



Parliament, the Church of England and the Last Gasp of Political Protestantism, 1963–4★

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Political protestantism has been an enduring theme in parliamentary and ecclesiastical politics and has had considerable influence on modern Church and state relations. Since the mid 19th century, evangelicals have sought to apply external and internal pressure on parliament to maintain the ‘protestant identity’ of the national Church, and as late as 1928, the house of commons rejected anglican proposals for the revision of the prayer book. This article examines the attempts by evangelicals to prevent the passage through parliament of controversial measures relating to canon law revision in 1963–4. It assesses the interaction between Church and legislature, the influence of both evangelical lobbyists and MPs, and the terms in which issues relating to religion and national identity were debated in parliament. It shows that while evangelicals were able to stir up a surprising level of controversy over canon law revision – enough for the Conservative Party chief whip, Selwyn Lloyd, to attempt to persuade Archbishop Ramsey to delay introducing the vesture of ministers measure to parliament until after the 1964 general election – the influence of political protestantism, and thus a significant long-term theme in British politics, had finally run its course.

Keywords: anglicanism; Church of England; house of commons; ecclesiastical legislation; protestantism; evangelicalism

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In October 1962, four prominent anglican evangelical leaders wrote to members of parliament calling on them to ‘protect lay-folk’ from controversial aspects of both a proposed revision of the canon law of the Church and reform of its liturgy.¹ The authors, described by *The Times* as ‘four leading evangelicals’,² could, indeed, have

★ The authors are indebted to Andrew Atherstone and to the anonymous reviewer for their comments on this article.

¹ Latimer Trust Archives, Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, Raymond Johnston Papers: J. R. W. Stott, Lord Brentford, R. P. Johnston and Arthur Smith to members of parliament, 30 Oct. 1962

² ‘Challenge to Prayer Book Proposals’, *The Times*, 31 Oct. 1962, p. 7.

reasonably claimed to have represented conservative anglican evangelicalism. John R.W. Stott, rector of All Souls, Langham Place, was becoming established as the most recognized individual figure in the party; Lord Brentford was president of the Church Society, the leading anglican evangelical organisation; R. Peter Johnston was vicar of Islington and chairman of the Islington Clerical Conference, the influential annual gathering of evangelical clerics; and Arthur Smith was president of the Church Pastoral-Aid Society, a leading evangelical patron.

Lord Brentford (Lancelot William Joynson-Hicks, MP for Chichester until 1958) had considerable pedigree as an evangelical campaigner for protestant interests. His father, William, or 'Jix', the Conservative home secretary, had spearheaded a national campaign against the proposed revision of the 1662 prayer book, which ended with MPs twice rejecting the bishops' proposals in 1927 and 1928 and the state thus undermining the spiritual authority of an allegedly 'catholicizing' church.³ Brentford's case had striking similarities to that of his father. It envisioned a national Church, the established status of which was conditional on a post-Reformation protestant constitutional settlement between Church and state. 'Since [the Church of England's] Protestant character was fixed at the Reformation', the letter argued, 'it has exerted a continuous influence for good upon our English life and character, fostering the national ideas of integrity, duty, equity and service, and proving itself a potent force to unify and stabilise our society.' It was, therefore, crucially important that 'the Church should not render itself unable to fulfill the weighty responsibilities towards the nation which its Establishment lays upon it'. While most canon law revisions would be uncontroversial, some would 'erect new barriers between the Church of England and the Free Churches' at a time of widespread hope for protestant reunion. Just as Jix had proclaimed the virtues of parliament as 'lay synod', protecting loyal protestant churchmen from the anglo-catholic clergy who were ascendant in the voting bodies of the Church, so his son pointed to the danger of the same 'clerical domination' and the critical importance of 'parliamentary control of ecclesiastical legislation'.⁴ Thus in the early 1960s, as in the 1920s, supposedly catholic trends in liturgy and ritual and their effects on protestant church and nation remained a concern for many conservative evangelicals. While the letter was not widely reported in the national press, the *Daily Mirror* was in little doubt as to how its contents should be interpreted, reporting that 'Protests on "No Popery!" lines are being heard from Low Church members of the Church of England.'⁵ It seemed that the kind of religious controversy which had undermined Church-state relations in 1927–8 was about to rear its head again.

