



**DISESTABLISHMENT
AND
DISENDOWMENT**



THE CHURCH IN WALES

DISESTABLISHMENT AND DISENDOWMENT

WHY?

HOW?

RESULTS

E. T. DAVIES
Canon of Monmouth
Honorary Editor of the
Church in Wales Historical Society



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Introduction

This brief study has been written at the request of the Church in Wales Publications Board to enable the present generation of churchmen in Wales, both clergy and laity, to know what happened to their Church fifty years ago, why it happened, and possibly with more boldness than wisdom, to make certain observations on the post-disestablishment Church in Wales.

Space and ignorance have determined the size of this study. Those who wish to dig more deeply will consult Dr. Kenneth Morgan's *Wales in British Politics 1868-1922* and *Sacrilege or Freedom*, and also P. M. H. Bell *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales*.

E. T. DAVIES

Llangybi Rectory,
Usk, Mon.

I. Why?

On 31st March 1970 the Church in Wales will commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the coming into force of the Welsh Disestablishment Act (1914) as it was amended by the Welsh Church Temporalities Bill, normally referred to as the Amending Act (1919). Behind this lay a period of exactly fifty years during which Parliament had been engaged, intermittently, with the question of the Welsh Church.

But for us today the most important matter is why this issue was raised and why it was ultimately successful. The whole disestablishment question was very involved and consisted of elements which were not wholly, or mainly, ecclesiastical, to say nothing of being religious, in nature.

First of all, there were the disabilities of Nonconformity, disabilities such as the church rate, burial according to Nonconformist rites in churchyards, of marriages in chapels and, of course, the tithe, apart from such disabilities as rights of admission to universities. These disabilities were all removed (except the tithe) by the end of the nineteenth century but there remained the question of status. The Welsh Church was, in those days, the Established Church and this meant, among other things, that the four Welsh bishops sat in the House of Lords.

Much of the preliminary work of the disestablishment campaign was carried out by the Liberation Society, whose full title was the 'Society for the Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control'. This was founded in 1853 to replace an earlier society formed in 1844 with very much the same aim.

This society was English in origin but it had, as one of its members, Henry Richard, who became M.P. for Merthyr Tydfil in 1868. The Liberation Society became very active through its monthly periodical, *Liberator*, by its publication of pamphlets etc. and, above all, by the

formation of local societies throughout the country. Here we find one of the roots of disestablishment in Victorian radicalism.

But during the second part of the nineteenth century the work of the Liberation Society, although it did not cease, became second in importance to the growth of Welsh nationalism. This sense of nationalism emphasised the claims of Wales to be regarded as a separate entity from England, with its own legitimate political and social aims. The Liberal Party, which increased its representation in Welsh constituencies in the General Election of 1868 and made Wales a preponderantly Liberal country politically after 1882, became the political organ of this newly awakened spirit of nationality, allied with an older radicalism.

It was inevitable that the Church of England in Wales, part of the province of Canterbury, with the Archbishop of Canterbury as its head, should come to be regarded as an 'alien' church in a newly awakened Nonconformist, Liberal Wales. This particular charge took three forms.

(i) The historical attack which sought to show that the ancient Celtic church came to an end with the coming of the Normans and the subjugation of the Welsh Church to Canterbury. It cannot be claimed today that this particular issue was fought with much light on either side; there was much spurious scholarship on both sides, Church and Nonconformity, but above all, these historical writings revealed that the Welsh Church of those days had largely forgotten its heritage. Even so, it can be claimed that these polemics failed to deprive the Welsh Church of her historical title deeds.

