Wakefield in 1886, gives a glimpse of that schism at which the Free and Open Church Association hinted in its report for that year.(147)

Theodore Dodd, a layman, who had been vice-chairman of the Association, opened the discussion. Although by now some bishops are among the patrons of the Association(148), he clearly regards others as in league with the wealthy tenants of the pews. So many 'a clergyman would thankfully see his church free, but the richers classes backed by the bishops are too much for him.' So the Bill was essential for in no other way could such powerful opposition be overcome.(149) The current chairman of the Association, W.R.Trench, vicar of All Saints', Notting Hill, denounced appropriation as worse than pew rents. 'It keeps people out, just as much as pew rents, and brings no money in their place.' The Bill was good in law, and he believed that it 'is helpful to the parson, it is popular with the people.'(150)

But Outram Marshall, curate of St Augustine's, Kilburn, thought otherwise. Of his credentials as an advocate of freedom

there could be no doubt: a member of the Association, and serving a parish church which was entirely unrestricted. The Bill was unnecessary for the cause was gradually being won. Moreover, he foresaw that persons who were becoming sympathetic could be estranged by this invoking of Parliamentary sanction, for they would not be 'forced to adopt at once a movement which they are not altogether prepared for.' To his view that the Bill was not needed and that it could be counterproductive he added a practical consideration. Laws were 'very easily evaded when they do not carry public opinion with them.'(151) His argument seems more convincing than that of J.W. Taylor, the rector of Strathern, Melton Mowbray. He too stood for free churches, but constructed a colourful picture of an injustice that could be perpetrated were there a statutory ban on any sort of pew reservation. 'It will be a very bad thing for some little seaside place that is just coming into notice, because the visitors to that seaside place will crowd out the parishioners, so that they will never be able to go to church during the season.' (152) The problem presented to devout parishioners by visitors to resorts was a real one as the Bishop of Chichester had shown(153). And the parishioners could be of the submissive working-class for whose rights Wilberforce had spoken.(154) Taylor's bleak picture raises again the difficulty of justice where all have equal rights. And even in these latter days when our coastal churches find their congregations augmented by holiday-makers, though not to bursting-point, the 'injustice' of losing one's favourite seat is not unknown, one suspects; .. but not to the extent of finding no seat at all.

Other speakers rejoiced at the prospect of a mandatory veto. They put the matter in another perspective. Contrary to the rector of Strathern, who would leave the allocation to local



decision, they were glad that the pressure would be lifted from the shoulders of those who had to adjudicate in individual cases. Newton Mant, vicar of Sledmere, York, cited the cause celebré of St Mary's, Beverley, which had occurred in that same year. The churchwardens had been necessarily told by the Archbishop of York, William Thomson, that it was their duty to seat worshippers 'according to their degree', though this was not in accordance with his own wishes.(155) The Bill, Mant declared, would deliver the bishops from such a painful task and 'lessen the friction which accompanies this question.'(156) His acknowledgment of the bishops as allies contrasts with the opinion of Theodore Dodd. Cowden Cole, vicar of Upton, Somerset, spoke in similar vein. He outlined the circumstances which might cause the fine resolutions of a country priest to lose the name of action. On average, he estimated, two thirds of the seats in rural churches were appropriated. Consequently large areas were unused as often not more than one occupant of a copious reserved pew was actually present at a service. The outraged incumbent determines to free his church, writes to the Free and Open Church Association, and is inspired. Now he will persuade the pewholders of the righteousness of the cause. 'But when you get your farmers around you in your comfortable little vestry on some Easter Monday, and put the matter to them fairly and straightforwardly, as you think, you will perhaps find such a different response made to your arguments, that you will, in the end be ready to go away, and be satisfied if you get your tithes and your glebe rents, and resolve to trouble yourself no further about the other "third" who are compelled to content themselves with the back seats.' (157) If only he could quote a law then there could be no argument.

The picture of that room crowded with the farmers of the parish, assembled for the vestry meeting at which the churchwardens were to be elected, starkly conveys the isolation and vulnerability of the idealistic parson. It is with settled tradition and corporate memory that he has to contend. Winning the hearts of such a gathering was a formidable enterprise that needed more for success than the recitation of the objects of the Free and Open Church Association.

The meetings of which we have treated were those in which the pew question was formally debated. But they do not represent the sum of the free church movement's presence at the Congress. The Association's stall with its expansive range of literature solicited the attention of delegates until in 1921 funds no longer allowed this vehicle of communication.(158) In the heyday of the Congress the Association might hold meetings of its own in the same city with its president in the chair, supported by clergy and prominent laity, and arrange for sermons to be preached on the Sunday before in neighbouring churches by clergy sympathetic to its aims.(159)

After 1886 the importance of the Congress waned. For there were now other opportunities for laymen to make themselves heard. (160) Notably in that year the first meeting of the House of Laymen of the Convocation of Canterbury took place, a body which made the Congress ultimately redundant. It was also, as we saw, the year when the unity of those seeking an end to discriminatory seating was damaged by disagreement over the wisdom of invoking the aid of the legislature. We now pass from the debate in the Congress to the debate, earlier in the year, in the House of Lords where the divisive measure had received qualified support.

## Notes to Frontal Attacks

(1) Life of Archbishop Magee John MacDonnell. Isbister 1896.p.228.

(2) The freedom of the church was its principal but not its only objective. See p.161.

(3) John Sandford(1801-73). Son of Daniel Sandford, Bishop of Edinburgh. Archdeacon of Coventry 1851-73.Helped form CE Temperance Society. Intimate friend of Archbishop Tait.Liberal in politics.

(4) The first lectures under the will of John Bampton, Canon of Salisbury were given in 1780. Eight 'Divinity Lecture Sermons' were to be delivered in Lent and Act Terms.

(5) Jeremiah 13.20.

(6) The Mission and Extension of the Church at Home Bampton Lectures, 1861. John Sandford. Longmans 1862. p.76.

(7) Ibid. p.78.

(8) From Bampton's Will.

(9) The Lecturer was not always an academic theologian: the only requirement in respect of status was that he should be a graduate of Oxford or Cambridge. The course delivered by J.H.F.Peile in 1907, published as The Reproach of the Gospel, included lectures on social questions and war and trade and there are points in them where one almost expects a reference to our subject.

(10) Op.Cit. p.78.

(11) Ibid. p.177.

(12) Compulsory Church Rate Abolition Act 1868. Cf.Ch.I,p.25(5).

(13) Op.Cit. p.178.

(14) The practice obtained in other Churches. Cf. e.g. Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England K.S. Inglis. Routledge 1963. pp.129,106f,96f. The difficulties of unrestricted seating at Brompton Oratory caused anxiety to Faber. Chadwick op.cit. Pt.I,p.330. Fr. Rolfe has an amusing passage on the problem of tickets for Christmas Mass in his novel Hadrian VII pub. Picador 1978 edition p.102ff.

(15) Op.Cit. p.177. Sandford clearly uses the word 'denationalise' not in the sense of losing the privileges of Establishment but of losing the character of a truly national church.

(16) Cf. Chap. II, Episcopal Concern, p45(28).

(17) Op.Cit. p.177.

(18) Cf. Ch.IV,External Pressures. Inglis shows that Labour Churches were formed as a protest against the link Nonconformity was establishing with the middle classes. op.cit. p.227.

(19) Op.Cit. p.77.

(20) Cf. Ch. IV, External Pressures, p.99ff.

(21) Op.Cit. p.177. Cf. Proverbs 22.2.

(22) James 2.2-4.

(23) Op.Cit. p.78.

(24) It is interesting to see how a great Victorian biblical scholar, J.B. Lightfoot, expounded this verse, Galatians 3.28, in his commentary first published in 1865. 'The conventional distinctions of religious caste or of social rank, even the natural distinctions of sex, are banished hence.' St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians J.B. Lightfoot. MacMillan 1874. p.148. Appropriately, when he became Bishop of Durham in 1879, he joined the Incorporated Free and Open Church Association as a patron.

(25) Cf. Ch. V, Collective Disquiet, pp.110,112ff.

(26) Op.Cit. p.79.

(27) Cf. Ch. V, Collective Disquiet pp.111ff.

(28) Op.Cit. p.178. The scandal of reserved seats not being used by those for whom they were intended recurs throughout our period, and was noted in 1818 by Bishop Howley of London. (Ch. II, Episcopal Concern p.29).

(29) Ibid. p.179.

(30) Ibid. p.178. Cf. Ch. IV External Pressures p.100ff.

(31) Cf. Ch. II, Episcopal Concern p.40f. Sandford does not tell us what is meant by this view which he reports. Perhaps the defenders of the pew system were relying on the vague datum of atmosphere. Morning and Evening Prayer were imbued with an archaic dignity which affirmed the social order: monarch, clergy and people, in that sequence, are interceded for in the versicles while of the four prayers at the end of the office two are devoted to royalty. In the Litany, which would have been the other service most familiar to worshippers of the time, the suffrages more explicitly recognise the national hierarchy: Monarch, Clergy, Nobility, Magistrates and people. Charles Booth similarly interpreted the feeling of Anglican ritual some forty years later. He does not mention pews as conveying a class signal, but the ceremonial makes the point sufficiently. 'The churches have come to be regarded as the resorts of the well-to-do, and of those who are willing to accept the charity and patronage of people better off than themselves. It is felt that the tone of the services, particularly in the Church of England, is opposed to the idea of advancement, inculcating rather contentment with, and the necessity for the doing of duty in that station of life to which it has pleased God to call a man.' Life and Labour of the People in London (1902-3) Religious Influences vol. vii, p.422f. In his

last words he is quoting from the answer, in The Catechism, to the question, What is my duty towards my Neighbour? James Obelkevitch, writing of the South Lindsey region of the Diocese of Lincoln in the last century, finds pew and liturgy joining in the same social affirmation. 'There was thus a distinctive tone and style to Anglican worship, and, since its implicit virtues of order and restraint were also social virtues, a distinctive social atmosphere. Just as the seating plan in the church recapitulated the external social hierarchy, so the tone of worship echoes certain secular values.' Religion and Rural Society OUP 1976. p.145.

(32)Op.Cit. p.179.

(33)Ibid. p.179. The Duke of Wellington made the reform of seating a prior condition of his support of the building of more churches, Ch. II, Episcopal Concern p. 32.

(34)Cf. Ch. III, Priestly Initiatives p. 56.

(35)Op.Cit. p.179.

(36)Ibid. p.180.

(37)Cf. Ch. IV, External Pressures p. 103.

(38)Op.Cit. p.322f.

(39)Cf. Ch. I, The Problem Arises, p.18ff.

(40)Cf. Ch. I, The Problem Arises, p.6.

(41)For evidence of the presence of pews in Henry's reign cf. Ch. I, The Problem Arises, p.7.

(42)Op.Cit. p.323. (Joshua) Toulmin Smith (1816-69). Lawyer. Prolific writer especially on subject of public health and local government. Founded Parliamentary Register (1857-65), a record of Parliamentary proceedings with commentary. DNB.

(43)Ibid. p.323.

(44)Ibid. p.329.

(45)Ibid. p.332.

(46)Ibid. p.324. 'The Church and the Congregation whom you must serve, is his spouse and his body. And if it shall happen the same Church, or any member thereof, to take any hurt or hindrance by reason of your negligence, ye know the greatness of the fault, and also the horrible punishment that will ensue.' From the Bishop's Charge at the service of The Ordering of Priests.

(47)Ibid. p.329. Cf. Ch. IV, External Pressures, p.97. Mann's correspondent senses artificial equality. Ch. V, Collective Disquiet, p.138, Wilberforce on 'artificial equality'.

(48)Ibid. p.329. Cf. p.168 above.

(49)Ibid. p.332.

(50)Except perhaps for a Good Friday Collect, the word is not used of the Church in the Book of Common Prayer. Children at baptism were received into 'the congregation of Christ's flock'; not until 1928 was the word 'family' substituted for 'congregation'.

(51)Op.cit.p.326f. In his Charge Sandford makes use of the parable of the Great Supper to emphasise the duty of the clergy in respect of the poor. 'Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in'. Luke 14.23.

(52)Ibid. p.327. Exeter Hall in the Strand opened about 1830 and was the scene of rousing Evangelical worship. Spurgeon preached there for some years. Not until 1857 were informal Anglican services held there so it could not have been these to which The Record referred.

(53)The Record, founded in 1828 by a group which included John Henry Newman, was the earliest religious newspaper, appearing twice and even three times a week. The quotation is evidently a poor example of the paper's capacity for virulence. Cf. Religion in the Victorian Era L.E.Elliott-Binns. Lutterworth 3rd Impression 1964. p.332f.

(54)Op.cit.p.328. An interesting study would be the extent to which the hymns that were sung encouraged the poor to feel 'at home' in church especially such hymns as celebrated the building itself. Such a hymn as, 'We love the place, O God', does not actually call the church a home, and Cowper's, 'Jesus, where'er Thy people meet', uses the word only for the departure of the congregation who 'going take Thee to their home.' The stress was perhaps elsewhere such as, 'There is a blessed home, Beyond this land of woe' or, more positively, 'Jerusalem, my happy home, Name ever dear to me'.

(55)Ibid. p.329.

(56)Ibid. p.332.

(57)Such a hint echoes the warnings of, for example, Bennett and Mann. Cf. Ch.III, Priestly Initiatives, p.75; Ch.IV, External Pressures p.98.

(58)This is not surprising. Stanley (Bishop of Norwich 1837-49) had advanced social views. He advocated a Christian version of Owen's village communities, and did this at a meeting in Exeter Hall in 1846. His vision never materialised.

(59)Lord Shaftesbury(1801-85)did not make this cause a first charge upon his humanitarian endeavours, but in his diary for Easter Day 1843 he records his abhorrence of the pew system unambiguously, and gives a picturesque description of it at work. The little church which he attended during his holiday he found 'choked with high gawky boxes that they call pews, the common people are fairly elbowed out; the gentry and middle classes sit as if they were packed for security.' In this latter point there may be a suggestion that the occupiers of

of pews were prepared to accept discomfort as the price of their pre-eminence. However congested their own accommodation may be it is imperative that they do not overflow into those areas where their inferiors are worshipping. Shaftesbury's opposition rests on both aesthetic and social grounds. He continues, 'I do dislike pews, they are always ungainly, and, in parish churches unjust.' Later he makes clear why he specifies parish churches. 'There may be something to be said in respect of proprietary chapels or other places of worship built not for the masses but for private accommodation'. Even here his approval is somewhat guarded. But he concedes that the financial factor rules out the abolition of the system, for pews have become 'indispensable in many places for the maintenance of the clergyman; they are a vile, painful, and only source of revenue.' The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury KG Edwin Hodder. Cassell 1887. Vol.I, p.490.

(60) Cf. Ch. IV, External Pressures p.102f.

(61) ~~Op.~~ op.cit. p.330.

(62) Cf. Ch. II Episcopal Concern 38 ff.

(63) ~~Op.~~ op.cit. p.80.

(64) Cf. Ch. IV, External Pressures pp.100f, 107(24).

(65) ~~Op.~~ op.cit. p.339. St John 15.16.

(66) These disturbances in the 1850's chiefly centred on St George's-in-the-East and St Barnabas', Pimlico, and were marked by extreme disruption of worship and some violence against the person. Though popular in the sense that masses of people took part in them, it is certain that not all of the participants were motivated by indignation at the 'Romanising' tendencies of the clergy who were targeted. Cf. A History of the English Church in the Nineteenth Century F. Warre Cornish. MacMillan 1910. Pt. II Ch. 1. Chadwick op.cit. Pt. I, pp495-501. Bowen op.cit. p.293ff.