Numerous studies have shown the ways in which, since the mid 19th century, evangelicals and other varieties of protestants had attempted to use parliament to curb anglo-catholic ritualism in the national Church.⁶ A multitude of evangelical societies,

³ On the protestant campaign against prayer book revision and the role of the home secretary, see John Maiden, *National Religion and the Prayer Book Controversy, 1927–28* (Woodbridge, 2009), ch. 5.

⁴ Latimer Trust Archives, Raymond Johnston Papers: J. R. W. Stott, Lord Brentford, R. P. Johnston and Arthur Smith to members of parliament, 30 Oct. 1962.

⁵ 'Parsons Lead a Revolt Against the Archbishops' New Plans', *Daily Mirror*, 5 Nov. 1962.

⁶ A summary of this period may be found in G.I.T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1869–1921* (Oxford, 1987).

such as the National Church League, the Protestant Truth Society and the Protestant Alliance, and many more minor groups – Bishop Hensley Henson’s ‘protestant under-world’ – were geared towards the mobilisation of parliamentarians.⁷ There was also a strong and durable tradition of protestant sentiment in parliament itself. A number of protestant ‘champions’ – for example, Lord Shaftesbury in the 1860s, Sir William Harcourt in the late 19th century and William Joynson-Hicks in the 1920s – had provided leadership for like-minded MPs. The Commons had passed the infamous Public Worship Regulation Act in 1874⁸ and, while protestants were largely unsuccessful in producing legislation after this point, they still commanded significant influence. During the 1900 general election, the proposed Church Discipline Bill became a key issue,⁹ and after the Great War, parliament’s rejection of prayer book revision was testimony to the resilience of ‘political protestantism’.¹⁰ However, while there is a robust historiography for the period to 1928, there is comparatively little on the fortunes of political protestantism after 1928 and the interaction between, in particular, evangelical concerns and their representation in parliament. This may, in part, be due to the lack of comparable instances of dispute over specifically ecclesiastical (as opposed to moral) legislation; it may also reflect assumptions about the dominance of a broad and tolerant ‘christian’ identity. However, the relationship between Church and state in fact remained undisturbed after 1928 and, although it had greater freedom under the Church of England Assembly (Powers) Act of 1919 to shape its legislation, the Church remained obliged ultimately to bring potentially-contentious measures regarding public worship, and, indeed, any matter that touched upon the law, before parliament.

This article examines the Church’s attempt to steer three particular measures through parliament: the ecclesiastical jurisdiction measure of 1963, and the holy table measure and the vesture of ministers measure, both in the summer of 1964. It will assess the means by which some evangelicals attempted to mobilise parliamentary protestantism in 1963 and 1964, and examine the terms in which debates over issues of faith and national identity were conducted both within and outside parliament. In a period often characterised in terms of ‘secularisation’, MPs were inclined still to take lobbying on religious issues very seriously, particularly in the election year of 1964. Through an examination of the ultimate failure of the attempt, it will show that, while protestantism remained an apparently potent force, its real influence, and thus a significant long-term theme in British politics, had finally run its course.

⁷ M. Wellings, *Evangelicals Embattled: Responses of Evangelicals in the Church of England to Ritualism, Darwinism and Theological Liberalism, 1890–1930* (Carlisle, 2003).

⁸ N. Yates, *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain, 1830–1910* (Oxford, 1999), 222–42; J. Bentley, *Ritualism and Victorian Politics: The Attempt to Legislate for Belief* (Oxford, 1978).

⁹ P. Nicholls, *The Khaki and the Confessional: A Study of a Religious Issue at the 1900 General Election in England* (Melbourne, 2000), *passim*.

¹⁰ Maiden, *National Religion*, ch. 5; G.I.T. Machin, ‘Parliament, the Church of England and the Prayer Book Crisis, 1927–28’, in *Parliament and the Church, 1529–1960*, ed. J.P. Parry and S. Taylor (Edinburgh, 2000), 131–47. On the 20th century, see also C.A. Devlin, ‘The Eucharistic Procession of 1908: The Dilemma of the Liberal Government’, *Church History*, lxiii (1994), 407–25.

