

## 6. Bishop of Hereford

It was deeply ironic that Henson, long the upholder of Establishment, was now causing cracks to appear in Church and State relations. Asquith thought Henson would have been wiser to decline Hereford but informed the Archbishop that he felt that Henson's appointment had given a 'real shake to the constitutional position of the Church'. Lord Salisbury took the same view as the Earl of Selborne, 'but much more calmly, and with, I think, a clearer appreciation of the difficulty of the situation'. From the announcement of Henson's appointment to his Consecration as Bishop the whole of the Church of England was in continuous turmoil. For Archbishop Davidson this period was the most anxious and harassing in the whole of his life - for Henson, 'the effect of the shameful agitation against my Consecration upon me was lasting and baleful'. An early flash of lightning came from Lord Halifax in a letter to Davidson. 'It is a monstrous appointment and if carried out will do more than anything I can imagine to convert all serious members of the Church to disestablishment as the only possible remedy for such scandals'. Halifax would not have caused the Archbishop's heart to miss many beats. The same would not be the case with the Bishop of Oxford, Charles Gore, who spent the night of 17 December 1917 at Lambeth Palace.

Gore admitted frankly that Henson is a firm believer in the Incarnation, but that Henson's belief in that great doctrine is accompanied by a disbelief in those miraculous events of the Human Ministry which Gore regards as essential to the Incarnation doctrine in its entirety. He was somewhat excited, though not to the degree I have often seen, but he passionately exclaimed - 'it all turns, though you won't see it, on his disbelief in miracles as such. He believes Our Lord had a human father, and that His Body rotted in the tomb. A man who believes that cannot, with my consent, be made a Bishop of the Province.

The *Church Times* whose editor, Revd E. Hermitage Day, who lived just outside the city of Hereford, spat venom. 'Unhappy Hereford' and 'The Hereford Scandal' were two early leaders in the *Church Times*. Day

wrote to the Archbishop explaining, 'I am bound to liberate my own mind by saying that in the event of Dr Henson's consecration I shall formally withdraw from communion with him and from any bishops who may have consecrated him.' The *Hereford Times*, whose editor, Charles James Box, was chairman of the local branch of the English Church Union (ECU), proclaimed the appointment as, 'deplorable. . . . He [Henson] has been the apostle of laxity and latitudinarianism in which every clergyman can be a law to himself'.

Henson wrote to Davidson, 'I see that there is a prospect of my figuring as the centrepiece in an Anglican *auto da fé*. It is a pity, for those functions don't really amuse the people any longer, and have never brought credit to the Church'.

Henson breakfasted with the Archbishop of 19 December: 'He seemed depressed and morose. I think he anticipates considerable trouble over my appointment. He told me that he was receiving numerous letters calling upon him to see the King, and insist upon this scandalous nomination being cancelled, and that he should refuse to consecrate. I came away from the Palace with an uncomfortable suspicion that the Archbishop would like to throw me over, if he decently could'.

The Archbishop's own note of the meeting was: 'I had a full talk with him [Henson]. He was pleasant and friendly, but he disappointed me by his self-satisfaction and his rather venomous denunciation of those who were opposing his appointment'.

The salvos were yet to be fired in a battle that would be ferocious, personally vindictive and unedifying. Henson's adversaries were organised into a militia to expose him as a heretic and to put pressure on the Archbishop into refusing him consecration. The ECU collected thousands of signatures for petitions and memorials and generally turned legitimate protest into a form of hatred. The *Church Times* provided outline letters readers should send to the occupants of Buckingham Palace, 10 Downing Street and Lambeth Palace. The sole purpose was to prevent Henson being consecrated a bishop.

Hereford was a bishopric that had had continuous life from the seventh century and was a traditional Church of England diocese with very few Anglo-Catholic parishes. However, it was the local branch of the ECU which whipped up a frenzy with meetings, posters on telegraph poles and a plethora of emotive leaflets where extracts from Henson's books were used crassly and dishonestly, for example, 'Follow Henson's teaching and Christianity in England would be reduced to the level of the State Church of Prussia'; 'The Hindu may ask with quite as much force as Henson, if your Jesus was born in the ordinary way of two human parents, how is He any better than our Krishna?'; 'On Christian Marriage, do we believe Jesus Christ or Henson?'

