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III.

THE HON. LANCELOT W. JOYNSON-HICKS.

I PROPOSE to call attention only to a few matters which strike one particularly from the point of view of a member of the House of Laity of the Church Assembly and to speak very briefly. We, of that House, have been discussed, and to some extent criticised, in the Report itself, and the Report indicates, what many speakers in the Church Assembly emphatically say—and it is difficult not to agree with them—that the House of Laity is not adequately representative of the laity in the Church of this country as a whole. If this be so it is the more important that the laity, both in the Church Assembly and outside, should grasp clearly the fundamental importance of the proposals of this Report, and how they are likely to affect, not only the Church as a whole, but particularly the laity who form no insignificant part of it.

In introducing the Report in the Church Assembly the Archbishop of York made what struck me as being a most remarkable statement. He denied that the rejection of the revised Prayer Book was the cause of the Commission being set up, though he admitted that in his view the Prayer Book controversy and its result emphasised the necessity for the Commission. He would not however go so far as to admit that the debate itself, and the rejection of the Prayer Book Measure by the House of Commons was the direct cause of the appointment of the Commission. There, I think, the majority of people will differ from the Archbishop.

Even a superficial reading of the Report shows so much reference to the Prayer Book debate and the effect of the House of Commons resolution, that it is impossible to avoid the feeling that whatever may have been in the minds of the Assembly when the Commission was appointed, there is no getting away from the fact that the members of the Commission themselves were very greatly influenced in the views they incorporated in the Report, by the Prayer Book Measure. In fact, they took it almost as their text and as the basis for the conclusions they had to formulate. The impression conveyed is that the Commission, in effect, said to itself: "We have got to try to find a way out of the position which is caused by the Prayer Book failure." In other words, they had to find a way round the House of Commons. It is scarcely open^v to doubt that that was the principal issue in the minds of the Commissioners, and the guiding thread running throughout the whole of their report.

It is worth while to consider the exact relationship which Parliament has had with the Church since the passing of the Church Assembly Act. Apart from the Prayer Book Measures it has only refused to pass two of the Measures sent up by the Assembly, that relating to the Diocese of Hereford and that about the City Churches. But upon these general Church opinion was acutely divided. It has never refused the various proposals agreed upon by the Church Assembly on which Church opinion has been substantially unanimous. One of the sentences used by the Arch-

bishop of York in his speech introducing the report was that the feeling of the Church must be practically unanimous; but he assumed that resolutions passed unanimously by the Assembly represented unanimity on the part of the Church, an assumption it would be difficult to verify.

Parliament itself has never, during this century, sought to set itself up in any despotic or tyrannical way over the Church. Rather, I prefer the phrase which Sir Thomas Inskip used when he referred to the Church and State as being partners. I think it is a very proper description. Some of you may well think that the State as representative of the laity, is rather what is known as a sleeping partner. I have heard the laity accused of being such in Church, but in their defence they are not always to be blamed for that. Anyhow, partners they are, and I think that the action of Parliament, in rejecting the Prayer Book Measure, was because it recognised that the other partner was seeking to impose its will over substantial minorities who were not in agreement with it. It was only then that Parliament took action, which many of us consider to have been of a very salutary nature. Even if the recommendations in this Report were adopted, it would still have been worth while for Parliament to have put a brake on the proposals so that the whole Church and the country might have a further opportunity of considering the matter. Another remark which the Archbishop of York made in the course of his speech, which was remarkable for the brilliant advocacy with which he put forward the case for receiving the Report, was that it is useless to reform the law courts till there was available a law of public worship which it was possible and desirable to enforce. Many of us consider there is such a law, but the Archbishop apparently is of opinion that there is not. Assuming that that point of view is correct we may at least suggest that if the ecclesiastical authorities since the passing of the Enabling Act, or better still, after the Royal Commission of 1906, had used such power and influence as they undoubtedly possess to restrain disorders within limits approximating to those in the Revised Prayer Book, their action would have contributed very greatly towards inspiring confidence in their willingness and their ability to see that the provisions of the new Book were obeyed. In addition to the strong disapproval of some parts of the 1928 Book, grave doubts were felt as to whether, if the Book passed into law, the Bishops could secure that the clergy would keep within its limits, and those doubts were a potent factor in the rejection of the Prayer Book Measure. There is no reason why the existing law should not have been put in force so as to limit the ritual excesses to the extent of the things permitted by the deposited Book. This was not, however, done and there seemed no solid reason to suppose that greater energy would be exerted for the enforcement of any new law regarding worship which that Book might embody.

A point of which the Archbishop of York made a great deal was what he described as the subjection of the Church in Spiritual matters to an authority other than ecclesiastical. To my mind, that expression in itself is a very doubtful one. Exactly what the

Archbishop means by it I find it difficult to gather. We are working under an arrangement devised in all its details by ecclesiastical authority and agreed to by Parliament without any attempt at alteration. Where is the "subjection" when Parliament merely acted as the Church authorities agreed it might properly do? Moreover, it will not do at this time of day to speak and act as if the words "spiritual," "ecclesiastical" and "clerical" were synonymous. There is no ground for the view that spiritual matters are more the concern of the Bishops and clergy than of the laity, nor that a body of men not ecclesiastically authorised is therefore and necessarily unspiritual. The laity, whether in Parliament or outside, have in the past had too strenuous a fight for a voice in matters of religion to surrender it to the Episcopate and the clerical order.

The Archbishop also says that the Report must stand as a whole. That is of course merely a tactical matter or a debating point. His Grace knows perfectly well that there are recommendations in the Report to which hardly anybody would take exception. There are certain excellent proposals with regard to Church courts which would be a very good thing to have in being, but the Archbishop says the Report as a whole: no reference to Church courts without the round table conference, nor without the abolition of the power of Parliament in connection with spiritual matters. The whole thing or nothing. We wonder whether he really does mean that. If he does and if this represents generally the official point of view as regards the Report, we cannot accept that position. It appears to say that if you won't have what you consider to be bad things, you won't have the good things. I hope he will abandon that position when the proposals of the Report come, if ever they do, into serious consideration.

Is it not time that the Bishops realised that there are certain things about which we Evangelicals never can and never will compromise? In opening this discussion I have tried to keep purely upon broad lines, and not gone into any questions of detail. I have left open for discussion, intentionally and purposely, a very wide field indeed. There is a great deal more to be said on the points I have raised, and there are the many points I have not touched upon at all. On this whole subject we must remember that it is less than ten years ago that we, as a Church, were riven by the conflict ensuing upon the Prayer Book controversy. The Church has not recovered from that conflict and we must bear in mind the disaster it would be if, from any ill-conceived or ill-executed plan or voice of ours, we were plunged again into similar strife. There is plenty of work for the Church to do, but it is quite impossible for that work to be properly carried on when the minds of people are being divided and exercised by the possibility of such revolutionary changes as are proposed in this Report. The work of the Church can only proceed beneficially if it proceeds harmoniously, and I do not believe that the proposals in this Report are such as can be considered conducive to any degree of harmony.