(ii) The second charge was more serious and had far more substance, namely, that the Welsh Church was 'alien' in the sense that it was out of sympathy with, if not antagonistic to, Welsh life. A long succession of English bishops (many of them excellent men who did great work in Wales) and, what was more important, English clerics who took livings in Wales and resided in England, gave colour to this charge. The Welsh churchman of today must be prepared to accept much of

the truth in this charge together with the undoubted fact that Welsh services were too freely abandoned in Welsh speaking areas to please a small but influential minority. There is much substance in this charge, but it should be emphasised that Welsh clergy and church scholars played a very important part in Welsh literature and the study of Welsh antiquities during the first half of the nineteenth century. Dr. R. T. Jenkins has emphasised the contribution these people made to Welsh life, and points out that they dug deeper into the traditions of the nation than those strata of nonconformity and radicalism. He says that it is impossible to exaggerate the importance of their work.

But Welsh Nonconformity came to influence the life of Wales more and more as the century went on, and it is not too much to say that to be a Welshman meant in the great majority of cases that one was a Nonconformist in religion and a Liberal in politics. The 'Welsh way of life', as this ultimately came to be understood, was largely a Welsh Nonconformist way of life. This can now be seen as a phase of, and a contribution to, Welsh cultural and social development, but not as the whole of it.

(iii) If the second charge needs to be examined closely and the truth it contains has to be accepted, the third charge was indisputable; that Welsh churchmen represented but a minority of the people of Wales. How small a minority may be disputed, but the fact is clear from the religious census of 1851. But between that date and the early years of the present century the Welsh Church underwent a striking transformation, while Nonconformity in Wales, although still preponderant, was losing ground. However, during the whole of the disestablishment campaign from, say, 1870 to 1920, the argument of numbers lay with Nonconformity, and this factor became increasingly important as politics became more democratic.

In addition to all these factors which contributed to the disestablishment issue, the struggle became bound up with the social struggle in the Welsh countryside. This

not only involved the tithe question which erupted in Wales, and especially in the diocese of St. Asaph, from 1886 to 1889, but it went deeper in that it became mixed up with the class struggle waged between a largely Welsh Nonconformist peasantry and tenant farmers on the one hand and English landlords, Anglican in religion, on the other hand. The former had certainly their legitimate grievances but it was unfortunate that the cause of the local parson became indistinguishable from that of the local landowner.

Thus we see that the disestablishment issue had many sides to it: a Victorian radicalism, a symbol in a struggle for national identity and aspirations, an element in the nineteenth century class struggle in Wales, and a privileged position which Nonconformity strove to abolish.

II. How?

At the beginning of the previous chapter it was said that the Church in Wales will in 1970 'commemorate' its disestablishment and disendowment. It is hardly necessary to say that the great majority of Welsh churchmen resisted these measures. There were a few within Wales who were prepared to accept disestablishment, and a few prominent English churchmen, notably Bishop Gore, who took a similar line. But successive Church congresses, Archbishops of Canterbury and diocesan conferences all opposed the policy.

There were no dissentient voices on this issue among the Welsh Liberal members whose numbers increased as one general election followed another, so that by 1892 they represented thirty-one out of the thirty-four parliamentary seats in Wales. In 1887 Welsh disestablishment became part of the official policy of the Liberal party, and in 1891 Gladstone accepted it as second only in importance to Irish Home Rule. A year later the Liberal party once again came into power and on this occasion the Welsh Liberal members were in a very strong strategic position, for the Gladstone government, having lost its support in England, was dependent upon the Welsh Liberal M.P.s and the Irish Nationalist M.P.s to remain in power. After a number of Motions for Welsh disestablishment had been introduced into and rejected by the House of Commons since 1870, the time had now come to introduce the first Bill for that purpose.

The first Welsh disestablishment Bill was introduced into the House of Commons in 1894 and had it become law it would have crippled the Welsh Church. The disestablishment clauses were what were to be expected and they did not differ in successive Bills. The four Welsh dioceses were to be severed from the Province of Canterbury and all ecclesiastical corporations were to be dissolved. Private patronage was to be abolished and

ecclesiastical law would not henceforth be enforceable in the Welsh Church (unless, of course, it chose to receive it and enforce it in its own courts); and the four Welsh bishops would cease to sit in the House of Lords. All this was foreseen and was necessary in any disestablishment measure. But the disendowment measures were unexpectedly severe, and before we can understand them it is necessary to explain whence the Welsh Church in those days derived its income.