After the Archbishop read *Dr Hensley Henson's Opinions*, he turned to Henson's books and, 're-read with care and with close attention all the passages' which were being quoted at him. He realised that the *Opinions* were an untrue representation of what Henson taught and he wrote to the ECU to say so. The postbags of both Archbishop and Henson were huge, and there was daily commentary and correspondence in *The Times*. Individual bishops were provoked into publishing lengthy justifications of their own positions. The persistent lobbying on the Archbishop to do something was immense and he wrote to Selborne saying Henson was, 'occupying my thought and study night and day. . . . Henson's attitude is, "I will not make explanations now except to a competent Court. If I am a heretic let me be prosecuted as such and I will abide the judgment of competent authority"'. Selborne thought Henson 'ought not to become a Bishop'.

The next stage in the legal procedure towards Consecration was the requirement for Henson to be elected by the Dean and Greater Chapter of Hereford Cathedral, on 4 January 1918. The wily and worried archbishop had considered the prospect of what he would do if the electors refused Henson. The 'electors would meet under the singular conditions of a *congé d'élire*. The Archbishop privately pondered, 'The Crown will, I think, be itself in some difficulty, and I imagine that I ought, if the rejection happens, to intimate at once to the Prime Minister that I should not be prepared to consecrate on mere Royal Mandate which had over-ridden an adverse election vote. What would happen nobody can say, for there is no precedent. I do not see how I could do otherwise in view of what I myself again and again have said during many years past as to the safeguard against improper appointments which is afforded by the election and by the Archbishop's power of refusing to consecrate. If I were to refuse to consecrate I should have to make it quite clear publicly that this was not because I regard Dr Henson as heretical, but simply because the Chapter had (in my view wrongly) refused to elect him, and that I could not therefore act'. Such an escape-hatch did not present itself. But it is unthinkable that the Archbishop would have sacrificed himself for Henson, or that the Prime Minister would have allowed Henson to withdraw.

Henson received a telegram, 'Elected by Chapter, nineteen present. Four only did not sign'. The dean and two archdeacons voted for Henson. However, that is insufficient as a historical record. The Greater Chapter comprised twenty-nine members, of which only nineteen members turned up to vote. If the absentees had attended and abstained from voting, Henson would have been elected by the

barest majority. Bishop Gore's 'Formal Protest' – a very official looking document – was sent to the Archbishop on 3 January 1918 with an accompanying letter. 'I never wrote anything with such loathing as I have written this'. Gore's chief concerns were the three consequences that would result from accepting Henson as a bishop, 'apart from any fresh declaration of his belief which he may think to make'. The bishops corporately, though not the Church of England in general, would be committed to the abandonment of what had always been the ground of the Catholic Church, namely, that the theological ideas and the miraculous facts of the Gospels were interdependent; secondly, an increasing atmosphere of suspicion and unreality would be attached in the public mind to the most solemn public assertions of the clergy in the matter of religion; thirdly, 'an effective (though not I think legitimate) excuse will be afforded to all officers of the Church to treat their solemn declarations on other subjects as scraps of paper': the exercise of discipline would become more difficult, and the authority of the episcopate would be quite undermined. Accordingly, he appealed to the Archbishops and other bishops to refuse to consecrate.

The Archbishop was both circumspect and unconvinced by Gore, as he regarded Henson as 'a brilliant and powerful teacher of the Christian faith'. The difficulty for the Archbishop was that he was dealing with two mavericks, Gore and Henson. The Archbishop was troubled by those who seemed prepared to put Henson into court and there was no evidence that a court case would succeed. More troubling for the Archbishop and for Henson were ominous signs when individual bishops informed them, and simultaneously the press, that they were not prepared to join in consecrating Henson. These were: London, Winchester, Salisbury, Worcester, Exeter, Ely, Truro, Chelmsford, Chichester and Rochester. There would be a larger number of bishops who shared their views but they remained publicly quiescent. But none of them was prepared to follow Gore blindfold in suggesting or threatening their own resignations if Henson were consecrated. Most bishops wanted clarification from Henson.