(67) Cf. Ch. III, Priestly Initiatives p.84 (15).

(68) Cf. Ch. VIII, The Long Twilight, p.228.

(69) Cf. Ch. III, Priestly Initiatives p.50ff.

(70) Church of England Year Book Report of the Incorporated Free and Open Church Association for 1882 p.153. (This was the first year of publication of the Year Book, in which the reports are printed).

(71) George Hull Bowers (1794-1872), Dean of Manchester (1847-71). He began his crusade in 1851 and two literary contributions of his to the subject were published: a sermon preached in 1855, Open Churches with Endowments Preferable to Pew Rents and an address given in 1865, Pew Rents Injurious to the Church. He was instrumental in establishing St Alban's, Cheetwood, Manchester, which was consecrated in 1874. Bowers thought the problem

of the freedom of seating was confined to churches erected after 1818. Sandford acknowledged the dean's part in the campaign but corrected his misconception in his Bampton Lectures. Op.cit. p.338.

(72)Cf. Ch. IV, Collective Disquiet, p.134(58).

(73)Year Book p.153. Another local body was the Liverpool and Birkenhead Open Church Association founded in 1862. Henry Clark, the founder, was put forward as the free church candidate for the churchwardenship of Liverpool Parish Church in 1866. He and his colleague got slightly more votes than their opponents but were not elected as Sturges Bourne's Act gave more weight to those who paid a higher Church Rate. Free and Open Church Chronology 1862,1866.

(74)Year Book p.154.

(75)Cf. Ch. IV, External Pressures p.103.

(76)Op.cit. p.154.

(77)Ibid. p.154.

(78)Ibid. p.154.

(79)Cf. Ch. V, Collective Disquiet p.115ff.

(80)Op.cit. p.56.

(81)Year Book p.154.

(82)Ibid. p.155.

(83)Ibid. Report for 1886 p.143f.(Year Book 1887).

(84)Ibid. p.143f.

(85)Year Book p.118.

(86)Free and Open Church Chronology

(87)Cf. Ch.I,The Problem Arises, p.16(29).

(88)Herbert Hensley Henson(1863-1947).Bishop of Hereford 1918-20, of Durham 1920-39. His doctrinal position especially with regard to the Virgin Birth caused protests when he was nominated to Hereford. He went from a fellowship of All Souls' to become vicar of the working class parish of Barking.

(89)Year Book 1895. p.637.

(90)Year Book 1883. p.726.

(91)Strictly a verger is one who carries a 'verge' before a dignitary. In a parish church he would almost certainly have been of the working class so his democratic allocation is not surprising. But this particular task is properly that of the church-



wardens as officers of the bishop. Cf. Ch. V, Collective Disquiet p.111ff.

(92) Cf. Ch. V, Collective Disquiet p.121ff.

(93) Year Book 1887 p.144.

(94) Cf. Ch. V, Collective Disquiet p.121ff Petitions in favour of the Bill were drawn up throughout the country and presented to parliament by the Association. Year Book 1883 p. 155.

(95) Cf. Ch. VII, Rebuff in the Lords, p.192ff.

(96) Year Book 1883 p.155.

(97) Year Book 1887 p.144.

(98) This aversion to the invoking of Parliamentary aid seems consistent with the reaction of many Churchmen to the Gorham Judgment of 1850, and the Public Worship Regulation Act of 1874 which attempted to control the clergy after the ritual disturbances. At the end of the reign of Victoria the Church of England was far less content than in the previous century to acquiesce in the right of the civil authority to order its business.

(99) Joseph Barber Lightfoot (1828-89), Bishop of Durham 1879-89. Cf. this ch. p.183 (24). His successor at Durham, Brooke Foss Westcott, who was first president of the Christian Social Union, did not become a patron. Edward Harold Browne (1811-91), Bishop of Winchester, 1873-90, may have succeeded Tait at Canterbury in 1882 had he been younger. Arthur Wilson Thorold, who followed Browne at Winchester, also did not become a patron though he is cited approvingly in the Association's record. In 1888, when Bishop of Rochester, he said that a Church that lets the poor stand in the porch until there is room or go to a 'cold and sordid schoolroom....forfeits by her selfishness all her claim to be "the Church of the nation"'. Chronology 1888.

(100) Cf. Ch. VII, Rebuff in the Lords p.196f.

(101) 3rd Earl Nelson (1823-1913). Tractarian. Widely involved in Church affairs at every level. He was 'undoubtedly the leading lay Churchman' of Salisbury Dio. Wilts Archaeological Mag. 1914. p.118f.

(102) Year Book 1893. p.639.

(103) Year Book 1891 p.629.

(104) Year Book 1895. p.657.

(105) Year Books 1887 (sic) p.144, and 1895 p.119.

(106) Year Book 1883. p. 155.

(107) Year Book 1895. p. 118.

(108) Women are not numbered among the patrons or vice-presidents. Cf. Ch. I, The Problem Arises, p.11f Anna Barbauld, Sarah Trimmer...

(109) A Danger to the Established Church (pages unnumbered). For an opposite interpretation of the regular services see above p.183(31).

(110) Cf. Ch. V, Collective Disquiet p.134(61). Emery was a vice-president of the Free and Open Church Association.

(111) For an account of the origins of the Church Congress see Chadwick op.cit. Pt.II, p.359ff. For an example of a lecture on biblical criticism Sandford himself spoke to the the Congress at Norwich on, 'The spirit in which the Researches of learning and science should be applied to the study of the Bible.' Church Congress Report 1865 p.19ff. At the time of the Norwich meeting he also addressed a rally of the Association in the city (not recorded in the Report) on the question of free churches. Chronology 1865.

(112) The diocesan bishop always presided at Congress meetings. It was not possible to hold a meeting at Birmingham in 1867 as the Bishop of Worcester objected. Chadwick op.cit. p.362. For Wilberforce's position see Ch. V, Collective Disquiet above.

(113) Church Congress Report 1862. p.170.

(114) Ibid. p.174.

(115) Ch.IV, External Pressures p.100.

(116) Op.cit. p. 179.

(117) Sandford gave these figures for St Marylebone op.cit. p.79.

(118) Op.cit. p.116.

(119) Ibid. p.185f. Such a device evidently did not occur to Squire Paxton. Ch.III, Priestly Initiatives p.66 ff.

(120) Ibid. p.189.

(121) Ibid. p.193. Cf. Wilberforce's formula Ch. V, Collective Disquiet p. 123.

(122) Cf. Ch. VII, Rebuff in the Lords p.194.

(123) Op.cit. p.196.

(124) In the official biography of Wilberforce no reference is made to the pew question either when this Congress is reported or when he speaks in Convocation. Life of the Right Reverend Samuel Wilberforce DD R.G.Wilberforce.Murray 1882. But Standish Meacham refers to his feelings and pronouncements. See Ch. V, Collective Disquiet p.141f. He also quotes from the bishop's speech on the subject at the Congress meeting. Meacham op.cit. p.132.

(125) Op.cit.p.199.

(126)Church Congress Report 1863. pp.37 and 42.

(127)Cf. p.160 above.

(128)Op.cit. p.133.

(129)St Philip's was the first pew-rented church in London to be made free. This was in 1859. Chronology p.32f.

(130)Ch. I, The Problem Arises, p.13.

(131)I Corinthians 9.7,11,13. Galatians 6.6. These texts suggest that at least some part of the offertory may be used for the support of the clergy. Though primarily the offertory constituted, 'Alms for the Poor' (rubric), also received were 'other devotions of the people' which could be understood as being for the maintenance of the ministry. Cf. A New History of the Book of Common prayer Procter and Frere. MacMillan 1902. p.482. Note 1.

(132)Op.cit.p.132ff.

(133)Ibid. p.140.

(134)Ibid. p.146.

(135)Ibid. p.146f.

(136)Cf. Ch.VII,Rebuff in the Lords, p.198.

(137)Report of the Meeting of Working Men at the Church Congress 1866. See p.180 below.

(138)Ibid. p.6. Archbishop Thomson had spoken with equal force at Sheffield in the previous year. 'I don't know why we should take any human or personal distinctions into the church with us, and therefore, I give my voice certainly for having all the people who come to worship God put on an equal footing...My interest in church building would greatly diminish, nay, it would almost disappear, if it was to be used to keep up these distinctions in the house of God.' Chronology 1866 reporting from the Manchester Guardian of January 20, 1866. This underlines how painful for him must have been the letter he wrote to the churchwardens of St Mary's, Beverley.

(139)Ibid. p.15. 'His appointment to the deanery of Chichester in 1859 was in many ways a move towards retirement, and it is significant that his major work there was the publication of his monumental Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury.' Leeds and the Oxford Movement Nigel Yates. Thoresby Society 1975. p.18.

(140)Ibid. p.21.

(141)Cf. Ch. IV External Pressures, p.100.

(142)Op.cit. p.21.

(143)Church Congress Report 1873. pp.288,291f. Though sixteen years lay between, it was assumptions like Gurney's that the future Bishop Westcott had in mind in a speech at Cambridge in 1889. 'Quite lately we have heard the Church of England spoken of as the Church of the educated and the wealthy. It will never accept such a title. It is the Church of the people; and free and open churches are the sign of its mission.'  
Chronology 1889. p.79.

(144)Ibid. p.296. Dean Close was also an Evangelical.

(145)Ibid. p.299.

(146)Ibid. p.302.

(147)The Bill was far from revolutionary: the removal of square proprietary pews, the abolition of illegal pew rents, and the strict application of the statutory provision for a proportion of free seats in new churches. Cf. Ch.VII, Rebuff in the Lords.

(148)Cf. p.167 above.

(149)Church Congress Report 1886 p.437.

(150)Ibid. p.445.

(151)Ibid. p.461ff.

(152)Ibid. p.465.

(153)Cf. Ch. V, Collective Disquiet p.112f. The problems caused by 'the season' were known in Cheltenham in 1775. In May of that year the bishop was petitioned for a faculty to build a gallery in St. Mary's Church by some of the 'principal residents' of the Spa 'otherwise our families and lodgers in the season cannot be accommodated with the convenience of hearing the Word of God there'. Quoted from Cheltenham's Churches and Chapels Steven Blake. Cheltenham Council 1979. p.2.

(154)Cf. Ch. V, Collective Disquiet p.124.

(155)Cf. p.175 above.

(156)Op.cit. p.465.

(157)Ibid. p.469.

(158)Cf. Ch. VIII, The Long Twilight, p.227.

(159)In 1881 fifteen such sermons were planned. Times September 15, 1881.

(160)For the silence of women in the Church Congress see Chadwick op.cit. Pt.II, p.362.

VII  
REBUFF IN THE LORDS

In 1882, as we have seen, the Free and Open Church Association was jubilant. The Second Reading of the Parish Churches Bill in the House of Commons showed that it had 'thus accepted the principle of a measure which affirms the Common Law right of the English people to the free use of their churches'.(1) However, the circumstances of that triumph would, in fact, seem to have warranted only moderate jubilation. For on March 22, 1882 'a house almost empty except for supporters of the Association agreed at 2a.m. to a second reading.'(2) Almost four years later to the day, March 16, 1886, the Bill appeared in the House of Lords. To its Second Reading there the Association responded with satisfaction tempered by the realities of the achievement.(3)

In the higher chamber the Second Reading was moved by William Magee, Bishop of Peterborough, a patron of the Association.(4) The auguries were not discouraging for though the peers were initially 'very indifferent and talkative' he 'spoke for exactly an hour, and sat down with a fair amount (for the Lords) of applause.'(5) By today's standards the bishop's speech was of formidable duration, but it repays study for it carries a number of illuminating and even original points.

Magee assured the House that it was no revolutionary proposal that he brought before them and feared that this very restraint may cause the Bill to 'lack some interest in your Lordships' eyes'.(6) For it only sought to give effect to the recommendations of a 'large and representative Committee' which 'sat as long as 28 years ago.' Its object was to re-affirm that parish churches should be free for the use of parishioners in accordance

with 'the common law of England from time immemorial'. And the right to such use, in the words of the Committee, 'cannot lawfully be defeated by the permanent appropriation of a particular person.'(7)

As a minister of a proprietary chapel(8) Magee recalled that he had 'sold' his sermons each Sunday. But he realised that such an establishment could never fulfil the vocation of the Church of England. 'It could not evangelise the masses; it could not reach the poor.' And should the neighbourhood in which it was situated become too destitute to maintain it, then it had to close and move elsewhere.(9)

It appears that for Magee a law is necessary because, at least in respect of their right to a seat, the poor will never stand up for themselves. He gave a particularly unpleasant example of the selfishness of pew-owners meeting with no resistance. During a mission to a parish they had objected to the use of the church in the evenings. 'The poor man was thus practically excluded from his parish church'. He responded thus passively and did neither 'elbow nor cringe'. The poor took their places on narrow benches from where they might catch 'a sentence or two of an eloquent sermon on the text, "To the poor the Gospel is preached" '. No wonder the lament was often heard, 'The parish church is for gentlefolks, not for the likes of us.'(10) In these circumstances the role of the churchwardens was crucial. They did not always act on behalf of all the parishioners and Magee seems to imply that as they were appointed by the rate-payers they favoured that class to which they themselves belonged. Though he did not wish to deprive them of their right to assign seats they should be champions of the poor. 'Rank

and wealth could very well take care of themselves'.(11) In his interpretation of the duties of the churchwardens there are resonances with the debates in Convocation of 1860 and 1867. There also the obligation of the churchwardens to seat the poor was stressed. But the prevailing voice of Wilberforce emphasised the category of 'quality' as the criterion when they performed this function.(12)

Magee disclosed to the House another deterrent to allowing the dispossessed to occupy pews which their owners were not using. Having installed their own hassock or cushion they did not want others to 'press' these aids to personal comfort. Here in church is an offshoot of that general anxiety about the consequences even of indirect contact with others of indifferent hygienic habits.(13) The Bishop of Peterborough wondered why the use of public railway carriages gave rise to no such anxiety. And there were these seats of the very chamber in which he was speaking: these also were 'pressed' by the anatomy of various persons yet without trepidation. Why, then, dread such a happening in church? We may tax the bishop with some naïveté. The railways provided three classes for their passengers so that the 'pressing' which the traveller inherited would have been inflicted by people of his own rank, and likewise with regard to the communal facilities of Westminster. In fact the complaint was not about equals, and that no speaker drew attention to this obvious flaw does not mean that Magee's analogy was accepted. Such reticence is more likely to have stemmed from an unwillingness to indicate an aspect of the matter that may have caused profound offence probably within, but certainly beyond, the chamber.(14) Another anxiety regarding devotional equipment, Magee rapidly disposed of: a little box would suffice to secure one's Bible and other

volumes against the infringement of the Eighth Commandment.(15)

Then there were those who sought the construction of 'churches suitable for the poor' which could consist of cheap materials and be located in working-class areas. As far as the quality of the building was concerned, Magee argued that it was precisely the opposite that was needed. Those whose daily lives were spent amid squalor and ugliness are those with most claim to have their spirits raised by an experience of visible glory.(16) And as to the proposal for separate buildings, he issued a warning. 'It was not a wise nor a safe thing that wealth and rank and respectability should have one place of worship on Sunday, and that the poor should have another. One of the sorest and saddest evils of 19th Century life was the ever-widening chasm which separated class from class and rank from rank.' This chasm was not caused by the separation on Sunday, but 'it was enhanced and increased by it.' Against such division one could not overestimate the healing and uniting influence of a common sanctuary for rich and poor, in which they would feel, in the highest sense of it, their religious equality, and that there was one place on this side of the grave where rich and poor might meet together.'(17) So in the old parish churches (built before the Church Building Act 1818) the Bill sought the removal of square proprietary pews, and the abolition of illegal pew rents. In the new churches it sought the strict application of the law regarding the provision of free seats.