Much of it came from property which had been given to the Church in past ages and particularly in pre-Reformation times. There was also the income from tithe, and grants from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners of England. Queen Anne's Bounty grants also yielded rents and, of course, there were the offertories of church people from week to week. (In this connection it may be pointed out that, with the exception of the service of Holy Communion, the Sunday collection in many country parish churches was a fairly recent innovation.) From all these sources only an annual income of £13,000 would have remained. By far the greater part of its income would have been lost to the Church had the Bill of 1894 become law, but the Church would have retained its church buildings (but not its cathedrals), parsonage houses and the furniture etc. of its churches. But its burial grounds, which were such a sore point with Nonconformists, were to be vested in the recently formed parish councils.

The Bill did not get as far as a second reading in the House of Commons, and another Bill introduced in 1895 likewise failed because of the fall of the Rosebery government. But concessions had already been made: under the 1895 Bill cathedrals would be retained by the Church, only closed churchyards would be transferred to parish councils, and the date of the secularization of church property was to be changed from 1703 to 1662.

From 1895 to the beginning of 1906 the Welsh disestablishment question lay dormant, as the conservative governments of those years did not adopt it as part of their policy. But with the sweeping Liberal victory in the

general election of January 1906 the matter reached its final and last phase. But although the Liberal party had given a prominent place in its general programme to the disestablishment and disendowment of the Welsh Church, it did not immediately introduce legislation but it set up the 'Royal Commission on the Church of England and other religious bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire' with Frank Morgan, of Keble College, Oxford, as secretary. This Commission issued its report in 1910, but a year before this the third Welsh Disestablishment Bill had been introduced into the House of Commons.

By this time the situation was changing in favour of the Welsh Church. The tide of Nonconformity had reached its high water mark before the end of the nineteenth century and although Nonconformists were collectively in a clear majority in Wales the Welsh Church could now put forward and defend the claim that it was the strongest single religious body in Wales though, of course, the claim was disputed. But all had to admit that the Church of 1910 was very different from that of 1800 and 1850. Prominent Nonconformists recognized this and it was clear that there were thousands of them in Wales who did not support the disendowment clauses of the earlier Bills. But most important of all, society was changing. The Liberal government of 1906 embarked on a programme of far reaching social reform, compared with which the question of disestablishment was peripheral; and David Lloyd George, who had been prominent in the early phases of the struggle, had become Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1908, and had far bigger fish to fry than the relatively insignificant matter of Welsh ecclesiastical politics. This change was reflected in the disendowment clauses of the 1909 and 1912 Welsh Disestablishment Bills, although of course the disestablishment clauses remained unchanged.

A number of financial concessions were made in these last two Bills, with the result that the Bill of 1912 proposed to allow an annual income of £133,000 to the Welsh Church out of its annual estimated income of £260,000 per annum. These improved terms were made

possible because the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and the Governors of Queen Anne's Bounty were allowed to transfer to the Welsh Church the capital from which their annual grants had hitherto been made. The annual value of Welsh Church property to be secularized (i.e. diverted to other uses) amounted to £158,000.

The 1909 Bill passed the House of Commons but was rejected by the House of Lords. It was reintroduced, in a slightly amended form, after the passing of the Parliament Act (1910) had reduced the power of the latter House, and it passed both Houses, receiving the royal assent on 18th September 1914. The Bill to disestablish the Welsh Church thus reached the statute book fifty years after the question had first been introduced into the House of Commons, but it was not to come into operation for at least one year, and if the (first World) War was not then terminated it was to be further postponed 'not later than the date of the termination of the war, as may be fixed by Order in Council'.