Henson visited Lambeth on 15/16 January for a most difficult meeting with the Archbishop, who felt, 'It was clear that Henson's complete silence gave a handle to those who declared that he was obviously unable to express a definite belief in the credal articles on which he is unsound. On the other hand, one felt the difficulty of his seeming to be trimming a statement of belief in order to enter the port of Episcopacy, and his vehement and rather irritable spirit would lead him to listen greedily to those who urge him to leave the

onus on his opponents, and to preserve a dignified silence. While this might be well enough for him, it did not go far to relieve me of the charge that I was carelessly ordaining an unbelieving man because the Crown made me do so'. And, 'Past midnight, just when going to bed, it occurred to me that possibly I might write something to which he might assent. I scribbled down a draft letter, abbreviating it to the narrowest compass, and a yet briefer draft reply. I slept over these, so far as I did sleep, and in the morning showed them to Dibdin, who had come to breakfast at my request. He was very much against my asking Henson to fall in with such a plan. He was sure to refuse, and then I should be in a most undignified position, apparently having gone begging to him to get us out of a morass, and having failed in the attempt. While Dibdin and I were talking, the servant announced that the Dean of Durham was in the next room, and brought Henson in'.

The upshot of these meetings with the Archbishop was two letters:

Archbishop of Canterbury to Dean of Durham, 16 January 1918:

I am receiving communications from many earnest men of different schools who are disquieted by what they have been led to suppose to be your disbelief in the Apostles' Creed, and especially in the clauses relating to Our Lord's Birth and Resurrection. I reply to them that they are misinformed, and that I am persuaded that when you repeat the words of the Creed you do so *ex animo* and without any desire to change them. I think I understand your reluctance to make at this moment a statement on the motives of which might be misconstrued, and it is only because you would relieve many good people from real distress that I ask you to let me publish this letter with a word of reassurance from yourself.

Dean of Durham to Archbishop of Canterbury, 17 January 1918:

I do not like to leave any letter of yours unanswered. It is strange that it should be thought by anyone to be necessary that I should give such an assurance as you mention, but of course what you say is absolutely true. I am indeed astonished that any candid reader of my published books, or anyone acquainted with my public Ministry of thirty years, could entertain a suggestion so dishonourable to me as a man and as a clergyman.

The last sentence of Henson's letter was added at Henson's insistence. The letters were published and appeared in the newspapers on 18 January. Owen Chadwick makes an important point: 'In archiepiscopal prudence came a point where skilful drafting verged into sleight of hand. And Davidson could plead as his justification,

that, while he asked nothing of Henson which in a literal sense Henson could not concede, he saved the Church from calamity.' The exchange of correspondence prompted an immediate letter from Gore to the Archbishop:

Henson's reply is given without reservation. . . . I consider myself now entitled to declare that Dr Henson believes what I thought he disbelieved, and affirms *ex animo* what I thought he did not affirm. I am also entitled to declare that the declaration of the bishops in Convocation would stand unimpaired by Dr Henson's consecration. And with this twofold assurance I beg respectfully to withdraw my protest against his consecration.

Henson was not deceived. Gore was not privy to Henson's journal: 'He professes to be entitled to assume that I don't disbelieve what he thought I did disbelieve and that I give an *ex animo* belief to what he thought I doubted. Is he really entitled to make this assumption? I certainly did not intend him to be so'. Gore, Talbot of Winchester and other bishops wrongly thought Henson had come close to recantation. But it neither changed their view of Henson, nor reversed their decision to boycott his consecration.

It is doubtful if many people were genuinely convinced by this unedifying procedure. At that moment it appears that Henson miscalculated, was weak and in error. At his Ordination he had subscribed and assented to the Book of Common Prayer and the Thirty-Nine Articles. These foundation documents of the Reformed and Established Church of England specified the beliefs demanded of every clergyman. The Archbishop was unusually disingenuous in obtaining any other statement of belief from Henson, and Henson was inexplicably weak and wrong in making it. He should have been his usual resolute self and not acceded to the Archbishop's wishes. Perhaps in the *mêlée* of the moment he did not want to see a bishopric slipping from his grasp.

### *Consecration as Bishop*

The Confirmation of Election was the final legal stage before Consecration. It took place at St Mary-le-Bow church in the City of London, on 23 January 1918. Prior to the ceremony Lord Parmoor, as Vicar-General to the Archbishop, received two documents of objections from solicitors acting on behalf of John Riley JP and the Revd Hermitage Day of Hereford, but legally he could not consider them. At 10:30 the procession entered the Church – Canon Masterman of Bow Church and the Bishop-elect in black gown and Oxford hood. The Litany was said. Henson was formally presented, and made and subscribed to the declaration against simony and once again assented to the Thirty-Nine Articles and to the Book of Common Prayer. He was now, in law, the Bishop of Hereford.