Having sought to alarm the House with the spectre of civil unrest, Magee ended on a note of encouragement. He wanted to make 'the Church of England what she was more and more becoming and what she in theory desired to be in fact - the Church of the



people and the Church of the poor.'(18)

The speech of Lord Grimthorpe, who followed Magee, with a manner 'cool, able, sarcastic, and contemptuous' caused the bishop to fear that 'all was up with the Bill and with me.'(19)Grimthorpe reported that many clergy had written asking him to oppose the Bill. He did not explain the reason for the request. But it is likely that some incumbents had accepted benefices believing that they were entitled to pew rents which, in the case of old churches, the Bill would cancel, and, in the case of new churches, reduce if the designated free area was encroached upon. Though some of his correspondents may have desired the division of the classes on social grounds, others may have been prompted by genuine financial anxiety for their families and themselves.

Lord Grimthorpe accused the Association of being utterly wrong in the statement inserted in the preamble to the Bill that 'every parish church was for the free use in common of all parishioners'. He exposed, as Mann did(20), the ambiguity of the word 'free'. It was rightly used only as opposed to rented: it did not mean that people could sit anywhere they wished. As 'free' in this latter sense was the basis of the proposed legislation, the Bill should be dropped. Curiously, he added that as an ecclesiastical lawyer he 'had some suspicion of Ecclesiastical Bills, as it had been his business to see to their administration.' He proposed that the Second Reading should be delayed for six months.(21)

The division in the Free and Open Church Association is again apparent when Magee rejoices that Grimthorpe having made 'mincemeat of the "free and open" ' was'evidently put out a good deal by finding that I was not their mouthpiece'.(22) His wish to distance himself from that body is also implicit in his

description of the contribution of the president, who spoke next. 'Then Nelson made a feeble speech which rather hurt than helped me.'(23) That speech does not seem to have deviated greatly from the spirit of Magee's. Earl Nelson believed that if the House passed the bill it would show the nation that the peers 'wished to see in the House of God all class distinctions removed.' And he argued that the 'testimony of working men showed that the system of pew rents in church, although a portion was kept for the people, had done more than anything else to alienate the people from the Church of their fathers'.(24) Further discouragement for the bishop was Earl Granville's disclosure that though he had come to the chamber to support Magee, he had been dissuaded from that path by Grimthorpe.(25) However, the Earl of Selborne(26), backed the Second Reading though he had not noticed the exclusion of the poor that was alleged. He linked his support to the extension of the franchise which gave 'stimulus' to union between the classes. (27) Magee detected an element of reproach in Selborne's remarks(28) though heartened by his intention to vote for the Bill. But the Lord Chancellor, Lord Herschell, 'damning it with faint praise' (29), alarmed him. Herschell was not convinced that the powers of churchwardens would be unaffected and feared that any limitation of their right to assign seats would make things worse for the poor.(30)

Magee then took emergency action. 'I poked up Cantuar to recommend a Second Reading and Select Committee'.(31) That Edward Benson, its most distinguished patron, had to be thus jolted to his feet indicates further the reservations within the Association as to this particular strategy. On the one hand the Archbishop did not share the Lord Chancellor's confidence

that churchwardens would prove friends of the poor worshipper. He instanced a church with which he was acquainted which had been restored by the efforts of the whole community which it served. But the churchwardens had assigned the seats to 'small farmers' and other ratepayers to the detriment of the working-class population. On the other hand he did not favour the Bill in its intention to abolish pew rents for 'many churches in towns without endowments depended on pew rents.'<sup>(32)</sup>

Lord Grimthorpe's amendment which would send the Bill to a Committee for information was approved without a division<sup>(33)</sup> and in these circumstances the Second Reading succeeded. In fact that signified little for the Bill was never enacted. The statistical return which the Committee produced four years later was the only significant outcome of the reference to Parliament.

In seeking for the cause of the virtual failure in the Upper House, the sparse attendance of the lords spiritual must be weighed. Lord Grimthorpe both drew attention to it and offered an explanation. The bishops were pre-occupied with their forthcoming ordinations.<sup>(34)</sup> Did this expression of the renewal of the episcopal ministry in the 19th century cause to be aborted a development of great pastoral significance? However, given the reticent and ambivalent leadership of the Archbishop of Canterbury in the debate, it is doubtful whether there would have been an overwhelming surge of support from that quarter. Moreover, we note that the absentees included such overt critics of the pew system as Thomson of York, Temple of London, Lightfoot of Durham, and Browne of Winchester.<sup>(35)</sup> It seems unlikely that they would all have stayed away if they really believed that the Bill provided the right way forward in the quest for the freedom

of the nation's churches. (36)

Moreover, bishops may have been among that group, at whose existence the Association hinted in its report for 1886 and of which the Church Congress was made aware at its meeting in that year(37), who recoiled from asking the sanction of Parliament. A conviction that the Church of England, though by law established, should have more say in its own affairs had been given impetus by the controversy that followed the Gorham judgement and the Public Worship Regulation Act. Indeed, only a few months before the debate, a House of Laymen had been called into being prefiguring a widening measure of self-government for the Church in which its non-clerical members would play an increasing role.(38) In addition, could not the description of its promotion of the Parish Churches Bill as the 'most important public action of the Association in recent years'(39) possibly be construed as failure to persuade? And for a body that relied upon Scripture for its charter it might have seemed more an admission of defeat than an exhibition of strength to seek such mandatory enforcement. The argument from Common Law might well be correct, but battles of the spirit are not won until hearts are converted.

The bishops may also have been concerned about the erosion of the authority of their officers, the churchwardens. Although Magee was re-assuring on this point, the unfettered liberty of a parish church was still the consummation for which the Association worked. But if this pruning of authority was a factor that counted for the bishops we need not rate it as an unworthy hoarding of power. The Lord Chancellor had spoken of his anxiety for the less favoured worshippers if the churchwardens were so deprived; and doing so had echoed the uneasiness

that prevailed in the debates of the 1860's in the Convocation of Canterbury. (40) Perhaps we may say that the half-heartedness or the absence of episcopal patrons on that crucial day illustrates a general truth perceived in parish life and elsewhere, that however eagerly the quest for a distant ideal may unite, the mechanics of its attainment may prove the catalyst that tests and breaches that unity.

## Notes to Rebuff in the Lords

- (1) CE Year Book 1883 p.155.
- (2) Inglis op.cit. p.53.
- (3) Cf. Ch.VI, Frontal Attacks p.166f.
- (4) William Connor Magee (1821-1891). Bishop of Peterborough 1868-91, Archbishop of York 1891. Great orator and controversialist. Though of Evangelical sympathies he opposed the ritual prosecutions.
- (5) The Life and Correspondence of William Connor Magee John Cotter MacDonnell. Isbister 1896. p.227.
- (6) Hansards Parliamentary Debates House of Lords 3rd series. e.923.
- (7) Ibid. c.924. Cf. Ch.IV, External Pressures p.99ff.
- (8) A proprietary chapel was a place of worship outside the parochial system. It was a private venture. The money with which to build it was raised by selling shares in the chapel. Each shareholder (or proprietor) receiving seats within the building according to the number of shares purchased. They could either be used by the proprietor or rented out to other worshippers. Some of the seats were allocated to the minister to pay his stipend.
- (9) Op.cit. c.925.
- (10) Ibid. c.927f.
- (11) Ibid. c.929f.
- (12) Cf. e.g. Ch. V, Collective Disquiet pp.111,128.
- (13) Cf. Ch.VI, Frontal Attacks p.172f. A curate from Stepney told the Select Committee that if the pew system were abolished 'the dirt of some of the people, and the fleas that we see, would prevent many persons going'. Parliamentary Papers Select Committee, House of Lords 1857-58 Appendix s. Evidence of T.J.Rowsell p.634. For the problems at the Brompton Oratory see Chadwick op.cit. Pt.I, p.330. Leslie Paul, in a reference to our subject, sees the issue of hygiene as a significant obstacle to the freeing of the pews. For the Victorian upper classes the 'poor were a mysterious, hostile group, full of envy. They were sexually dangerous. Probably they stank, spat and had fleas, they might be helped but it was better not to have them sitting beside you. These fears were one reason why the campaign to get rid of pew rents....took half a century to complete.' A Church by Daylight Leslie Paul. Geoffrey Chapman 1973. p.91. Cf. also, Ch.VIII, p.250 (12).
- (14) Defenders of the system seem to have been very coy about mentioning this aspect to fortify their case. Magee's allusion seems to have been the most public reference to this delicate matter.

(15) An ancillary drawback to freedom of a similar kind had come to the notice of the vicar of Marton-cum-Grafton in Yorkshire. 'One of the objections brought against free and open Churches, and which to my mind carries considerable weight, is the inconvenience of carrying one's books backwards and forwards every time. If the ante-room be provided with a book closet, or series of small cupboards, this objection would, I think, be met.' The Arrangement of Parish Churches John R. Lunn. Yorkshire Architectural Society 1884. p.19. The Society to which Lunn read his paper on July 3, 1884, was in 'union' with the Cambridge Camden Society and its members would, therefore, support the abolition of pew rents. The Cambridge Movement James White. Cambridge 1961. p.230.

(16) The point has recently been reiterated by Geoffrey Rowell. Alluding to the donnish origins of the Oxford Movement, he continues, 'Decorous restraint and academic discourse were alike out of place in the slums. Mystery and movement, colour and ceremonial were more powerful. The sacramental sign could speak more strongly than the written word. But if these were the characteristics of worship in the town parishes influenced by the Oxford Movement, that worship impressed through the devotion and holiness of life and pastoral concern of the priests who led that worship.' And again, though the value of auricular confession was stressed, 'The ritualist slum priests, working in what they rightly saw to be missionary situations, were conscious both of the need for greater imagination in worship, and of proclaiming the Catholic faith in a visible and striking way.' The Vision Glorious Oxford 1983. pp.116,128.

(17) Op.cit. c. 934, Cf. Ch.IV, External Pressures, p.96, Mann on 'ostensibly on equal terms' and Wilberforce Ch.V, Collective Disquiet, Appendix p.136ff.

(18) Ibid. c.935, Cf. Earl Nelson's speech to the Church Congress Ch. VI, Frontal Attacks p.175f.

(19) Life p.227. Magee describes his own speech at the opening of the House of Laity as 'bitter and sarcastic' (p.223) and in DNB his 'withering power of sarcasm' is mentioned. Lord Grimthorpe (1816-1905) was Chancellor of the Diocese of York. Alarmed by the spread of ritual he became president of the Protestant Churchmen's Alliance. According to DNB, 'his powers of sarcasm and assertive manner stood him in better stead than his knowledge of the law'.

(20) Cf. Ch.IV, External Pressures p.106(5).

(21) Op.cit. c.935.

(22) Life p.227. Magee was no slavish disciple of the Association. Of the outcome of the debate he reported, 'Of course, on the other hand, I incur the wrath of the "free and open" whom I fairly flung over, and without flinging over whom I would never have carried the second reading.' Life p.228.

(23) Life p.228.

(24) Op.cit.c.940.

(25) Ibid.c.941.

(26) Roundell Palmer, Earl of Selborne (1812-95). High Churchman. Lord Chancellor 1872-74, 1880-85. The month before the debate he had been elected first chairman of the House of Laymen. Though ranging over an enormous spectrum of Church affairs in which he was involved he does not mention this debate or the Bill in his/biography, Memorials Personal and Political. MacMillan. 1898.

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(27) Op.cit.c.943. He was much involved in the Franchise Bill of the Gladstone administration, in which he was Lord Chancellor, which extended the vote to more men in the towns and the country districts. It became law in 1884. Cf. Ch.VI, Frontal Attacks p.169 where the franchise is cited by an essayist in the Association's competition.

(28) Selborne, according to Magee, 'strongly supported the Bill, while, more suo, pharisaically rebuking both me and Grimthorpe.' Life p.228.

(29) Life p.228.

(30) Op.cit.c.944.

(31) Life p.228.

(32) Op.cit.c.946f. The Bill only sought to abolish illegal pew rents, and to ensure that the area declared free was strictly upheld as such. Benson doubtless felt for those clergy who were in danger of a loss of stipend if the number of lettings were reduced.

(33) A few days later when engaged in drawing up a list of peers to serve on the Committee, Magee 'was surprised to find how many peers were in favour of my Bill and would have voted for it had it gone to a division'. Life p.229.

(34) Op.cit.c.936. For examples of the negligent attitude of bishops towards candidates for ordination at the beginning of our period see Church and People 1789-1889 S.C. Carpenter. SPCK 1959 edition Pt.2, p.255f. Apart from the Archbishop and Magee the only other bishop to appear was George Ridding of Southwell, and at the beginning of the day, 'Prayers were read by the Lord Chancellor, no Bishop being present.' Journal of House of Lords 16<sup>th</sup> Martii 1886.p.95.

(35) We have quoted Archbishop Thomson's speech to the Church Congress in 1866 (Ch. VI, Frontal Attacks p.475); and his speech at Sheffield in the previous year p.490 (138). Lightfoot and Browne were patrons of the Association (p.467). In 1885, the year before the debate, Temple had made a novel assault on the pew system. Referring to a case at All Saints' Church, Notting Hill he declared, 'I do not myself object to seat-rents, provided the free seats occupy the best parts of the church. Justice requires that people who like to secure their seats shall be contented with an inferior one. But it is best that the seats shall be free if we can afford it.' Chronology 1885.

(36) Nor would the snow have deterred them. Life p.227. However, on June 21, 1886 Magee records, 'To my dismay, I found myself the sole bishop in the House and no less than four ecclesiastical Bills coming in.' p.231.



(37) Cf. Ch. VI, Frontal Attacks p.178ff.

(38) Diocesan Conferences in which clergy and laity gathered to confer not only on matters of religious, but also of general social and moral concern, originated at Ely in 1866 and by the 1880's all English dioceses had them except for London and Worcester. Robert Moberly, Bishop of Salisbury, was, however, the first bishop to organise the Conference on a careful representative basis with only a small ex-officio membership. This was in 1871 (when it was called a Synod, though it included laity) and its leading lay member was Earl Nelson, president of the Free and Open Church Association. (Cf. Ch. VI, Frontal Attacks p.188(101) ). Moberly was a patron of the Association, and at a meeting of his Synod in 1876 he remarked significantly that though the building of new churches was a 'great work' there was a 'greater work yet - and a more difficult work by far - remains to be done: to open the church freely and really to the people'. He went on to observe that this was a 'very unpopular' thing to say. We surmise that he meant that the building of new churches was fairly smooth and uncontroversial activity compared with the task of repudiating class divisions whether in old or in newly erected buildings. Chronology 1876.

(39) Year Book 1883. p.155.

(40) Cf. Ch. V, Collective Disquiet p.111ff.