The resistance of the Welsh Church, led by Bishops A. G. Edwards and John Owen, persisted to the end. There were those who believed that continued resistance would avert the final blow, but Frank Morgan urged otherwise, so that, while still hoping for the best, church leaders began to prepare for the worst and put their house in order by the time the Welsh Church would become a separate province. The outstanding landmark in this period of preparation was the Convention which met in Cardiff in October 2-5 1917. This Convention consisted of clerical and lay members from the four Welsh dioceses, in addition of course to the Welsh bishops. It was this Convention which accepted the Constitution of the Church in Wales much as we know it today, the preliminary work having been done by three high court judges: Sankey, Bankes and Atkin, Canon Gilbert Joyce and Frank Morgan, who was later to become Secretary to the Governing Body. After the Constitution had been accepted the members of the Convention held a service of thanksgiving in St. John's Church, Cardiff.

Although hostilities in the first World War ceased in November 1918, the war in Western Europe did not end until the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on 28th June 1919. The time was approaching when the disestablishment and disendowment terms of the 1914 Act were to be put into effect, but before this happened the Amending Act (1919) went through all its stages by 19th August of that year. This fixed the date of disestablishment as 31st March 1920 and it also gave an exchequer grant of £1,000,000 to the Commissioners 'of Church Temporalities in Wales' who were responsible for implementing the Act, and it was estimated at the time that the disendowment clauses deprived the Welsh Church of an annual income of £48,000 which was far less than had been feared. By 1931 the Commissioners had paid over to the Representative Body of the Church in Wales the sum of £3,561,136.

The capital value of secularized property amounted to £3,455,813 10s. 8d. when the Welsh Church Commissioners came to transfer it to the recipients between 1942 and 1947. This money was distributed as follows:

<i>County Councils</i>			£	s.	d.
Anglesey	..	..	221,983	4	11
Brecon	..	..	138,732	1	5
Caernarvon	..	..	164,263	9	1
Cardigan	..	..	85,770	16	0
Carmarthen	..	..	130,209	0	5
Denbigh	..	..	259,917	2	2
Flint	..	..	105,158	17	6
Glamorgan	..	..	291,149	10	1
Merioneth	..	..	38,199	12	5
Monmouth	..	..	340,630	18	4
Montgomery	..	..	198,290	12	11
Pembroke	..	..	229,576	5	3
Radnor	..	..	120,787	3	11

<i>Boroughs</i>			£	s.	d.
Cardiff			10,719	4	0
Merthyr Tydfil ..			124,923	13	3
Newport			3,267	5	4
Swansea			3,038	2	11
<i>University of Wales</i> ..			989,196	10	6

The above are the Welsh Church Act funds administered by these bodies.

Technically all of the above property, secularized and unsecularized, was on 31st March 1920 transferred to a body already referred to which was created under the Act and described 'The Commissioners of Church Temporalities in Wales'. It is unfortunate that this body became known as 'The Welsh Church Commissioners', whose duty it was to carry out the disendowment terms of the Act, but their function was misunderstood, e.g. farmers who continued to pay tithe after 1920 did so to this body, and many were under the impression that the tithe so paid went to the Church. So far from holding Church assets, the 'Welsh Church Commissioners', so called, were administering assets taken from the Church. Their function came to an end in 1948 when the disendowment terms of the 1914 and 1919 Acts had been carried out.

One word more about finance: as the result of an appeal to Welsh churchmen for one million pounds, the sum of £700,000 approximately had been raised by the early 1930s, and this went far to offset the annual loss of £48,000 suffered by disendowment.

III. Results

This is the most difficult chapter to write because it must rest largely on personal judgement which may well be in error and moreover, only one attempt has hitherto been made to assess the Church in Wales since disestablishment, and this attempt avoided the real issues.