Their uncompromising stance during the prayer book controversy had had mixed results for conservative evangelicals in the Church of England, with whom this article is primarily concerned.¹¹ The defeat of prayer book revision was evidence that, while the bishops might not be relied upon, parliament remained on their side in the struggle for the protestant soul of the Church. However, the victory in 1927–8 proved pyrrhic; the Church allowed use of the 1928 prayer book without parliamentary sanction, and in the immediate period which followed, evangelicals found themselves increasingly marginalised. While this isolation was, in part, self-imposed,¹² evangelicals felt themselves frozen out by the Church hierarchy. The *Record*, the main party newspaper, describing the membership of the archbishops' commission on Church and state, set up in 1930, claimed that: 'in a spirit of narrow petty vindictiveness unworthy of any grown man, every one, however distinguished his position or honoured his name, who had had the temerity to oppose the archiepiscopal policy was deliberately and ostentatiously excluded'.¹³ Though care must be taken not to draw too sharp a contrast between pre- and post-war anglican evangelicalism,¹⁴ by the 1950s things had begun to change significantly for the party. Galvanised by the Billy Graham evangelistic 'crusades' at Harringey in 1954, there were signs of a renewed intellectual life, of resurgence at parish level and of increasing influence and organisation in the church assembly;¹⁵ and by the early 1960s, young leaders such as Colin Buchanan were representing the party on 'official' Church bodies.

This growing influence and declining isolationism had come partly at the expense of protestant concerns. For Talbot Mohan, secretary of the Church Pastoral-Aid Society, younger evangelicals seemed less interested in the controversies of their fathers; instead there was a 'prevailing tolerance which allows almost anything to pass . . . Thus the process of "catholicizing" the church proceeds apace with very little resistance'.¹⁶ For others, an increased perception of 'secularisation' and permissiveness in the nation at large prompted some second thoughts about the direction of scarce resources towards ritualistic controversies. In 1958, for example, the monthly *Churchman* magazine asserted that the party could not 'afford a ritual war' over canon law revision, warning of a more

¹¹ Hereafter 'evangelical' refers to conservative and moderate evangelicals, and not to liberal evangelicals, who were a distinct grouping themselves. For a useful taxonomy of the party, see David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (1989), 251–3.

¹² See the opinion of John Stott in *Keele '67: The National Evangelical Anglican Congress Statement*, ed. Philip Crowe (1967), 8.

¹³ *This Church and Realm of England: An Examination of the Report of the Archbishops' Commission on the Relations of Church and State* (1936), 7.

¹⁴ M.A. Smith, 'A Foundation of Influence: The Oxford Pastorate and Elite Recruitment in Early Twentieth-Century Anglican Evangelicalism', in *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism*, ed. D.W. Lovegrove (2002), 202–13.

¹⁵ A. Chapman, 'Secularization and the Ministry of John R. W. Stott at All Souls, Langham Place, 1950–1970', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, lvi (2005), 496–513; M. Smith, 'The Roots of Resurgence: Evangelical Parish Ministry in the Mid-Twentieth Century', in *Revival and Resurgence in Christian History*, ed. K. Cooper and J. Gregory (Studies in Church History xlv, Woodbridge, 2008), 318–28.

¹⁶ Talbot Mohan, 'The Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion: Evangelicalism in the Church of England', *Churchman*, Dec. 1963, pp. 262–3.

significant battle 'for the soul of the nation'.¹⁷ So it was that, by the late 1950s, there was some indication of a change of emphasis away from the isolationist anti-ritualism of previous decades; a trend which may, in part, be due to a shift of generations. However, the early 1960s saw a unique coincidence of apparently threatening developments within the Church of England – legal, political and ecumenical – which were to galvanise older understandings of Church, state and parliament into opposition, even if once the moment of tension had passed, it proved to be the last such irruption. The precipitating issues were elements of the revision of the canon law of the Church.

By the early 1960s the Church of England had, in many eyes, been entangled in the process of canon law revision for too long and at too great an expenditure of effort.¹⁸ A commission had been set up in 1939 to remedy the perceived obsolescence of the canons of 1603, the principal body of law governing the Church. Interrupted by the war, it finally reported in 1947, arguing for the swiftest possible action to revise the canons, since the present 'state of confusion and uncertainty is profoundly humiliating and unsatisfactory, and until it is remedied it will be difficult to secure order and cohesion in our Church'.¹⁹ The urgency was also apparent to Robert Mortimer, bishop of Exeter, and member of the commission, but he also sensed a growing recognition that 'the role of Parliament to represent the laity and to protect their rights in ecclesiastical matters is now obsolescent and has passed into the hands of the House of Laity of the Church Assembly' and, as a consequence, parliament seemed disposed to grant the Church greater freedom in its own affairs.²⁰ By 1959, however, the end was nowhere in sight, and Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher found himself with a 'sort of little rebellion' amongst even the bishops, some of whom were advocating the postponement, definitely or indefinitely, of the remainder of the project.²¹ Michael Ramsey made it clear after his arrival at Lambeth two years later that there were many greater and more pressing matters facing the Church, and that the process ought to be concluded with all convenient speed, since by the preoccupation with the canon law 'the proportion of things is obscured'.²² However, the highest hurdles were yet to be cleared.