## Appendix to Rebuff in the Lords

### Return, Free Seats in Churches(1)

The only tangible outcome to the debate of 1886 was a massive statistical exercise. The Committee appointed by the Lords endeavoured to discover, in those churches which had 'no Pews or Sittings Rented', the degree of assignment or appropriation for which no compulsory charge was made. These amounted to 10,168 and included those constructed before and those constructed after the Church Building Act of 1818. This figure shows that by this time, 1886-1890, some forty percent of Anglican churches still had rented pews.(2)

The Return which covers 361 pages does not offer any analysis of, or comment on, the information provided. However, it is of great interest in that it shows first, that in nearly all such churches some kind of privileged seating prevails, and, second, that such seats, if unoccupied by those for whom they are intended, may be used by any worshipper when the service begins. Of even more interest are the remarks which some incumbents added to their enquiry forms and which are recorded by the Committee. The clergy were asked six questions: first, whether the population of the parish is largely poor; second, the number of inhabitants; third, the number of free sittings; the fourth column of the questionnaire is headed 'Reserved Free' and if this figure is subtracted from the previous question the answer to the fifth is obtained, namely, how many seats are appropriated or assigned (without payment, of course). The sixth and last question enquires whether seats are 'thrown open' when the service begins.(3)

The writer sought out the information provided about

the six churches he has served in his ministry. St Giles', Wishford Magna and St Andrew's, South Newton, two rural parishes on the edge of Salisbury Plain, both received grants from the Incorporated Church Building Society in 1861 for re-building, and to each permission was given for the churchwardens to assign seats as they thought fit 'suitable provision being made for the poorer inhabitants.'<sup>(4)</sup> The churchwardens of Wishford did not avail themselves/for any of their 200 sittings/of this permission, but those at South Newton assigned 'some' of their 250 sittings. Of the 900 sittings in All Saints', Brenchley, a village in the Weald of Kent, 385 were assigned to the occupants of certain houses in the parish. Likewise at St Michael's, Sittingbourne, an industrial town in north Kent straddling Watling Street, half of its 650 seats were assigned to the owners of particular properties but only while they were actually in residence. The parish church of Croydon in Surrey had spaces available for a congregation of 1400, four hundred of which were appropriated but these only for Sunday mornings. St Luke's, Maidenhead, in Berkshire, is not mentioned for pews there were rented and the incumbent received 20 per cent of his stipend from them until the Second World War.<sup>(5)</sup> In all four churches the reserved seats were available to anyone after the service had begun: to Wishford, of course, the question did not apply as no restrictions whatever were imposed.<sup>(6)</sup>

Many of the comments of the responding incumbents show their hostility to the pew system. The vicar of Abbotsbury in Dorset claims that since all sittings were made free (by which he clearly means neither charged for nor appropriated) in 1886, congregations are larger than they were before.<sup>(7)</sup> His experience is confirmed by the contrary testimony of the rector of Aldridge

in Staffordshire who finds appropriated seats 'a great hindrance to attendance.'<sup>(8)</sup> The parishioners of Ambleside suffer from faculty pews (granted as a reward for some past benefaction to the church) on the legality of which privilege the vicar casts doubt.<sup>(9)</sup> The squire of Toddington in Bedfordshire has his own pew, but the rector will ensure that he will not bequeath it to his family, for the right will cease at his death.<sup>(10)</sup> From Gloucestershire the vicar of Tidenham with Tutshill laments, 'All the chief people have seats which are often not used for weeks or months together, while other people are not allowed to go into them: this is the fault of the churchwardens.' Though at St Mark's, Swindon, there are 400 appropriated sittings the system is apparently obsolescent for there have been 'no new allotments for the past 6 years.'<sup>(11)</sup> An Act of 1805 authorising the rebuilding of the parish church of Lewes in Sussex granted faculty pews to those who had subscribed to the project.<sup>(12)</sup> But now, some ninety years later, the rector appraises that grateful provision somewhat differently. 'As this is an ancient parish church, the common law right of all parishioners to a seat has been infringed by a private Act of Parliament.'<sup>(13)</sup> Likewise the vicar of Fordington in Dorset believes that appropriation 'tends to keep the poor away from the church.' And he goes on, 'I would like to see churchwardens forbidden to assign any seat formore that one service at a time.'<sup>(14)</sup>

Incumbents who show any support for the system do so on economic grounds except, perhaps, for the curious case of the rector of Llangyniew in Wales, where all the seats are free. He, however, suggests that the pew system should apply in all new churches as it has served the Nonconformists so well. Presumably

noting the flourishing Bethels in the valleys of the Principality, he finds that thus people 'take a greater interest in their places of worship.'(15)

The abolition, in 1868, of the compulsory Church Rate doubtless caused financial difficulty in some parishes. There was no provision in law, however, forbidding some encouragement to those who accepted a voluntary impost. So at Tunstall-cum-Dunningworth in Suffolk 20 sittings were assigned to such rate-payers,(16) while at Nuthall in Nottinghamshire the rector reports that, 'The expenses of divine service are defrayed by a voluntary rate which is paid by those having seats appropriated to them.'(17) This seems a distinction without a difference; pew rents are virtually paid in the form of a voluntary Church Rate. A less formal arrangement obtains at Kingsland in Herefordshire where the rector declares that persons to whom seats are assigned are expected 'to contribute to the church's expenses.'(18) There are no pew rents at the parish church of Sutton in Surrey, but the rector adds regretfully that they are necessary at the 'iron church' in order to pay the curate and to save up for a permanent daughter church. 'It would be impossible to maintain it free.'(19) So four hundred of its 900 seats are let.

The findings of the Committee hold the promise - to adapt Mann's memorable phrase - that it is at least possible for 'working men' to 'enter our religious structures without having pressed upon their notice some memento of inferiority.'(20) But the system is far from moribund. Some forty years after Mann 60 per cent of churches no longer charged for seats. But as even in this proportion of the whole most churches practised some

kind of reservation, then the plebeian worshipper is still very likely to encounter some threat to his self-esteem.

A real advance, however, was that seats unoccupied by those for whom they had been reserved are available to others once the service has begun.(21) Thus those spaces, empty because of the possessiveness of their owners, at which Bishop Howley had tilted as far back as 1818(22) were in decline. But the Committee did not enquire whether such a new spirit was abroad in the forty percent of churches where seats could still be purchased. The system, though chastened, crosses the boundary into the century of the common man.

Notes to Return, Free Seats in Churches

(1)Parliamentary Papers 1890(XV).

(2)Ibid. p.1. In 1881 there were 16,300, and in 1891, 16,956 Anglican places of worship. Religion and Society in Industrial England A.D. Gilbert. Longmans 1976. p.28.

(3)Ibid. p.2.

(4)From a board in the vestry at South Newton and a framed document in the vestry at Wishford Magna recording the Society's donations.

(5)In 1938 the living was worth £364 per annum of which £75 came from pew rents. Crockford 1938. Ironically the incumbent from 1914 until 1947 was C.E.M. Fry, who was a son of T.C.Fry who opened Lincoln Cathedral to visitors when he became Dean and wrote, 'pew rents are another obstacle to popular influence wherever they exist; scarcely less so are seats appropriated on any ground save that of equality between all parishioners. It may appear right enough to secure the claims of parishioners against strangers: but then the parishioners whose claims are thus secured are not often the poor but the well-to-do.' Essays in Aid of the Reform of the Church ed. C.Gore. Murray 1898. p. 309. Cf. Conclusion, p.252.

(6)Op.cit. pp.348,234,46,284,90.

(7)Ibid. p.2.

(8)Ibid. p.6.

(9)Ibid. p.8.

(10)Ibid. p.318.

(11)Ibid. p.316,306.

(12)Ibid. p.186. In law this seems a questionable proceeding even at the time. 'A faculty for a pew can only properly be granted in connection with the occupation of a particular house within a parish. In former times such faculties were granted with some freedom, especially to parishioners who were liberal contributors to a building or restoration fund.' And the reason why they should only be granted with caution whatever the circumstances 'is that given by Sir John Nicholl, namely that if a faculty is once issued it is good and valid even against the ordinary himself.' (The case cited is that of Fuller v. Lane 1825). Cripps Law Relating to Church and Clergy Sweet & Maxwell 1921 p. 386f.

(13)'Ancient' sc. before the Church Building Act 1818.

(14)Op.cit. p. 122.

(15) Ibid. p. 198. The belief that having a place of one's own in church strengthens allegiance to it was cited before the Select Committee of 1856. Cf. Ch. IV p. 100 above. Booth records, at the end of the century, the comments of two priests, the freeing of whose churches had been marked by a decline in congregational loyalty. One spoke of those who now 'go to church without committing themselves' and 'like to get religion for nothing and for that reason prefer open churches.' The other testified that 'the working-men aimed at do not stream in; and church-goers wandering increases and income suffers.' Life and Labour of the People in London Charles Booth. MacMillan 1902. 3rd Ser. p. 38.

(16) Ibid. p. 322.

(17) Ibid. p. 238.

(18) Ibid. p. 172.

(19) Ibid. p. 304.

(20) Cf. Ch. IV. External Pressures p. 95.

(21) The question of when a service has actually begun may have posed a problem sometimes. When William Temple became vicar of St James's, Piccadilly in 1914, he found that pew tenants allowed others into unoccupied seats, but only after Venite had been sung. This would be some five minutes into the service, so by then even the tardiest tenant could be expected to have taken up his or her rightful position. Temple persuaded the pew-holders to bring forward the point of availability to that hushed moment after the choir have taken their places. He desired a more liberal concession, but even so a few 'among the oldest and most regular attendants objected to any curtailment of their rights.' William Temple: Archbishop of Canterbury F.A. Iremonger. Oxford 1948. p. 170.

(22) Cf. Ch. II, Episcopal Concern p. 29 and, for another example p. 32 Also Ch. VI, Frontal Assaults p. 165.



VIII  
THE LONG TWILIGHT

When he embarked on the project, this writer believed that the sun had set upon the pew system with the death of the great Queen. An afterglow, perhaps, in that a re-assuring, 'Free', may still be found stencilled on book ledges in churches where the signs of an obsolete practice have not been wholly obliterated, was all the substance that he thought remained.(1) So it was until he came across the final minute books of the Association which happily survived the conflagration.(2) Thus it became clear that the present century must have some place in this enquiry.

We have seen that the action of the Association in invoking the aid of Parliament was a cause of division.(3) In fact it was a double misfortune. For it won for the Association both the reproach of wanting the sanction of legislation without the compensating, if hypothetical, advantage of actually securing it. And the end it sought was never a popular cause. It must compete with other noble endeavours of the Victorian Christian conscience. The huge missionary outreach which followed the flag of Empire, the education of the poor to meet the demands of an industrial economy, the struggle to alleviate the sufferings of women and children in mine, and factory, and field(4). These and other such causes were high concerns besides which the campaign for a seat in church, accorded without regard to wealth or rank, may seem to lack colour, and warrant but a minor place in the table of Christian priorities.

Moreover, it may have looked more like a symbol that was being pursued rather than an actual or concrete benefit. On the one hand if the seats were at last to be open to all they might not be occupied by the excluded multitude, for church

attendance was declining.(5) On the other hand what did it profit a man if, outside the building, the same old inequalities prevailed apparently countenanced by those who preached the Gospel within? And yet it is by symbols, most of all in the area of religion, that beliefs are proclaimed. For example, the prominence of the altar or of the pulpit declares belief in the primacy of the Sacrament or of the Word as the channel of divine grace.(6) So in the manner in which the congregation is disposed we may tacitly enunciate our assumptions about their standing not only in the eyes of man but of God. And the question may follow, if I treat my fellow worshippers as brothers or sisters in church, may I treat them as anything less in the relationships of everyday life? The doctrine that God became man forbids the indulgence of a purely 'spiritual' religion. The believer is challenged to care for the world. Likewise when people assemble as equal before God, that notion may escape from the sanctuary to work its will in broader places. Such questions gain a special urgency for the period which these records cover includes those four perilous years when the classes were united in a desperate struggle. As we look at these documents we shall not follow a strictly chronological order, but divide our study under five themes: 1)We extract miscellaneous items from the minutes which illustrate especially the ebb and flow of the movement;2)We observe the impact of the First World War; 3)We note the persistence of the financial implications as a deterrent to freedom; 4)We consider a possibly fatal diversion of the Association's interests; 5)We trace the last moments of the organisation.

## Ebb and Flow

Turning now to these minutes of the committee of the Association, one is impressed by the frequency with which it met. Remission is granted neither for August nor December. It is true that other Church organisations, at national level, met with the same regularity. But to gather in London each month to promote a cause to which, generally, neither clergy nor laity displayed any vehement attachment argues great conviction and moral courage.

The records begin with 1912, the same year in which the appearance of Foundations(7) troubled the theological waters, and war in the Balkans hinted at the catastrophe only two years ahead. On September 13, the date of the first entry, a complaint is noted that a church in Manchester has 'an illegal deficiency' of free seats.(8) What action, if any, is not minuted. In November it was resolved to write to the Bishop of Chester... about the question of rented pews in his diocese, but the following month it was reported that no reply had been vouchsafed. However, in January, 1913, the committee heard that Francis Boyd, the vicar, had succeeded in getting rents abolished at St Saviour's, Pimlico.(9) Then, in December, the pendulum swings again for the new church of St Mary, Addiscombe, a desirable suburb of Croydon, opens with the system imposed without any consultation of the wishes of the parishioners. The suggestion that the feelings of the residents should have been considered is interesting for the patronage was in private hands. However objectionable, the failure to consult seems formally justified.(10)

The information reaching the committee during the seventeen years for which records are available seems to have justified only moderate optimism that members would live to see

the pew system entirely eliminated. In November 1925, the news comes that five churches have been freed and that two others, St Peter Mancroft, Norwich, and St Mark's, Surbiton, will be free in the evenings. The vicar of Yatley, Hampshire, writes, in October, 1927, that he is freeing his church and this is 'thanks largely to the excellent tracts so kindly sent.'<sup>(11)</sup> In May, 1920, however, the churchwardens of Gorleston, Suffolk, had reverted to allocating seats for money,<sup>(12)</sup> and in December of the following year the committee's attention is drawn to an item in the Western Morning News that the parochial church council<sup>(13)</sup> of Liskeard, Cornwall, had actually increased its pew rents to ten shillings a year. The secretary will write to the newspaper pointing out that this amounts to more than 2½d per Sunday.

The most stubborn resistance to the Association's efforts came from Ealing in west London. The secretary wrote to the rural dean in October 1918 pointing out that an Archbishops' committee, which during the Great War had considered what steps the Church should take for the nation's spiritual welfare, had recommended that pews should be open to all. It could, of course, only be a recommendation unless or until the law was changed. The approach was apparently not fruitful for, eight years later, in July 1926, the secretary is instructed to consult the nine incumbents of pew-rented churches in the deanery and to ask them and their church councils if they would meet representatives of the Association and 'assist in a debate.'

In September the hapless secretary had to tell his colleagues that no contact had been possible with the churches in Ealing as all the priests to whom he had written were away.