The tangible results are obvious: on 1st April 1920 the ancient Welsh Church began a new chapter in its history as a separate province within the Anglican communion. On 7th April in the same year Alfred George Edwards was elected the first Archbishop of Wales and on the following 1st June was enthroned in St. Asaph Cathedral. The Constitution which was accepted by the Cardiff Convention in 1917 has stood the test of time very well and the organisations which have grown up under its aegis have fulfilled the functions for which they were created. The Representative Body and its various committees have attracted the loyalty and skills of churchmen (and one instinctively thinks of our leading laymen) for which the whole Church is grateful; and, in the context of administration, it is pertinent and a pleasure to record what most clergy have experienced, namely, the efficiency of the staff at 39 Cathedral Road, Cardiff. It was not long before the Governing Body, as the chief legislative organ of the Church in Wales, created two new dioceses: Monmouth (1921) and Swansea and Brecon (1923). But would it be just at this point of time to accuse the various diocesan conferences of an excessive multiplication of parishes by sub-division in our urban and industrial areas? Again, those who have worked on our Liturgical Commission for the revision of the Prayer Book can hold their heads high in any province in the Anglican Communion, and the Church in Wales Publications Board has received more than one handsome compliment from other Anglican churches. In other matters we have failed: especially in an overall provincial

church schools' policy. This is probably our greatest failure.

It is when we come to deal with the intangibles and imponderables that a verdict is more difficult to reach. One thing, however, is quite clear: the Welsh Church was not deprived of one note of catholicity as that term has been and still is interpreted in Anglicanism. The historic ministry of bishops, priests and deacons was retained without a break, together with the ancient creeds of christendom and the sacraments. Mr. Justice Sankey, in introducing the draft of the new Constitution to the 1917 Convention said: 'There are many of us here to whom changes seem desirable and welcome', but no one suggested a change which would in any way affect the nature of the Church. The canonical mind and watchful eye of Archdeacon C. A. H. Green were a sufficient guarantee against any revolutionary ecclesiastical innovations, and this was made clear when the Standing Orders of the Convention were being discussed. One Order was to the effect that any resolution passed by a majority of clerical delegates and by a majority of lay delegates should be carried unless vetoed by three of the four Welsh bishops. A Cardiff barrister, Lovat-Fraser, moved the deletion of this Order, but Archdeacon Green feared that this principle would be written into the Constitution itself and thus abolish voting by Orders which, he believed, would set up a Presbyterian or Congregationalist ecclesiastical system. The move to delete this particular Order was heavily defeated after a long and characteristic speech by the future Archbishop of Wales.

To try to assess successes and failures in other spheres it is well to recall the hopes and fears of the architects of the Constitution in 1917. Mr. Justice Sankey looked forward to a Church *in* Wales which would become a Church *of* Wales (although he did not express his hopes in these terms). He said: 'As long as you have the wisdom to throw open wide the door of the Church, to make her truly Catholic, wherever Welshmen worship your Founder, they will turn new faces toward you.'

The more they multiply the more friends you will have The Nonconformist is already turning his weary steps to the old mother'. Lord Justice Bankes was more explicit: the Welsh Church had been compulsorily set free and this afforded a great opportunity. He saw a great National Church which would capture the affections of the people of Wales. It would be a missionary church and a tolerant church; one not divided against itself but would contain all types of churchmen. It would be a Church in which the laity would have a well defined position, and one in which the congregation would be entitled to be heard before any appointment to a benefice would be made or before any alteration was made in the accustomed form of service. Some of these hopes have been realised, and on the whole it can be claimed that the Church in Wales occupies a more prominent place in the life of Wales than it did before 1920. It would have been helpful if Archbishop Green had examined these aspects of disestablishment in a lengthy newspaper article he wrote in 1935 and afterward had published separately: *Disestablishment and Disendowment: The experience of the Church in Wales*. Unfortunately the Archbishop did not concern himself with the broader issues but confined himself almost exclusively with the working out of the disestablishment and disendowment terms. Then, at the end of the article came the rhetorical question: 'Is all well?', to be followed by the flat answer: 'I believe it is'. True, he touched upon the question of language, but said that was no outcome of disestablishment.