From the late 1950s onwards, evangelicals and protestant-minded churchmen saw simultaneous developments in several areas within the life of the Church of England, which together appeared to indicate a very definite direction of travel towards Rome; motion being directed, as the *Churchman* saw it, by a group within the Church intent on shaping it into a 'sacerdotal sect'.²³ The first of these developments was in relation to intercommunion with the free churches and the progress of the new canon B.15, which appeared to restrict the historic right claimed by some free churchmen to communicate

¹⁷ 'Editorial', *Churchman*, Mar. 1958, p. 3.

¹⁸ Paul A. Welsby, *A History of the Church of England 1945–1980* (Oxford, 1984), 41–4.

¹⁹ 'Foreword by the Chairman', in *The Canon Law of the Church of England. Being a Report of the Archbishops' Commission on Canon Law, Together with Proposals for a Revised Body of Canons* (1947), p. v.

²⁰ R.C. Mortimer, *Western Canon Law* (1951), 72–3.

²¹ For an overview of the process, see Edward Carpenter, *Archbishop Fisher: His Life and Times* (Norwich, 1991), 205–14.

²² Lambeth Palace Library [hereafter cited as LPL], Ramsey Papers, v, ff. 315–16: Ramsey to the Rev. Michael Bruce, 8 Sept. 1961.

²³ 'Editorial', *Churchman*, Sept. 1963, p. 161.

in the national Church.²⁴ Second, some detected a catholic doctrine of the episcopacy and priesthood in the service of reconciliation proposed as part of the process towards anglican-methodist reunion.²⁵ The two developments together appeared clearly to indicate motion towards Rome and an orchestrated narrowing of the scope for engagement with the free churches. Third, the process of revising the liturgy of the Church was also beginning in earnest; an enterprise that proved uncomfortable to those evangelicals for whom the Book of Common Prayer expressed, and thus preserved, crucial protestant understandings of key doctrines. In July 1962, the bishops wrote to MPs and peers outlining a proposed programme of time-limited alternative services for testing by churches, following debate in the convocations and the church assembly, after which the prayer book (alternative services) measure was notified to parliament.²⁶ The *Sunday Express* predicted trouble amongst many individual MPs, even if the party leaders, Harold Macmillan and Hugh Gaitskell, had ruled out any whipped opposition. Progress was slow, however, and the measure came before the ecclesiastical committee of parliament only in May 1964, in between the debates on the holy table measure and on vestments.²⁷

Fourth, the unease prompted by moves in relation to liturgical revision and intercommunion was also the greater since it appeared that proposals in relation to synodical government for the Church would remove the final sanction against such changes; that of the 'lay synod' of parliament. A draft scheme was circulating in manuscript late in 1961 which proposed to recast the governing bodies of the Church such that the need for parliament to act in this capacity would be removed. Had it not been for the crisis of 1927–8, it was suggested, the church assembly would already be performing this function and there would be no suggestion of parliament exercising its veto.²⁸ The scheme was debated and revised during 1962–3, and in November 1963 the church assembly requested that a commission be set up to take the matter forward.²⁹

The final element in the increasingly-explosive atmosphere amongst the more protestant elements within and outside the Church of England was the increasingly-cordial relationship with Rome. Ramsey's predecessor, Geoffrey Fisher, had met Pope John XXIII in Rome in December 1960 and the Church of England appointed a liaison officer to the Vatican ecumenical council soon after. In 1961, a much publicised speech by Lord Alexander of Hillsborough, the Labour baptist peer and, arguably, the last great champion of parliamentary protestantism, drew the support of many evangelicals.³⁰ In

²⁴ On the disputed historical basis of the right, and the canon itself, see Gervase Duffield, *Admission to Holy Communion* (Abingdon, 1964).

²⁵ 'Look to South India' Plea', *Church of England Newspaper and Record*, 10 Jan. 1964, p. 1.

²⁶ LPL, Ramsey Papers, xxiv, f. 323: 'Legislation proposed by the Church of England', July 1962; *Guardian*, 9 July 1962.