As it is reasonable to attribute such a comprehensive egress to the holiday season, this itself is significant in two respects. It argues an extended vacation to which the rents of the pews contributed and, if the secretary's communication reached them and went unheeded then it suggests a dependence which the Association's activities seemed to threaten.(14) However, the secretary was exhorted to renew his efforts and arrange 'a conference on the pew question before the end of the year if practicable.' Such an encounter did not occur. It may have been because that official(15) was about to depart for an incumbency in Brighton, or because he felt that Ealing was a fortress not yet ripe for capture. Perhaps, however, the explanation he gave for his inaction to the November meeting is the whole story: there was, he reported, 'no money' to pay for such a convention. Presumably he referred to the cost of hiring a hall, the administrative expenses and the advertising of the meeting, and perhaps the fares of the speakers. Not surprisingly the rural deanery of Ealing does not appear to have offered a subsidy.

#### First World War

Human concerns that previously seemed matters of great moment may suddenly be dwarfed by the impact of a huge catastrophe. In comparison a cause which stirred the deepest passion and eager endeavour may now look trifling in the presence of events which threaten to engulf the entire established order and way of life. On the other hand war may impart a fresh sense of urgency for the attainment of the ideal. For causes which affirm the values of justice and brotherhood offer a vision of what could be when peace returns, and without such a vision a nation in arms lacks a source of inspiration.(16)

To some members of the Free and Open Church Association

the freedom of the pews must have seemed an insignificant cause compared with that freedom for which the allies were contending.(17) Indeed, they may even have wondered whether, if the war were lost, corporate worship would still be an option. However, given the continuance of civilisation, the Association's cause would increase rather than diminish in importance for the 'brave new world' of the future. For how could those officers and men who shared the camaraderie and terror of the trenches - provided they returned alive and actually went to church - again sit in social isolation from each other?

The committee met on July 16, 1914, two weeks before the outbreak of hostilities and, as if the awesome events across the Channel had distracted the members, not again until April, 1915. Then it seems that for a moment it was business as usual. A year previously the committee had expressed its concern that the new church of St Andrew, Chelsea, consecrated in 1913, was operating the pew system, and has now heard that the Bishop of London will 'take the matter in hand' when he addresses his diocesan conference.(18) However, the annual general meeting of the Association had been held as usual the previous month although 'the Revd Everard Digby who was to have spoken had gone to the front to minister to our soldiers.' For the year of the Somme there is silence. In January, 1917, however, the secretary is asked to 'get a soldier from the front to speak' at the annual general meeting.(19) This proved impossible. What did the committee have in mind in seeking such an item for the agenda? Did it calculate that the irony of stratified seating in a country united in war would be more effectively demonstrated in the person of such a visitor? Such a young man emerging from the

Ypres Salient, perhaps, or Passchendaele, into the peculiar normality of London, may have given the campaign a wider focus. The experience of fighting, and belonging to a band of brothers from all classes, a common enemy may have led him to perceive the pew system not as a trivial and isolated offence, but as symptomatic of a deep injustice which lay at the heart of society. Indeed, had the speech been delivered, some may even have suspected this devout and grave Association as a covert mouthpiece of political radicalism.(20) Later that year the committee successfully sponsored a motion in the Canterbury House of Laymen which directly introduced the war as an incentive to abolishing the pew system. It read, the secretary reported in July, 'That at the present time circumstances render it more than ever desirable that churches, whether in town or country, should be open all day and everyday for private prayer and the seats in them should be free and unappropriated.'

The question of the views of serving soldiers was raised in another form in May 1918. Harold Peile, himself a chaplain to the forces, suggested that army chaplains at home and abroad should be canvassed for their opinions. The problem, which understandably daunted the secretary, was that of finding the addresses of serving men whose whereabouts were subject to the demands of mobility and national security. In June a reply was received from the Deputy Chaplain General in France.(21) It was not possible, he explained, to ask officially for the views of chaplains; nevertheless, from information unofficially gathered, the vast majority of them 'in all parts of the field' were 'heart and soul with the Association.' However, in October, 1918, a few weeks before the Armistice, the secretary reported

a disappointing response from chaplains in the home camps: their replies were neither sufficiently numerous nor significant enough to warrant their transmission to the Archbishops.

This dichotomy of reaction is what we would expect. In the conditions of military life in Britain the established division of officers and other ranks could continue to reflect the hierarchy of the civilian world. And chaplains, as belonging to the commissioned élite, may be, if not approving of, at least acquiescent in, that arrangement. Abroad, the exigencies of battle and the enforced intimacy of life in the trenches, may foster a new awareness of human solidarity. However, caution must be the watchword. For, as we saw, the evidence was not collected with the precision of modern research techniques. As for the Association itself, it seems that, while continuing as far as possible with its work after the initial lull it recognised that war injected a fresh ingredient into the cause making its task not less but more relevant than before. So, more broadly, those four costly years, that transformed irrevocably the social fabric of the nation, doubtless hastened the decline of the system. However, the innate conservatism of an ancient institution prevented, even in that crucible, its total destruction. A journalist of the period had expected otherwise. Reporting a meeting of the Association in 1926, he comments that it might have been expected 'especially in view of the history of the last ten years that this hoary anachronism, the pew-system, would have been swept away.'<sup>(22)</sup> He thinks our thoughts before us. Nevertheless, even after another World War a remnant was to remain.

#### The Financial Deterrent

We saw that in Victorian times the problem of where



the money was to come from if pew rents ceased helped to leave the system deeply entrenched.(23) A critical distinction may be drawn between those who simply wanted people to be arranged in church according to their social standing, and those who feared to renounce the system because they could see no other way for the local church to remain solvent. For the Association the objection to social discrimination was axiomatic. Those who would retain the system on financial grounds, they tried to persuade. Some of this group, we may suspect, were also motivated by social prejudices and, perhaps, trembled that the problem of money may lack the virtue of insolubility. Nevertheless, there was a real difficulty: how to persuade those parishes where revenue flowed from a fixed tariff from which the poor were exempt, that voluntary contributions could provide a comparable return.

Part of the public relations activity of the Association was to show that, in fact, this could, and did, happen. As churches were liberated so, through its literature, it showed that what had been lost through the ending of a compulsory impost had been regained by the free offerings of the faithful.(24) The minutes record that the Bishop of Kensington, at the annual general meeting in April 1913 urged the 'principle of free will offering' as the best method of church finance. This method, involving envelopes which encouraged regularity as well a promising immunity from prying eyes, still flourishes. It is the child of the abolition of pew rents and carried the seeds of stewardship campaigns and covenant schemes that have been prominent features of the last thirty years of church life.(25)

The annual general meeting in April 1920 learnt of a

bold episcopal initiative. The Bishop of Birmingham, Henry Wakefield, who presided, announced that he would refuse to consecrate any new church in his diocese unless it were free. The financial argument, he believed, was failing. But he went further. Churches are better off when the seating in them is unrestricted. This is a large claim, which we have met before. There are, perhaps, two reasons at least for giving it credence. By this time church-going is no longer the fashion: those who attend are more in earnest. They are there because they think it is their duty, or because they wish to go. In either case it is not obedience to a social convention that brings them. In consequence it is more likely that they will answer generously to the needs of the building and its ministry. It may also be that the sense of community engendered by the ending of discrimination in the house of God may release a new spirit of sacrifice which the division of the congregation had suppressed. The sense of common possession, of being 'members one of another', of being equally valued and respected, may inspire people to give on the New Testament model, 'each according to his ability'.(26)

Striking evidence of such a happy development was produced at the annual meeting in April 1921. The Dean of Chester, Frank Bennett(27), was not able to be present, but celebrates in a letter the excellent results of freeing his cathedral. In the year 1920-1921 the congregation had adopted the freewill offering scheme with such enthusiasm that the cathedral's lay workers were able to be given an increase of salary.

At the same meeting the Bishop of St Albans, Michael Furse, declared that pew rents were an actual impediment

to the realistic financing of a church. They were a means of 'chloroforming the conscience' of worshippers against their duty of ensuring that the expenses of the church were fully discharged. Pew rents were not commensurate with what the tenant ought to be subscribing towards the running costs of the local Christian community. Furse is, in fact, moving into the painful area of personal responsibility and decision. When people are required to pay a fixed sum, it is a short journey from there to the conclusion that one's obligations have been fully defrayed. The facility provided has been paid for. But when people are asked to contribute whatever their means permit, the choice can be uncomfortable and laborious. Pew rents avoided such an ordeal. To incumbents who felt that they could not trust their flock to rise adequately to the need, the Bishop issued this advice, 'Take some risks and the Lord will provide not out of the clouds, but by the voluntary gifts of the congregation.'

#### Critical Diversion

During the last twenty years a growing number of cathedrals have found it imperative to charge visitors for entry at least to some area of the building, or openly invite the donation of a stated sum. Spontaneous gifts from those who come to view are not sufficient for the maintenance of these vast medieval structures. The difficulty, as well as the propriety, of distinguishing between the visitor and the worshipper has been a source of anxiety and often opprobrium for deans and chapters. (28) The essence of the protest is not easy to identify, and it would be incautious to suggest an analogy with antipathy to pew rents. Nevertheless, though the one may arise

from the lips of the thwarted tourist and the other from those of the devout worshipper, they share a conviction that admission into church should be free. Curiously, another form of restriction which, in this century, greatly perturbed the Association now seems to evoke little dissent from any quarter. This is the use of places of worship, whether cathedrals or parish churches, for concerts and other cultural events. To members of the Association payment for entry to such occasions seems to have been simply a variation on that abuse which it existed to eradicate. The central offence was the same: a place in God's house was acquired by payment. Some members may have been unhappy about recitals in consecrated buildings anyway, but that is not evident from the minutes. The issue is financial.

In January 1914 anxious reference is made to a 'musical performance' in Canterbury Cathedral(29) and the question of payment is raised. It is certainly possible to interpret 'musical performance' in the pejorative sense in which case the objection was more fundamental, and the Association was moving beyond its charter. Three months later, in April, there appears to be some anxiety even about the prestigious Three Choirs Festival.(30) Nothing was apparently done in either instance. However, in December 1919 the committee learns of a report in the Press that a recital is to be held in Westminster Abbey for which admission will be by payment. If the secretary should find that the information is correct, the Bishop of Birmingham, the chairman, is asked to issue a 'remonstrance'.

Better news came from Lincoln and from York. The Enabling Act of 1919 had brought the Church Assembly(31) into being, and greatly increased the role of the laity in Church

government. At the annual meeting in April 1920, the Dean of  
(32)  
Lincoln related this development to a decision which he announced.  
He and his chapter had decided not to charge even for entry to  
musical recitals. Clearly for him the access for the laity to  
the government of the Church was an incentive to give them the  
freedom of a building that they should grow to perceive more  
and more as their own rather than the demesne of a remote and  
omnipotent capitular body. The Dean and Chapter of York sus-  
tained a grievous setback in 1922 due to the vigilance of the  
Association. The Yorkshire papers had carried reports of its  
work and this publicity evidently influenced the city's rating  
authority to threaten to change the status of the Minster to  
that of a place of entertainment if any more seats, which were  
priced at 5/9d, were sold. As a result, the committee heard  
at its meeting in March, these special 'musical services' which  
were the subject of the admission charge were to be discontinued.  
That these events were described as 'services' invites comment.  
The line dividing services from recitals is often very narrow:  
in either experience it is possible to worship through, or mere-  
ly listen to, the music. Did the dean and chapter not recognise  
that it may seem even more objectionable to extract payment for  
entry to a purely devotional than to an avowedly cultural event?  
Thus the tactical use of the word 'service'. Of course, this  
would not mollify the Association: indeed, it would compound  
the offence.

In September 1926 the secretary notified the committee,  
with brutal candour that Worcester Cathedral was being used as  
a 'concert hall'. This was ironic for as recently as the prev-  
ious January he had reported that the entry fee to that church

had been waived. Perhaps the cathedral authorities drew a distinction between charging for simply being inside the edifice and paying to hear music rendered within it. If so it reckoned without the radical principles of the Association that demanded the complete freedom of all churches of the Establishment. But why the 'concert hall' so soon after the decision to admit without penalty? The likely reason is that the gifts of visitors had not compensated for the loss of income due to the ending of a fixed charge.(33) The opening of doors may not evoke the same response as the opening of pews. We have noted the witness of parish churches to the happy economic consequences of freeing their seats. But visitors, even when they are churchpeople, do not react as positively as those who actually come to worship. The building is understood more as an ancient monument, not a house where they belong, from whose ministry they profit, and which they, for the present, possess but hold in trust for posterity.

This section of the chapter has moved beyond the subject of our study. Its relevance, however, lies in the likelihood that the Association committed a strategic error in moving into this particular area. Certainly it wanted churches to be open daily for private prayer, but its first objective was the freeing of the pews. And payment for listening to a recital is in a category distinct from the social segregation which the pew system perpetuated in the very act of worship. Indeed, the attention given to this present campaign may have cost the Association the sympathy of some of its allies at a crucial moment in its history. In the long term this secondary battle was not

won whatever the initial successes. Today the practice of holding musical events in cathedrals, and even in the smallest parish churches, flourishes and is regarded, notwithstanding an entry fee, as an acceptable use of this portion of the nation's architectural heritage.

### Last Moments

In the 19th Century it was possible to share the aims of the Association while jibbing at its methods and declining to enrol in membership. Thus the bishops repudiated its interpretation of the law(34), and deplored its excursions to the courts(35), while sympathising with the ideal it stood for. And the Parish Churches Bill caused even its <sup>OWN</sup> house to be divided.(36) In the 20th Century, however, with the Parish Churches Bill now laid to rest(37), and its litigiousness limited to Counsel's opinion, it was less easy to be scandalised by the style of its operation. So, in this section, while aware of the distinction in principle, we allow a firm link between the waning of interest in the cause and the shrinking of support for the Association. Waning interest for any campaigning organisation, depending for its survival on voluntary subscription, manifests itself pre-eminently in loss of income. We now briefly trace that loss but only as a symptom, and in the context of various factors that eventually lead to the extinction of the Incorporated Free and Open Church Association.

Even in the century of its birth the resources of the Association were frugal.(38) In the period which these records chronicle its revenue causes one to marvel that hearts were not downcast sooner than they apparently were. In May 1917 an above average collection is announced for the annual

meeting, but the fact that this brought the balance in hand up to only £19-19-4d suggests gratitude for very small mercies. And in March 1920 comes the alarming news that the rent of the office in Church House, Westminster, (39) is to be raised by 50 per cent. The measure of the seriousness of this increase is apparent in the action of the committee in invoking - successfully - the right to six months' notice. A further indication of financial stress appears a few weeks later, in May, when the activities of the churchwardens of Gorleston (40) are reviewed. The cost of legal proceedings, which would be £30, leaves the Association powerless to do more than issue a 'remonstrance'.

As we have seen, (41) the Association's stall at meetings of the Church Congress was a regular channel through which its work and ideas were broadcast. But in June 1921 an initial decision was to have no such display at the meeting in Birmingham in October, because funds will not run to it. Birmingham, however, was the diocese of the chairman and, appropriately, the decision was reversed the following month. In November 1922 Counsel's opinion concerning a case will not be sought if the expenses exceed three guineas, and at the end of the year subscriptions are down by £33. A critical situation is evident in the decision, in September 1924 to advertise for funds in the Church Times, but spirits are raised in December with a gift of a hundred pounds, bringing the balance, nevertheless, to only £117. This windfall enabled 1500 Easter Vestries to be circulated in the spring of 1925 at a cost of £20, but a shortage of manpower in the form of speakers in February 1926 prevents a campaign among the deaneries.