Originally three bishops were to be consecrated on 2 February: Richard Stanley Heywood as Bishop of Mombasa; William Woodcock Hough as Bishop Suffragan of Woolwich and Henson. In the end, Heywood, who was serving as a missionary in India, could not get through the Mediterranean, a salutary reminder that the First World War was still in progress. Henson had successfully approached Burge of Southwark, and Herbert Ryle, Dean of Westminster, a former bishop of Exeter and of Winchester, to present him to the Archbishop at the Consecration. Henson's friend, Dean W.R. Inge, had agreed to preach the sermon and, 'thought of speaking on the national character of the English Church, as accentuated by the war', but when he informed the Archbishop of what he would cover the Archbishop responded, 'that we ought not to accommodate those excitement mongers who will want to make an incendiary bomb of the occasion. . . . What I personally should hope for is a little more abstinence from the controversial field'. Unexpectedly, Inge modified his sermon without completely mutilating its original intention.

Protests continued until the last moment before the Consecration. But, for Henson, the most painful aspect was the personal vindictiveness of some bishops and the hypocrisy of others. He never liked falsity, so to receive letters of congratulation in warm terms from the likes of Lang of York was simply odious. When Henson met the Archbishop on 22 January, 'I told him that I deeply resented the way in which I had been treated, and I do. My relations with these abstaining bishops will not be exactly easy. They have done what they can to hinder my entrance on my episcopate; they have added enormously to my difficulties in starting my work; they have lent the sanction of their names to the campaign of calumny and insult which has been running its course for the past month. All this it is impossible not to resent, difficult to forgive'.

The Consecration took place on 2 February in Westminster Abbey. The Archbishop was assisted by the Bishops of Durham, Bristol, Lincoln, Llandaff, Newcastle, Peterborough and Southwark; Bishop Suffragan of Jarrow and Bishops Taylor-Smith, Ryle and Boyd Carpenter. The Archbishop made a note, 'Carlisle came for the service, but had to leave before the actual Consecration. The only Bishop present who definitely abstained from taking part in the laying on of hands was Bishop Taylor of Kingston-upon-Thames. He attended as the presenting Bishop along with Southwark for Bishop Hough. . . . So ends, for the time at least, the personal part of the controversy. What its outcome may be in the disestablishment direction, or otherwise, remains to be seen'.

Henson was enthroned in Hereford Cathedral on 16 February

1918. Only seventy of three hundred and fifty-two diocesan clergy attended, although the difficulty of travelling might have accounted for many absences. Henson preached an encouraging and uncontroversial sermon. The diocese's jurisdiction was the county of Hereford and parts of the adjoining counties of Worcester, Shropshire, Radnor and Montgomery. The population was 206,117. There were 360 benefices, 425 churches and 313 church schools. The Bishop's patronage covered the Archdeacons, Canonries, Prebends and only fifty-six benefices.

### *Proposals for Administrative Reform*

Crucial for Henson was having the *Hereford Diocesan Magazine* at his disposal, even though it had been reduced from a monthly to a quarterly during the war. He could return to matters of Church and State; the consequences of The Enabling Act; the union of benefices in a diocese where 60 parishes had populations of less than 200 and a further over 200 but less than 300; requiring confirmation candidates to be aged fourteen; encouraging Holy Communion to have a central place in the Church's worship. 'The Lord's Supper, as it is generally administered does not sufficiently declare the fellowship of Christians with one another in the Family of God'.

The situation was becoming urgent that if Henson was to save the Established Church from itself he needed allies. 'It cannot be denied that the recent appointments to the Episcopal Bench have tended to weaken the Tractarian dominance. Nickson of Bristol, Pearce of Worcester, Burge of Southwark, (Theodore) Woods of Peterborough, Watts-Ditchfield of Chelmsford form a block which might be worked into a fighting factor of some force.' That would be a delusion. He wrote to the Bishop of Norwich, Bertram Pollock, suggesting that a resolution should be moved in Convocation for a Royal Commission to inquire into the state of the Church of England and to suggest a plan of reform. Above all, Henson's chief concern was when he would enter the House of Lords so he could have a national platform. Henson was thirteenth on the list awaiting a seat. In his journal he calculated that, with anticipated retirements, and the removal of the four Welsh bishops following disestablishment, 'At the end of 1919 I shall probably stand 4 in the succession'.