The issue that has to be faced is one which is summed up under the term 'nationalism', but which consists of factors not usually brought under that term. Bishop John Owen, as true a Welshman as ever lived, once feared the 'dreadful apparition of a Welsh Synod, messing about with the big, complex, and far reaching questions which now perplex all the combined wisdom of the Church of England', and the growth of 'tribal jealousies' and 'nationalist vanities' in a disestablished and separated Church. He was not alone in these fears,

for there were others who feared a possible isolation from the Church of England and consequent in-breeding. But these were risks that had to be taken, for disestablishment was imposed on the Welsh Church and it had no option except to organise itself as a Church serving a particular territorial area: Wales.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude this brief sketch on a semi-apologetic note, for this particular territorial area called Wales has its own national identity, and it is the privilege of the Church in Wales to serve the nation, whether its inhabitants speak the language or not. This is a theological truth laid down by one of the greatest of all Anglican theologians, Richard Hooker: 'As the main body of the sea being one, yet within divers precincts hath divers names; so the Catholic Church is in like sort divided into a number of distinct Societies, every one of which is termed a Church within itself.'

The duty of the Church is to serve that area whose name it has taken, and the most successful churches are those which have been most faithful to their charge.

It is difficult to assess this relationship of Church and Nation in Wales and the historical judgement which follows may well be modified if not suspended, by a more detailed examination than this brief study makes possible. But, in retrospect, the period between disestablishment and the beginning of the second World War seems to have been one in which the Church in Wales was primarily concerned with its own affairs. If this is true it may be excused as the natural reaction of a Church to the traumatic experience of disestablishment. But even in this period the impact of Bishop Timothy Rees on the whole life of the diocese of Llandaff should not be forgotten, nor should it be forgotten that his contemporary, Bishop Joyce of Monmouth, became Pro-Chancellor of the University of Wales. These signs of a more outward looking spirit became more obvious after 1946 during the days of Archbishop John Morgan, and one visible symbol of this was the setting up of the Prayer Book and Nation Commission and the publication of its Report in 1950.

And who would have foreseen in 1920 that Welsh bishops would be one day seen among Gorsedd y Beirdd!

A recent ecclesiastical historian has written that the most successful churches in the contemporary world are those which have associated themselves most closely with the life of the nation, and the Church of Scotland is cited as an example. Its General Assembly is the nearest institution the Scots have to a parliament. May the time come when the people of Wales will see the Governing Body of the Church in Wales in a similar light.

APPENDIX

Questions for Discussion Groups

- I. (i) Has the Church v. Chapel issue completely died in your parish?
(ii) Do you think that ecclesiastical allegiances any longer correspond to political allegiances?
(iii) Has the Church in Wales learned any lessons from the disestablishment campaign?
- II. (i) Do you believe that the abolition of private patronage in the Church in Wales was altogether a good thing?
(ii) What relevance had the issues of the disestablishment campaign to the problems created in Wales by the Industrial Revolution?
(iii) Do you know how the Welsh Church Act Fund is administered by your County Council or County Borough?
- III. (i) To what extent, if any, do you believe that the Constitution of the Church in Wales needs to be amended in the light of fifty years' experience. Discuss this matter in connection with:
 - (a) Voting by Orders in the Governing Body.
 - (b) Bill procedure in the Governing Body.
 - (c) The hopes expressed in the Cardiff Convention of 1917.
(ii) How is the mission of the Church in Wales today affected by:
 - (a) Its deployment of clergy according to geographical areas rather than distribution of population;
 - (b) Its sense of priorities;
 - (c) The Ecumenical Movement.
(iii) Is there a danger of too great a uniformity in matters of churchmanship in the Church in Wales?
(iv) To what extent can any church be:
 - (a) Democratic.
 - (b) Nationalist.
(v) Do you believe that the central funds of the Church in Wales should be partly used for the building of church day schools?

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