The increased rent, to which we have referred above,



caused the Association to leave Church House and to hire an office in Queen Anne's Gate. But clearly the address mattered. For in November 1926 the committee resolved to hire a locker in Church House so that for postal purposes it could continue to be located there. Despite such bold defiance of so many ominous portents, at the same meeting it was determined to burn 'all books of accounts and others of no interest in the furnace.' This suggests that members knew that the writing was on the wall. It could, of course, have been a purely practical arrangement due to congestion at Queen Anne's Gate. However, these somewhat inconsistent decisions tally well with those fluctuations of mood which characterise these remaining months. So the reason for the destruction may be a feeling among the Association's dwindling membership that its work did not merit for the future more than minimal evidence of its existence.

In February 1927 an affirmative statement implies that the end has been sighted, for it was agreed 'that the active work of the Association be continued for the present and at least until the end of 1927.' Then, in June, the committee learns that a secretary which it had been without since the previous September, (42) has been appointed in the person of the Revd Thomas Smylie at a salary of £50 per annum. However, in October he guardedly reports that 'the desire for freeing the churches was still very keen in certain places.' So we are not unprepared for the decision reached in December 1927 that the work of the Association should carry on but only for another 6 months.

A critical, though not unexpected, step was taken when the committee met in the following March. As attendances are getting 'smaller and smaller' annual general meetings will no longer

be held. So an important ceremony of renewal and inspiration was struck from the calendar. (43) However, almost as a last testament, a letter was drawn up for publication in the Press urging those attending annual parochial meetings, in parishes where the pew system prevailed, to agitate for its abolition. The letter, significantly using the Church House address, was signed by the chairman, a layman, Wilfred de Winton.(44) The spirit of equality in the world beyond the Church is recruited as an incentive. 'It is an admitted fact that less than 20 per cent of the population attend any place of worship and in these democratic days it is surely desirable to eradicate any practice which accentuates class distinction (such as those [pews] to which I have referred) and acts as a discouragement to the would-be worshipper.' Any incumbents or other churchpeople who were interested were invited to write to the Association for advice, and meanwhile the secretary wrote to the fifty rural deans of the London and Southwark dioceses applying for permission to speak at their rural-decanal conferences. But in November 1928 he told the committee that only 16 replies had been received and all had rejected his request. The message would seem to be that the Church of England, at least in the capital, desired to hear no more about the subject. These were, after all, the stirring days of the Prayer Book controversy(45) when relations between Church and State were being sorely tried. The pew question might have seemed, if not somewhat passé, to belong at best to the day of small things. Yet Smylie, with a courage bordering on temerity, suggested that he should try again with the rural deans. But his colleagues would not consider such a course. They agreed with the chairman who felt

'it was practically impossible for the Association to continue as heretofore.' (46) Plainly this emergency had been expected for the committee agreed forthwith to approach the Church Reform League (47) with a view to that body taking over the cause for which the Association stood. The approach was duly made and in February 1929 it was resolved to hold a conference with the League. In June the amalgamation with the League, which was henceforth known as the Church Self-Government League, was legally effected and the Incorporated Free and Open Church Association extinguished. The poignancy of the occasion must have been heightened by the knowledge that the chairman, Wilfred de Winton, had recently died. The minutes also record a belated legacy to the Association of £12-10s, and despite the sense of loss and even defeat which must have prevailed members did not forget to congratulate one of their supporters, Lord Justice Hankey, on his appointment as Lord Chancellor before they dispersed from their final meeting at 5 o'clock on June 14, 1929.

The Free and Open Church Association was conceived when there was no forum within the structures of the Church of England where a non-clerical voice may be heard. However, the inception of the House of Laymen of Canterbury in 1886 provided at least the rudiments of such a forum and therefore checked the need for a campaigning body like the Association. (48) The inauguration of the Church Assembly in 1919 vastly increased the scope for the Church to govern itself and within the Assembly the laity was accorded a central role. It was, therefore, fitting that as, for whatever reasons, the Association was to

lay down its arms, it should be absorbed by an organisation wholly committed to effecting change through the Church's own representative agencies. But, in fact, the hope that the Church Assembly would actively dismantle the pew system was tested and thwarted, as we shall see, in 1925, four years before the Association ceased to exist. In theory, of course, such a refusal at official level should have increased the need for an independent campaigning body; however, that would be contingent upon the cause being one that aroused strong evangelistic passions. In the event, diminishing interest was the theme of the 1920's. The appearance of the question on the agenda of the Church Assembly was, however, the achievement of IFOCA. So the brief debate that it engendered becomes part of the history of the Association in its last moments, and to it we now turn.

#### A FINAL AIRING

The hopes of the Association for legislative enforcement of its cause revived with the birth of the new instrument of Church government. In December of that year, 1919, undeterred by the memory or the report of the vain struggles of the last century, it discerned a fresh opportunity of attaining the end that had been denied. After all the National Assembly of the Church of England possessed, subject to the approval of Parliament, wide power of legislation. Surely such a body, consisting entirely of Churchpeople, would not withhold its blessing from the Parish Churches Bill.(49) Such, one suspects, must have been the thinking behind the offer of Lord Wolmer, a member of the committee and of the Assembly(50), to present the Bill. So confident as to the outcome, apparently, was the Association

that the minutes of the following month, May 1920, record a decision to send the Bill to Eyre and Spottiswoode for printing. This costly exercise was authorised in the same month as the economy over the Gorleston case.(51) In July, however, Lord Wolmer, having experienced the procedural methods of the new Church Assembly, suggested a less direct approach. The provisions of the Bill could be included in other Bills coming before the Assembly. But the committee would not hear of such a compromise. However, the procedural difficulties proved an effective obstacle and when, in November, Wolmer told the committee that he had been unable to introduce the measure, the Parish Churches Bill was at long last interred.

So a new tactic was adopted. A resolution would be moved at the January 1921 session urging the abolition of pew rents and appropriation. But in March the committee learned from a member of the Assembly, Robert Holmes who represented the Sheffield Diocese, that the item had not been reached. In May the committee opted for a diluted and characteristically Anglican motion. Sydney Bartle, who represented the Southwell Diocese,(52) would propose, 'That a committee should be appointed to consider the question of pew rents and the appropriation of sittings in churches.' Like Holmes he had to tell his colleagues in December that the motion 'just failed' to reach that point on the agenda where it would have been heard. Eventually, in January 1923, the Assembly braced itself for the long deferred debate.(53)

Sydney Bartle, whom the Association had designated as proposer, was not able to attend so the responsibility fell to Major John Birchall(54) from the Gloucester Diocese. Somewhat

surprisingly, in view of the apathy from which the Association by now was suffering, he argued that at any meeting of rank-and-file Church members no subject 'provoked more denunciation than the present system of pew rents'. It gave a signal to 'those outside the Church, that wealth and means were recognised as giving a special right to worship in the common Church of the people.'(55) This concern with what people outside the Church were thinking is a significant variant of the usual arguments. The image that the national Church was projecting, at least in some parishes, was particularly incongruous in the post-war age of more relaxed social relationships. When Birchall spoke the first Labour government, with all that that at least symbolised in the history of the common man, was only a year away. (56) The Church must often swim against the tide of public sentiment, but this was not such an example.

For the Archdeacon of Stow, Ernest Blackie, who supported Birchall, the system affected adversely 'the spiritual efficiency of the Church'.(57) He linked this aspect with the dependence of some parishes upon pew rents for their viability. But mild though the proposal was, the prospect even of a committee was too much for a member of the House of Laity. A.J. Preston worshipped at St Nicholas, Blundell Sands, in the Diocese of Liverpool. Evidently sensing no need for an apology, he explained that of the seven hundred sittings in his church 30 were free. As for the occupants they were 'a very happy party, and everybody was quite satisfied.'(58) Focussing the issue upon this blissful scene he hoped that in the Assembly nothing would be passed that would destroy the whole machinery and working of St Nicholas', Blundell Sands.'(59)

One both warms to Preston's openness and marvels at his naivety. If Birchall's testimony is to be believed it was an unpopular stance to take. Nor did he defend the system on grounds of economy. Rather it was a Victorian vision of the harmony present when each worships according to his order, which led him to battle for the status quo. The vicar, indeed, relied upon the pews for two thirds of his very substantial income<sup>(60)</sup>, but apparently that was not the issue unless it were subsumed under 'the machinery and working of the parish.' Whatever the reason, a century after the Duke of Wellington's letter to Bishop Sumner, and with a world war and all its consequences in terms of social upheaval but a few years behind, the system finds a doughty champion who speaks with the authentic accents of an age that seemed long passed<sup>(61)</sup>. The potential insularity of parish life, and the impulse to infer from one's own narrow experience a policy for the whole state of Christ's Church is splendidly illustrated in Mr Preston's intervention.

The only other member of the Assembly who spoke was the Bishop of Norwich, Bertram Pollock, who hedged his support for the idea of a committee with qualifications. He hoped that the committee would 'find a way by which with some limitations and under certain restrictions seats could be appropriated.'<sup>(62)</sup> Pollock had been consecrated in 1910 from the Mastership of Wellington College, and had never served as a parish priest. The school's eponymous patron had expressed a more radical view nearly a century before.<sup>(63)</sup> It appears that the bishop was not against the abolition of pew rents, but would have liked the right of church officials to appropriate seats for certain persons, without payment, to be retained. We do not know how representative of the Assembly's feelings such a hesitant

attitude was for, although the motion was carried, no voting figures are given.

The committee, which the motion had recommended, reported two years later.(64) Its preference for gradualism rather than urgent remedy echoes the findings of the Lords' committee of some seventy years before.(65) The system, the committee held, was dying a natural death and it was to be hoped that the process of decay would continue. It found that the system still obtained in some 1300 parishes(66) and though it recommended no legislative action it urged them to provide 'either immediately, or in the more or less distant future, an alternative system which was better from a financial and spiritual point of view.'(67) So notwithstanding the committee's aversion to the system, exhortation rather than direction was the instrument chosen to further its aim. And when a 'distant future' is mentioned those fearing reform may relax. No shadow of uncertainty need disturb the 'happy party' at Blundell Sands.

In its unwillingness to advocate draconian action against an abuse it believed time itself was dismantling, the committee may have been influenced by the fate of the Parish Churches Bill, and the potential divisiveness of legislation. It may even have known that others in the Assembly felt as Preston did, and concluded that no useful purpose would be served by further alienating them. Indeed, the silence that followed the presentation of the report nurtures the suspicion that the spokesman for Blundell Sands did not stand alone. The Archbishop of York, Cosmo Gordon Lang, who was in the chair, was moved to console the committee. He trusted that they 'would not think that because the report was received without discussion,



that their labours had been in vain. On the contrary they had put a very vexed question on a sensible basis.'(68) These remarks point the delicacy of the committee's task, and also help to explain why thirty years and another world war lay between its aspirations and their fulfilment. So there the matter rested for time to work its will; there was apparently no further reference to the question in the Assembly.

## Notes to The Long Twilight

- (1) A seat at St Andrew's, South Newton, where the writer served, still has the word on a book ledge. At St George's, Deal, a sign proclaiming, 'Free Seats in the Gallery', may still be seen.
- (2) The two volumes are in the archives of Church House, Westminster. (The archives are soon to be moved to a centre in South London). The entries are chronological with the pages unnumbered.
- (3) Ch. VI, Frontal Attacks p.166.
- (4) Cf. Ch. VI, Frontal Attacks p.185(59).
- (5) The reasons for the decline are complex and not simply the result of a loss of faith. Cf. for example, Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain Hugh McLeod. MacMillan 1984. p.64ff. The Retreat from Christianity in the Modern World Langmead Casserley. Longmans 1952. Ch. VI.
- (6) Kenneth Clark, writing of the dominant role of theology in the artistic ideals of the Camden Society, shows how the meaning of the altar depended upon the material of which it was made, and continues, 'Other features of the church arrangements were equally involved with doctrine; for instance, if the pulpit were in the middle of the aisle, the building were a mere preaching house; if at the side, it was a catholic church.' The Gothic Revival Kenneth Clark. Murray 3rd Ed. 1962. p.164f.
- (7) This collection of essays was considered 'modernist' in tone, the essay by B.H. Streeter on the Resurrection causing most offence.
- (8) It is probable that this church was built with a grant from the Church Building Society which included a condition that a certain portion of the seats should be free. Cf. Ch. V, Collective Disquiet p.111ff.
- (9) The fluctuations of the movement we are studying are notably portrayed by the arrangements at St Barnabas' and St Saviour's, Pimlico. The latter was consecrated replete with rented pews in 1864, fourteen years after its neighbour had pioneered congregational freedom. Cf. Ch. III, Priestly Initiatives, p.72ff:
- (10) A few years before, two other churches in Surrey had opened with the system operative. St Mark's, Woodcote, had been dedicated in 1905 and by 'June 141 out of 200 seats had been taken at a rental of 30 shillings each a year.' It was intended that four fifths of the seats should be subject to pew rents in spite of the disapproval of the Bishop of Rochester, Edward Talbot. In 1908 St Mary's, Sanderstead, was dedicated and the curate's stipend of £150 per annum provided from pew rents. The North Downs Church Michael Elliott-Binns. privately 1983. pp.36 and 40. On the other hand Elliott-Binns records that some forty years before in the same area of the county, though in the Diocese of

Winchester, Bishop Sumner consecrated St Luke's, Caterham Valley (now St Luke's, Whyteleafe) in 1866 in which 'all the seats were free, which suggested a particular concern for the railway workers and the other poorer people.' p.30.

(11) In the period covered by these records two new pamphlets were printed in 1918, The Pew System Condemned and On the Wickedness of Pews. Cf. Ch. VI, Frontal Attacks p.163.

(12) Cf. p. 227 below.

(13) Parochial church councils were instituted in this year, 1921, as part of the process of democratisation in the Church of England. Ironically Liskeard PCC chose the earliest moment of its life to confirm a method of discrimination.

(14) There were ten churches in Ealing. The free church was St Saviour's; not only, therefore, did it not require the secretary's attention but he had actually preached there in 1923 on behalf of the Association which benefited with a collection of £9. The incumbent was Augustus Buckell and the invitation breathes a certain defiance. Buckell was curate of Christ Church with the charge of St Saviour's from 1897 until 1916 when he became the incumbent when the daughter church was raised to parish status. At the time of the secretary's visit the vicar of Christ Church depended on pew rents for almost half his stipend and as late as 1938 for £140 of the £770 annual income. Crockford 1938.

(15) John Nankivell became vicar of St Martin's, Brighton in 1926. He combined his work for IFOCA with the secretaryship of the White Cross League, an Anglican organisation founded in 1883 for the nurturing of morality. It was a forerunner of moral welfare associations.

(16) Thus two great education Acts (Fisher, 1918; Butler, 1944) were conceived in war, and it was in 1942 that Sir William Beveridge launched his historic report from which sprang the National Health Service.

(17) Even John Mason Neale recognised that his concern with the subject may seem disproportionate to its significance, although 'the introduction of pews, as trifling a thing as it may seem, has exercised no small influence for ill.' The History of Pews J.M. Neale. Cambridge 1841 p.3.

(18) Attempts to get a resolution actually denouncing the pew system debated in the London Diocesan Conference were repeatedly frustrated. Lord Justice Hankey, a future Lord Chancellor, was to propose such a motion in 1919 but it was crowded out of the agenda. A letter to the Bishop of London, Arthur Winnington-Ingram, expressing disappointment drew only a reply expressing regret at the Association's 'aggrievement' minuted for July.