²⁷ *Observer*, 20 May 1962; 'Church-and-State Row Looms Among M.P.s', *Sunday Express*, 20 May 1962.

²⁸ LPL, Ramsey Papers, xxii, ff. 86–98: draft report of the convocations, joint committee on synodical government.

²⁹ 'Laymen to have a Bigger Say in Church', *Daily Express*, 13 Feb. 1962; 'Clergy Favour General Synod', *Daily Telegraph*, 11 Oct. 1962.

³⁰ On press responses see, e.g., T.E. Utley, 'Is England Moving Towards Rome?', *Daily Telegraph*, 14 May 1961. Gilbert Kirby, the general secretary of the Evangelical Alliance, wrote to his supporters that the peer had received hundreds of letters of support, asserting: 'It is quite clear that Britain is at heart still very much a Protestant country' – see Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge, Lord Hillsborough Papers, AV11/3: Kirby to Evangelical Alliance members, May 1961.

May that year, Maurice Wood, principal of Oak Hill theological college, wrote to the bishops on behalf of the Federation of Diocesan Evangelical Unions expressing the 'anxiety amongst Evangelicals' about the 'new impetus of relations between the Church of England and the Church of Rome'.³¹ Against the backdrop of the Second Vatican Council, which began in October 1962, the ecumenical policy of Archbishop Ramsey was always likely to be interpreted even less favourably than that of Fisher, since Ramsey was suspected by some of being disposed towards anglican-catholic reunion in a way that Fisher was assuredly not.³² In June 1963, there was a requiem for Pope John, celebrated by Ramsey himself, in the chapel of Lambeth Palace. Despite Ramsey's protestations that the service was taken wholly from the prayer book, the event attracted opposition from across the evangelical spectrum, not least from the National Union of Protestants who picketed the palace.³³

It was against this backdrop of protestant anxiety that the three Church measures came before parliament in 1963 and 1964, all of which generated opposition both within and outside Westminster, and all of which resulted in divisions in the house of commons. The first of these was the ecclesiastical jurisdiction measure, a large piece of legislation reforming the highly complex and anomalous system of Church courts, which came before the Lords in May 1963. The two issues of particular concern among its 89 clauses were the ending of the role of the judicial committee of the privy council (and thus the state) as the court of final appeal, and the apparent extension of the power of the bishops to stay proceedings in certain cases. Reassurances as to the unexceptional nature of the changes, and the degree to which they were simply a more comprehensive restatement of principles inherent, though obscurely so, in the current system, were not sufficient to allay the suspicions. To extend the power of the bishops, who were widely perceived amongst evangelicals as disinclined to enforce the law regarding ritual even as it stood, and to remove the safeguard of appeal to a court outside the Church, was seen as simply another step in the move of the national Church towards 'an episcopal sect'.³⁴

As a result, the passage of the measure through parliament was by no means a smooth one, and a shock to those officials within the Church concerned with the management of parliamentary business. Gerald Ellison, bishop of Chester, reported a difficult meeting with the Commons' legislative committee in early May; he had been able to reassure certain MPs, but parliament remained 'very touchy and sensitive'.³⁵ Before the debate in the Lords, MPs received a letter signed by a group of distinguished protestant-minded lawyers, objecting to the bishops' veto.³⁶ In the Lords on 16 May the measure passed but amidst considerable disquiet, and (due to a change of time) no peer was available to

³¹ Watford, Church Society Archive: Federation of Diocesan Evangelical Unions minute book, Nov. 1956–Oct. 1962, 10 May 1961.

³² Owen Chadwick, *Michael Ramsey: A Life* (Oxford, 1990), 315.

³³ Chadwick, *Ramsey*, 316. See letters of protest from the Protestant Truth Society, the Church Society, the Fellowship of Evangelical Churchmen, and from outside the Church of England, at LPL, Ramsey Papers, xlvi, ff. 241–307.

³⁴ The words of Peter Johnston, vicar of Islington, as reported to the Lords by Earl Alexander of Hillsborough: Hansard, *Lords Debates*, 5th ser., ccxlix, col. 1446: 16 May 1963.

³⁵ LPL, Ramsey Papers, xxxviii, f. 175: bishop of Chester to Ramsey, 2 May 1963.