The Archbishops' Fourth Committee of Inquiry (one of the five committees set up after the National Mission in 1916) on *Administrative Reform in the Church* published its Report in 1918. The Committee's recommendations included a revision of the parson's freehold, the advantage of which had been, 'purchased at too high a cost'. In future: 'institution to a benefice should be for a limited number of



years (say, ten years)'; Patronage Boards should be founded in each diocese, and parishioners should have the right to be consulted before an incumbent was appointed; a minimum wage (that was the word used!) should be established for all clergy; Parochial Church Councils should be statutorily formed in each and every parish; the compulsory age for retirement should be fixed at seventy; an Advisory Council should be created, 'to advise the Prime Minister with reference to the recommendations of Bishops to the Crown'; an increase in the number of bishoprics was essential, the position of Cathedrals and Deans needed reforming, as did the Convocations; and a series of financial reforms.

In sum, they amounted to a revolution, and would affect relations between Church and State. It was also the prospectus of 'Life and Liberty'. It is not without significance that William Temple was secretary of the Committee, and probably drafted the Report. Henson's reaction was not to condemn wholesale each individual proposal, some he would adopt or adapt in the future. Kenneth Thompson makes a valid observation: 'Despite Henson's tendency to see all movements for increased self-government as movements for disestablishment, he was the one contemporary commentator who could analyse the separate forces involved in the process by which the "autonomist" and "instrumentalist" groups came together in the successful reform movement'. Henson's contention was: 'The Church of England is a federation of dioceses, and the independence of the diocesan units ought to be jealously guarded. Centralization of government may have large practical advantages, and will always commend itself to those who are distinguished as 'business men', but more reflecting Churchmen will not readily forget that those practical advantages are always dearly paid for.' Henson had been a continuous problem for Lang in the Convocation of York. His move to the Southern Province brought his opposition to developments in Church and State nearer to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Henson's opposition mattered, even when the Archbishop was advised by bishops not to take the Hensonian threat too seriously.

As late as October 1918, the Archbishop was being pressed by the reformers to make a public statement and, on 24 October, he received an eighty strong delegation from 'Life and Liberty' and the Church Self-Government Association. Feeling ran high but the Archbishop declined to make a public statement. Parliament was dissolved following the Armistice on 11 November which prevented legislation 'without delay'. Perhaps this imposed pause led the Archbishop to write to Selborne a letter which was also issued to the Press, giving his opinion that the proposals of the Church and State Committee and, *ipso facto*, 'Life and

Liberty', were sound, and strongly urging the Representative Church Council to support the scheme. He concluded, 'Both the Church and the Nation will, I am convinced, have cause for gratitude if, by God's blessing, our efforts are successful.'

This was a betrayal of everything Henson represented, and public confirmation of his isolation in the episcopate. The crux of the dilemma was that if institutional Christianity were to remain as a part of national life, the Church of England would have to accept some of the conditions of all human institutions, such as expediency, compromise and the abstention from pressing too far logical or theological conclusions. Persistence to obstinate policies and unbending convictions could only issue in the relegation of the Church of England to such a place as it may secure in the scuffling anarchy of competing sects. If Henson knew this, could he convince the Church's hierarchy and parliamentarians who would vote in the debate on the 'Enabling Bill' – National Assembly of the Church of England (Powers) Bill – in 1919? That year witnessed the fight of Henson's life, defending the Establishment against the infidels in the Church and a complaisant Parliament.

When Henson had arrived in Hereford, 'Nothing in my previous life has qualified me for the meticulous business of a rural diocese: and it is the case that my opposition to the prevailing policy in the Church cuts me off from sympathy, and makes me enigmatic & unintelligible even to those who would like to work with me.' Henson was wrong! The people of the diocese quickly came to appreciate Henson's qualities: those of directness, courage, promptness of initiative, steadiness in action, an intuitive intelligence of men and affairs. His ways were not always their ways, but because they were so unmistakably and completely his own, people recognised his sense of wisdom and justice and yielded to his leadership. It was a massive and remarkable transformation. He continued a practice started at Barking and continued at Westminster, in talking to anyone he encountered on the streets and lanes of his new diocese, and if he found interesting points of view, not necessarily his own, he invited people to his home for a meal and conversation. He provoked intelligence by expecting it. What was new to Henson was the round of Confirmation Addresses and village sermons. Their effect upon the people, and their encouragement and stimulus to the parochial clergy in their teaching work, would never be forgotten.