(19)The suggestion has recently been made that the pew system was one of the symbols which adversely affected the relationship between chaplains and the troops to whom they ministered. So it seemed that, 'The churches did not support social justice. The Church of England was state endowed. Churches still had reserved pews. The churches were aristocratic societies in a democratic world.' The Church of England and the First World War Alan Wilkinson. SPCK 1985 p.163.

(20)Radical bodies existed within the Established Church such as the Guild of St Matthew, which had been founded by Stewart Headlam, the curate of St Matthew's, Bethnal Green in 1877, and the Christian Social Union (in 1918 it fused with the Navy Mission to become the Industrial Christian Fellowship) which was launched by Henry Scott Holland, a canon of St Paul's, in the Chapter House in 1889. One of the earliest members of the Union, and who later helped to found the Church Socialist League, was Lewis Donaldson, a supporter of the Association. In his address to the annual meeting in January 1926 (recorded in the minute book) he placed the pew question in the widest context. He referred to public schools which had originally been established for the education of the poor but had been 'appropriated' by the wealthy, and continued, 'When they attacked the pew rent system they could not isolate the phenomenon. People would question their sincerity unless they were prepared to consider the principle of appropriation in other matters also.' Donaldson, a canon of Westminster, concluded by making a striking use of the Epistle of Barnabas (a first century extra-canonical Christian writing) who had asked, if we were communicants (sharers, Donaldson explained) in things which did not pass away, how much more should we be communicants in things which did pass away?

(21)B.K. Cunningham who, in the following year, became principal of Westcott House, the Cambridge theological college, wrote this letter. He served as a chaplain from 1917 until 1919.

(22)Church Times January 29, 1926.

(23)Ch.VI, Frontal Attacks p.161.

(24)Cf. Ch. VI, Frontal Attacks p.164. In this area one may have some sympathy for Lucius Palmer Smith who successfully achieved the freedom of St Paul's, Herne Hill and whose satisfaction at 'the most excellent results that followed' was reported to the April 1924 meeting. However, in 1929 he was instituted to St Bartholomew and St Matthew, Sydenham where nearly four fifths of the benefice income came from pew rents. Though this aspect of the income was later compounded as 'pew rents and offertories' such dependence continued until the Second World War. In 1938 £346 of a total stipend of £660 came from this source. Crockford 1929 and others. Mercifully, at least in the matter of pew rents, clergy who may have wives and families to consider, do not have to suspend their convictions.

(25)The Free-Will Offering Scheme began in 1904, but Christian Stewardship not until 1957. The latter is based on a wider theology, that all time and talents belong to God and are to be

used responsibly. So it concerns the activities of Churchpeople as well as their material giving. Like the Free-Will Scheme it is biblically based(Deuteronomy 16.10): the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25.15) is its charter.

(26)Ephesians 4.25. Acts 11.29. John Bright(1811-1889), the great opponent of the Corn Laws, who was a Quaker, made a similar point when arguing, in the House of Commons, for the abolition of the Church Rate. 'Am I appealing in vain to you, when I try to encourage you to believe that if there were no Church Rates the members of your church and of your congregation would be greatly multiplied, and that, as has taken place in the parish where I live, your churches would be better supported by your own voluntary and liberal contributions than they ever can be by the penny per pound issuing from the pockets of men who do not attend your church, and who are rendered ten times more hostile to it by the very effort to make them contribute to its support?'Quoted in Church and People S.C.Carpenter SPCK Ed. 1959. p.338f. Cf. Ch. VI, Frontal Attacks, p.164.

(27)Bennett's initiative in de-restricting Chester Cathedral to visitors is legendary. This work has been called 'in its own field perhaps the fullest and purest genius England has ever produced'. The Church of England in the Twentieth Century Roger Lloyd vol.I, Longmans 1946 p.31.

(28)In Salisbury the tourist season often produces a letter in the local newspaper from visitors outraged by the 'invited' contribution of £1. Our concern has been wholly with parish churches: cathedrals were never enmeshed in the pew system but only with payment for entry or, as in this section, payment for a seat at a recital. 'Cathedrals stand alone....Scarcely any claims to, or legal questions respecting the seats in them have ever been raised.'The History and Law of Church Seats Alfred Heales. Butterworth 1872 Book II Law p.iii.

(29)Canterbury led the way in the use of cathedrals for dramatic presentations. In the 1920's the dean, George Bell, later Bishop of Chichester, inaugurated the annual Canterbury Festivals whose most celebrated offering was T.S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral, which he wrote for the Festival of 1935. The growing use of cathedrals and parish churches for such purposes led, after the Second World War, to the promulgation by the Convocations of a new canon stipulating that on such occasions 'the words, music, and pictures are such as befit the House of God, are consonant with sound doctrine, and make for the edifying of the people.'The Canons of the Church of England SPCK 1969 p.73 Canon F 16.

(30)First held in 1724, the Three Choirs Festival circulates annually among the cathedrals of Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester. A dispute about the event occurred at Worcester in 1875. The dean and chapter insisted on free entry for the poor and that the music should be part of a service. In consequence they suffered public obloquy for an offence which was the opposite of that which troubled the Association in 1926. Cf. Chadwick op.cit.pt.II p.387f and p.224f below.

(31)Cf. below p.231ff.

(32)Cf. Ch.VII,Rebuff in the Lords p.210(5).

(33)Cf. above p.240(30).

(34)Ch. V, Collective Disquiet p.110ff.

(35)Ch. V, Collective Disquiet p.126f.

(36)Ch. VI, Frontal Attacks p.166f.

(37)But see below p.231ff. Briefly the Association saw in the National Assembly a hope for the Bill's resurrection.

(38)Cf. Ch. VI, Frontal Attacks p.167f. As Inglis points out the Association ceased, in the 1890's, to record its finances in the Year Book. Op.cit.p.55(4). However the practice was resumed in the next decade and the picture is one of almost unremitting decline. For example in 1904 the figure was £436, in 1913, £305, 1916, £320, 1924, £160, 1927, £124. CE Year Book 1906,1914,1918,1916, and 1929. These were public facts available to anyone. In this chapter, however, our concern is with the financial difficulties and the response to them: of the Association's leaders as disclosed in the minutes.

(39)The meeting place of the National Assembly (now of the General Synod) and housing for the offices of many organisations connected with the Church of England. IFOCA's first office was at 33 Southampton Street, Strand, it moved to nearby Bedford Street in 1880's, and to the new Church House, built as a memorial of the Diamond Jubilee, in the 1890's. The present building which replaced it was opened in 1940.

(40)Cf. above p.215.

(41)Cf. Ch.VI,Frontal Attacks p.163. In December 1919 there was disappointment at the small attendance for the Association's stall at the Leicester meeting of the Church Congress in that year.

(42)Cf. above p.238(15). Unlike Nankivell, Smylie records his appointment in Crockford as if it were his main occupation.

(43)Efforts were made to get distinguished speakers at annual meetings. In January 1918 the apologies of G.K.Chesterton for the forthcoming annual meeting are recorded. Bishop Gore, who had retired in 1919 from the see of Oxford in 1919, was unable to speak at the annual meeting of 1920. In a sermon to the Church Congress in 1905 he had made a passing reference to the subject. 'The arrangement of the great majority of our churches in country and town, in spite of the quite unmistakable language of St James, and, I must add, in startling contrast to the churches of Roman Catholic Europe in almost all parts - give a marked preference to the well-off.' The New Theology and the Old Religion Charles Gore.Murray1907 p.184. William Temple also declined an invitation to speak in 1920,

the year before he became Bishop of Manchester. But well-known laymen who spoke included Sir Henry Slessor, who served in the first Labour Government, Lord Wolmer, MP, later the Earl of Selborne; Lord Justice Hankey, and Sir Griffith Boscawen, MP. The decline of the Association was so settled by 1926 that one may not blame the radical views of Donaldson which he expressed at the meeting of that year for the decision to discontinue the annual gathering. Indeed, the following month, February, the committee hear that the new Dean of Westminster, William Foxley Norris, had become a patron. Cf. above p.223.

(44) de Winton evidently became chairman in 1918 as Lord Hankey was not able to accept nomination.

(45) The Prayer Book Measure, which had been approved by the Convocations and the House of Lords, was defeated for a second time in the House of Commons in June 1928.

(46) Among other unhappy auguries of these last few years were a Counsel's Opinion on the legality of appropriation in ancient churches, which was sent to the editors of all diocesan magazines, but was published only in four in 1922; the help of the Church of England Men's Society and the Mothers' Union was sought in 1923 but the response was less than ardent; a problem all too familiar to present-day clergy was broached in 1927: the insurance of churches which are left open. The Association could not venture into this field. A thought should be spared for Miss Packer, who organised 'drawing room meetings' on behalf of the Association and as late as December 1927 reported that she had had an interview with the Dean of Salisbury regarding a new pamphlet.

(47) The League was founded in 1895 and its foundation principle was 'that Church Reform should be carried out by the Church itself through its own Assembly.' CE Year Book 1930 p.498. The same entry goes on to record that in '1929 the Free and Open Church Association was amalgamated with the League.'

(48) This was not the view of Lewis Donaldson in his speech to the annual meeting of 1926. Having allowed that the Church Assembly could do almost anything it still needed the 'stimulus of the private societies. Reforms, whether in the Church or State did not originate in the legislative assemblies.'

(49) Cf. Ch.VII, Rebuff in the Lords.

(50) At the <sup>second</sup> meeting of the House of Laymen, over which Wolmer's father, the Earl of Selborne, presided, in May 1886 two resolutions were unanimously agreed. 'That this House, fully recognising the common-law right of parishioners to the free use of all seats in common in their parish churches, is of opinion that the granting of faculties should be discontinued.' This echoed the Lords' Committee of 1856. Cf. Ch.IV, External Pressures p.104. And of the Parish Churches Bill which the Lords had referred to a

Committee two months before it resolved, 'That this House desires that the Bishop of Peterborough's Bill may be so shaped as to secure, as far as practicable, the common-law rights of parishioners to the free use of seats in parish churches.' Proceedings of the House of Laymen May 14, 1886 p.12. The matter of reviving the Parish Churches Bill was mooted at the Association's meeting on December 15, 1919, eight days before the Enabling Act became law, and the decision that Lord Wolmer would bring the Bill before the new Assembly was made two months later.

(51) Cf. above p.227.

(52) Bartle, who represented the Derby Diocese after his retirement, was a railway telegraphist. Probably his absence was due to the demands of his work, there being no provision for loss of wages or expenses of members at that time.

(53) Proceedings of the National Assembly vol.4, No 1.

(54) Birchall represented the Gloucester Diocese in the Assembly, and North East Leeds in Parliament.

(55) Op.cit.p.124. Birchall's views may have been influenced by his war service. Cf. below p.239(19).

(56) 'Bishops, financiers, lawyers, and all the polite spongers upon the working classes know that this is the beginning of the end.' Words of David Kirkwood quoted in England in the Twentieth Century David Thomson. Penguin 1965 p.92. Kirkwood was a Clydeside MP

(57) Op.cit. p.124.

(58) Built in 1875, the church was legally entitled to charge rents for pews, but the proportion of free seats is derisory. The patronage lay with trustees who obviously did not seek help from the Church Building Society which would have required much more free accommodation. Cf.Ch.V, Collective Disquiet p.122ff.

(59) Op.cit. p.125.

(60) Income from pews at Blundell Sands is not mentioned in the immediately contemporary Crockford. But according to the 1927 edition the incumbent received £520 out of his stipend of £646 from this source i.e. 80per cent. This proportion generally declines, although on the eve of World War II, 1938, it still stands at just over 50per cent, £380 out of £740.

(61) If no other influence of the period affected Preston, one might have thought that the very forum in which he spoke, representing as it did a revolution in the distribution of power in the Church, might have given him pause. W.S.F. Pickering assumes that this was at least generally the case for he suggests that



the absorption of 'democratic ideals [which] were slowly introduced into the Church of England and were legally implemented in the early 1920's' ensured that 'pew rents quickly disappeared.' The effect of these 'democratic ideals' must have been particularly felt at the local level, though clearly not entirely at Blundell Sands. But, surely, in most parishes, where the system prevailed, the irony of persons from all classes elected to serve on parochial church councils with equal status, dividing on Sundays according to their social rank, must have registered. Pickering, however, does give an example from the diocese of which he writes of St Paul's, Elwick where pew rents survived until 'around the time of World War II.' A Social History of the Diocese of Newcastle ed. W.S.F. Pickering. Oriel Press. 1981 pp.138,145. Cf. above p.238(13).

(62)Op.cit.p.125.

(63)Cf. Ch.II, Episcopal Concern p.31ff.

(64)Pew Rents Committee Reports Spring 1925 Proceedings Vol.6 No 1. Representatives of the Association gave evidence.

(65)Ibid. p.133. Cf. Ch.IV, External Pressures p.104.

(66)There were rather more than 16,000 parishes so the figure represents a proportion of over 6per cent.

(67)Op.cit. p. 134.

(68)Ibid. p. 134. Though the leaders of IFOCA may have felt less than ecstasy about the Report they were sufficiently encouraged to include two sentences from it in their entry in the CE Year Book for the following year, 1926, and the three remaining years of its life. 'We believe that renting of pews is liable to militate against the sense of brotherhood, uninfluenced by class or station, which ought to prevail in every Christian Congregation.' 'But we are convinced that if Parochial Church Councils were willing courageously to make the adventure and abolish pew rents, they would have the sympathy of Church people as a whole.' As quoted in CE Year Book 1926 et seq.

## Appendix to The Long Twilight

### A Belated Defence

A decade after the events in the Church Assembly, a member of that body, though silent at the time, attempted a vindication of the system in his memoirs.(1) William Shuckburgh Swayne, who had been Bishop of Lincoln for twelve years from 1920, was not unqualified for such an enterprise. In 1900 he had moved from the entirely free parish church of Walsall to St Peter's, Cranley Gardens, S.W.7, where pew rents were a vital component in the economy of the church. Of 1300 sittings only five hundred were free. As St Peter's lacked any endowment, the incumbent's stipend depended entirely upon the marketing of the remaining 800 places.

Initially Swayne was troubled about the constraints which financial dependence would inflict upon his ministry. But his anxiety was wider. For he wondered if pew rents were, in themselves, 'evil things', not to mention the possibility of their being 'inconsistent with the democratic spirit of the time.'(2) We might be reading the substance of a speech he did not make in 1923, for he seems to have the now defunct Incorporated Association in his sights.(3) This 'democratic spirit', he suspects, 'might be a bogey stuffed with straw.' And as for 'the wickedness of pew rents', Swayne 'instinctively recoiled from some of the men who proclaimed this faith most loudly.'(4)

One may not quarrel with the bishop's claim that having served Walsall and Cranley Gardens in succession he 'was in a position to compare together under favourable circumstances a pew rented church and an entirely free and open church.'

While in Walsall, 'I supposed that all the arguments were in favour of the free and open system', but the St Peter's experience had eroded that assumption.(5) In either church there was a large and vigorous congregation. That at Walsall with its 'merchants, professional men, tradesmen, and masses of artisans and their families'(6) was more socially comprehensive than at St Peter's where the congregation was mainly affluent though augmented by 'poorer people in the mews.'(7) As this latter group did not appear at 11 o'clock Morning Prayer, but attended Holy Communion or Evensong when restrictions were relaxed, 'I was never able to discover that any disability or inconvenience was suffered by visitors to the church, or by those who could not afford to pay seat rents.'(8) Nor was Swayne's liberty as a minister of the Gospel compromised though 'I was directly dependent on my congregation for every penny of my income.'(9)

The lesson he draws from this experience breathes a truly Anglican spirit: in some parishes a free church is desirable, in others the pew system is to be preferred. His models are, of course, confined to Walsall and Cranley Gardens between 1892 and 1918(10), and his failure 'to discover...any disability or inconvenience' at the latter church may not have been due to meticulous enquiry either among the poor who attended or others in the mews who did not darken the doors of St Peter's. Did private pews discourage the absentees? Swayne adds an intriguing comment which arises from his considerable knowledge of Scotland and the Kirk.(11) 'I have been struck by the conviction I have discovered among many Presbyterians that the system is essentially honest.'(12) Unfortunately he does not elaborate.

As we have seen, Sandford and other opponents grounded their argument on the premise that the purchasing or renting of

seats was, whatever the degree of probity in the transaction, contrary both to the law of the land and to the law of God.(13) In the event they found the system riddled with corruption and avarice. Indeed, in practice it was anything other than 'essentially honest'. But even if we are to understand by that statement/you have paid a fair price for the accommodation provided this, as a justification, would have drawn gales of cynical laughter from the reformers. The breach of a fundamental principle is not redeemed by the disclosure that the business of that breach is conducted with integrity.

Bishop Swayne's assumptions regarding the relationship between the classes at Cranley Gardens are moulded by the 19th century belief in the efficacy of voluntarism. The privations of the poor should be assuaged not by structural change, but by kindly gestures from those in a position to make them. Thus the tenants of the pews at St Peter's only invoked their title for the morning service, and gladly waived it in respect of the other services. In justice to Swayne we must observe that of these other services there were as many as twenty five in a week.(14) But however many there were such kindly and well-intentioned actions leave the underlying scheme of social gradations in church intact. A right has not been acknowledged. Only a privilege has been granted which is always subject to the fluctuations of fashion and caprice.

In that the new vicar of St Peter's came to London believing 'that all the arguments were in favour of the free and open system' and was subsequently dissuaded from that view, he is remarkable as one evidently converted by experience back to a conservative position.(15) Nor did his tenure of the deanery

of Manchester, in which city organised resistance began,(16) and of the see of Lincoln cause him to change his mind, as these memoirs, written at the end of his life, bear witness. It is, however, a common enough human trait to denounce the iniquities of an institution until, perhaps unexpectedly, one become its client. Then its objectionable features may become less significant, and every new trial of its working a recommendation. Thus the young incumbent, with no private means and a family to support, might have been moved by the opulence of the benefice to which he had been called, to see but the virtues of the machinery of that provision.(17)

It is curious that the bishop should have injected this somewhat sple.netic material into a placid record of a contented and uneventful life. Was he upbraiding the Free and Open Church Association over its cold ashes? Were its members the 'men who proclaimed this faith most loudly' and from whom he 'instinctively recoiled'? It seems likely, even though his predecessors at Lincoln were among its patrons, including the saintly Edward King to whose memory Swayne was greatly attached.(18) But these were yesterday's men. For the constraints upon Swayne in 1923 we must look to the Dean of Lincoln, T.C. Fry, and his long-standing abhorrence of the system.(19) And the seconder of the motion asking for a committee was Ernest Blackie, one of the bishop's own archdeacons.(20) The claims of protocol may have stifled any impulse publicly to disagree with two such senior representatives of his own diocese.

Whatever the explanation, Preston of Blundell Sands seems to have had a tacit ally on the episcopal bench in 1923, who in that critical debate went not forth with him to the

battle. Perhaps even then, Bishop Swayne knew that the battle was already lost,(a condition, indeed, which the Committee on Pew Rents confirmed and welcomed two years later) but he may have felt at the end of his days that some apologia was needed.

Notes to A Belated Defence

- (1) Parson's Pleasure W.S.Swayne. Blackwood 1934.
- (2) Ibid. p.183. Cf.p.243 (61) above.
- (3) Cf. Ch.VIII, The Long Twilight p.229. Wilfred de Winton's letter.
- (4) Op.cit. p.183.
- (5) Ibid. p.188. Cf. Ch.VI, Frontal Assaults p.174. Cadman changed his mind in the other direction.
- (6) Ibid. p.188.
- (7) Ibid. p.189.
- (8) Ibid. p.189f.
- (9) Ibid. p.189f. Such dependence was unusual. The stipend remained £1525 up to the Second World War, £1200 of which came from pew rents (by then demurely described as the PCC's contribution), the balance from the Easter Offering and fees. As fees did not exceed £100 the dependence of the incumbent on the congregation remained almost entire. Crockford 1938 and previous editions.
- (10) Vicar of Walsall, 1892-1901, of St Peter's, 1901-1918.
- (11) Swayne lived in Scotland in retirement.
- (12) It could hardly be so described in Glasgow in the 19th century. The Presbyterians (sc. Established Church) and the Dissenters were competing for the middle-classes as they had the wealth which the churches needed for survival. 'The middle class could be attracted by providing well-known preachers and luxuriously appointed buildings. But all this meant money, which was usually raised by increasing seat rents. Up until about 1810, prices of more expensive seats were increased, while rents for the inferior seats at the back were frozen. But about that time, the City Council, which owned the Established churches, began to raise rents on the poorer seats as well, or to abolish free and low-rents seating altogether. New churches began to be built specifically for the middle class, and at the Tron church, where the rich tended to come in the morning and the poor in the evening, the former began to complain that the latter were a health hazard. Thus the policy came to be the building of separate purpose-built working-class churches in the poorer parts of the city.' Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain Hugh McLeod. MacMillan 1984 p.59.
- (13) Ch.VI, Frontal Attacks p.146ff.
- (14) Op.cit. p.189.

(15)Cf., however, Archbishop Longley Ch. V, Collective Disquiet p.126.

(16)Cf. Ch.VI, Frontal Attacks p.160.

(17)This theory owes much to experience. In the 1960's when there was widespread discussion about the pooling of benefice glebe and sharing the proceeds (which eventually happened by the Endowment and Glebe Measure 1976) this writer enthusiastically supported such a plan. At the time he received a peppercorn rent of £1-10s a year from a car park which belonged to the benefice. While the issue was being debated the lease expired and the town council asked to renew it at £100 per annum. He recalls that his eagerness for change was temporarily subdued as he pondered such a supplement to his stipend of £800.

(18)Op.cit. p.259f.

(19)Cf. Ch.VIII The Long Twilight p.224.

(20)Blackie had been proposed for the appointment as archdeacon by Fry, though Swayne had already thought of him. Op.cit.p.272.



## CONCLUSION

In 1925, as we saw, the Pew Rents Committee found that the system continued to function in some 1300 parishes, but was in decline.(1) However, World War II saw it still not quite extinguished(2), and even after hostilities it feebly struggled, though generally contributing only a small fraction of the stipend here and there. In the Ealing deanery, which had caused the Free and Open Church Association so much heart ache, only one church draws anything, and that but a token sum, from pew rents: St Paul's, £3 from £415. Even in Blundell Sands the system is in retreat though, in 1947, the vicar still depended on this source for just over 50 per cent (£380) of his income of £740. After 1947 pew rents at Christ Church, Wellington, Salop, ceased, but the £20 which they contributed to the modest revenue of the benefice of £400 was not reimbursed, so the stipend fell accordingly. (3) After more than thirty years, this writer was surprised to learn that as late as 1951 the incumbent with whom he served his first curacy drew £38 of his stipend (£730) from a few persons who still preferred to pay for their accommodation.(4)

By the post-war period, however, we are no longer dealing with an institution, but with an anachronism to which the Church of England's reluctance to use the sanction of law had granted a vestigial survival. Extremely unlikely though it is, perhaps even now in some parochial backwoods a worshipper informally, and without episcopal or archidiaconal cognisance, prefers to pay for the privilege of a reserved seat, for he has 'always done so'. But this we could regard as no more than the sort of

harmless idiosyncrasy which the English delight to discover.

Now, therefore, that the pew system is at last laid to rest, the question may be asked, Were all the effort and anguish of its opponents worthwhile? The motives of the critics were, as we have seen, not univocal. But we focus our question on the common hope and belief which they held, that the achievement of their ideal would bring the working classes to church. We leave aside such as sought their presence as an insurance against civil disorder, or who simply wanted to stanch the flow of defections to the Nonconformists to which they perceived the system to be an incitement.(5) Our concern is with the great majority of those who, by deed and word, took up the cause but whose abhorrence of the system owed, as far as one may judge, nothing to considerations of utility. For them it was a mode of discrimination that could not be reconciled with the spirit of the Gospel. It kept Christ's poor from worship. Its abolition would bring them home to a community where all were equally esteemed as children of the same Heavenly Father.(6) Manifestly, there was no such consummation.

Nevertheless, our question is not easily answered. For one thing, we cannot pinpoint a moment when the system died. With varying degrees of earnestness and audibility protests were voiced for more than a century. At Pimlico the effect was as hoped for: a church crowded with the sons and daughters of toil. (7) But that was in 1850. We cannot say that such an awakening would have been universal if all the churches had been liberated at the same time. Edward Norman is probably right when he remarks, 'Pew rents do not in themselves account for the absence of the working classes from church; but they symptomised

for working people an institution that was not for them.'(8) Had the aims of the reformers been realised say, a hundred years ago, a reasonable cause of animosity from the lower orders would have been removed: that is, perhaps, as much as could have been realistically expected.

However, when a remedy takes a prodigiously long time to be applied, appetites may wilt. Such an outcome was implicit in the argument of John Molyneux.(9) And, of course, at a social level, as the century went on there became other things to do besides going to church on Sunday. For example, public parks were now open on Sunday, and at the same time there were cheap excursions to the seaside(10), which the working man could pay for from his more ample wage packet.(11) As the gloom of the Victorian Sabbath lifted, such new ways of spending the day of rest must have made a belated invitation to join, on an equal footing, the congregation at Mattins, a highly resistable opportunity.

On a slightly different tack, at the base of any problem, the solution to which cannot be imposed overnight, lies a further difficulty. It is, that by the time the objective is achieved, other problems have arisen to complicate the issue and change the whole scheme of reference. So the original problem seems hardly worth attention, is irrelevant, passé. We suggested such a possibility when considering the impact of the First World War for the cause of the Free and Open Church Association.(12) Between the endeavours of the early critics of the pew system and the final triumph of their aims, the movement called 'secularisation' gathered pace. In such a setting,

campaigners must have seemed like hucksters crying a bargain to a distracted and bemused circle of bystanders that would not have it even for nothing. Unlike the prophet they could not easily appeal, 'Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters...' (13) when the pangs of drought were no longer felt.

It is a measure of the conviction and courage of the later critics that they continued to preach when the heroic days were over. In earlier times the champions of the cause might have been seen to be what, indeed, they were, friends of those oppressed by this form of discrimination. But in the 20th century their successors may have appeared to be residual advocates of a cause that aroused little enough popular enthusiasm even when churchgoing was, at least to some extent, the fashion; but now that those days were gone, no more than spokesmen for a strictly minority interest. Yet we believe that they pursued, as did their predecessors, a mission that justified the labour and the wounds.

The rightness of a cause cannot be judged merely on the criterion of whether or not it delivers what it was thought that it would deliver. Those whom we may call 'true believers' in the cause of liberating the naves, responded to the insight that, despite its sanctification by long usage, there was something inherently wrong in a system which divided worshippers according to the differentials of wealth and rank. And the Bible, through St James, had execrated the practice to the New Testament Church. Inevitably the Church is influenced by, and to some extent reflects, the ethos of the society in which it is placed. But the Church must also move ahead of that society, and

point by its own example, especially at worship, to a more excellent way. A way that declares, despite all temporal differences, the equal worth of every human being, and affirms itself as a family, a foretaste of the Kingdom. This is not to call in question the sincerity of such a contrary voice as that of Bishop Wilberforce. Speaking under the constraints of his time and station he foresaw only pandemonium, confusion and even injustice as a consequence of this social mingling.(14) Against this argument we present, with due caution, the proposition that the acceptance of such excesses might - but only might - have won and secured the proletariat for the nation's Church.

So to our assertion that the struggle was worthwhile notwithstanding its failure to claim those poor sheep who had strayed, we add a qualification. We do not know whether, for the good of the Church and all the people, an early or even immediate victory would have been preferable to that long, laborious campaign which interacted with the social changes of the period. This country is not given to sudden and revolutionary reversals, and people in every generation practise or endure customs which posterity may declare to be iniquitous.

But, with that qualification aside, those who espoused the cause, we have been studying, did not labour in vain. If the Church in our own day were still encumbered with this institution it would be irrecoverably marginalised. In this century of the common man, how could it proclaim the Gospel if the very setting of that proclamation supplied its contradiction? And, to return to the classic text from St James, if an enquirer came into our 'meeting', hesitant but looking for light, what if he were told

by the sidesman, 'Stand over there, or sit here on the floor by my feet.'(15)? At least one part of the apparatus of the Church is there to welcome the multitude and, perhaps eventually, 'bring them forth into the house of God.'(16)

## Notes to Conclusion

(1)Chap. VIII, The Long Twilight, p.235f.

(2)During the War a group of Churchpeople, led by Archbishop William Temple, argued for a greater degree of equality in stipends in their report, Putting our House in Order Longmans 1941. Showing the problems of determining the actual total of a priest's income because of the many sources from which it may be derived, the report commented, 'More difficult to deal with are the variations in benefice income from fees and "unsecured" sources such as pew rents'. p.75.

(3)As there are no comprehensive records of pew rents, the writer used the first complete Crockford published after the War, the edition of 1947, and sought out figures from the biographies, picking two pages of each letter of the alphabet at random and compensating for overseas clergy. For fourteen letters there was no mention of pew rents; in the others there were one or two such items. But of these the amount was significant in two only: St Jude's, Southsea, Portsmouth, £200 out of a total stipend of £600, and St James's Birkdale, Southport, £260 out of £563.

(4)Crockford 1951. St Luke, Maidenhead (T.W. Morcom-Harneis).

(5)Cf. e.g. Chap.I, The Problem Arises, p.11; Chap.IV, External Pressures, p.98.

(6)Cf. e.g. Chap.V, Collective Disquiet, p.117.

(7)Chap. III, Priestly Initiatives, p.77.

(8)Church and Society in England 1770-1970 E.R.Norman. Oxford 1976. p.162.

(9)Chap.VI, Frontal Attacks, p.159.

(10)The writer first heard this point made by Langmead Casserly in his Maurice Lectures for 1951, published as The Retreat from Christianity in the Modern World Longmans 1952. p.112.

(11)Cf. e.g. The Common People 1736-1938 G.D.H. Cole and Raymond Postgate. Methuen 1938 p.345f.

(12)Chap. VIII, The Long Twilight, p.216.

(13)Isaiah 55.1. Authorised Version.

(14)Chap. V, Collective Disquiet, p.127f.

(15)Good News Bible translation of James 2.3.

(16)Prayer Book version of Psalm 42.4.

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Dictionary of National Biography

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Church of England Records Centre

Lambeth Palace Library

House of Lords' Library

Dr Williams' Library

Pusey House Library

Clerical and Sowter Library

Salisbury and Wells Theological College Library

Wiltshire County Records Office