³⁶ LPL, Ramsey Papers, xxxviii, ff. 185–6. It was referred to by Alexander in the Lords on May 16 – see Hansard, *Lords Debates*, 5th ser., ccxlix, col. 1447: 16 May 1963.

speak in favour of the measure.³⁷ This prompted a review at Lambeth of the procedure by which support for Church business in parliament was marshalled, and a recognition that 'the biggest hurdle since the Prayer Book' had wanted for much greater orchestration.³⁸ Despite the *Daily Mail's* suggestion that the measure might actually be defeated in the Commons, the measure then came to the House on 9 July, and after the debate (lasting over five hours in two sessions) the measure passed, but with some 60 MPs voting against it.³⁹ Ramsey expressed his relief to Prime Minister Macmillan that the measure had passed despite 'a good deal of emotional reaction'.⁴⁰ For Ellison, the episode was evidence of the 'great burden' that the establishment of the Church imposed, and had raised the dread prospect of similar obstructions to be cleared at every forthcoming step.⁴¹

The *Observer* saw the stormy passage of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction measure as a foretaste of trouble to come, and so it was to prove with the holy table measure which came to parliament in March 1964.⁴² Once again moved in the Lords by Bishop Ellison of Chester, the measure was presented as a housekeeping change, designed to regularise a long-standing anomaly by which the great many existing stone communion tables were in breach of the law, since the Book of Common Prayer and the canons of 1603 stipulated that the main communion table in any church should both be made of wood and be moveable.⁴³ Great care was taken to stress that this implied nothing concerning the doctrine of the eucharist, but this, once again, proved unsatisfactory to some protestant critics. Lord Alexander, opposing in the Lords, made the connection with the decision of the church assembly just a few days previously, to recommend that the use of vestments be legalised at communion, and argued that 'there can be no possible doubt that these changes are being made, step by step, only in order that the Church may move further Rome-ward in its policy'. Referring to Ellison's reaction in the chamber, he continued: '[t]he right reverend Prelate shakes his head, but he must remember, . . . that the only real idea behind a stone table is to turn it into an altar'.⁴⁴ For John Cordle, Conservative MP, the measure was 'a little bit of ecclesiastical kite-flying designed to discover how far the House is prepared to allow the national Church to de-Protestantise herself'.⁴⁵ At least one MP was petitioned by constituents to vote against the measure, and there were likely to have been many more such letters.⁴⁶ In the event, only six MPs

³⁷ Hansard, *Lords Debates*, 5th ser., ccxlix, cols 1435–75: 16 May 1963.

³⁸ LPL, Ramsey Papers, xxxviii, ff. 187–8: Robert Beloe memorandum, dated 21 May 1963. The phrase is at LPL, Ramsey Papers, xxxviii, f. 212: John Arbutnot MP to Ramsey, 22 July 1963.

³⁹ *Daily Mail*, 5 July 1963; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., dclxxx, cols 1157–201: 9 July 1963; dclxxxii, cols 344–403: 16 July 1963.

⁴⁰ LPL, Ramsey Papers, xxxviii, f. 211: Ramsey to Macmillan, 22 July 1963.

⁴¹ LPL, Ramsey Papers, xxxviii, f. 215: bishop of Chester to Ramsey, 24 July 1963.

⁴² *Observer*, 21 July 1963.

⁴³ See Hansard, *Lords Debates*, 5th ser., cclvi, cols 1131–4: bishop of Chester's opening speech, 24 Mar. 1964.

⁴⁴ Hansard, *Lords Debates*, 5th ser., cclvi, col. 1135: 24 Mar. 1964.

⁴⁵ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., dcxcii, col. 958: 7 Apr. 1964.

⁴⁶ Orr-Ewing, MP for Hendon, was petitioned by the Parochial Church Council of Edgware concerning the 'departure from the principles of the Reformation, implying as it does a sacrificial doctrine contrary to the rites and formularies of the Church of England': see *English Churchman*, 10 Apr. 1964. Orr-Ewing did not, in fact, vote in the division.

voted against the measure (though some of these complained that the debate had begun at 11 pm), but the scene was set for a greater controversy to come over the vesture of ministers measure.

For evangelicals, it was this measure that was the most controversial of the canon law revision proposals. There had been organised evangelical opposition to revision on vestments since 1952, when a Truth and Faith Committee (the name being a reference to the Committee for the Maintenance of Truth and Faith set up by protestants to combat prayer book revision in 1927) was set up to campaign against revisions which would 'radically undermine the scriptural position of the Church of England, and radically alter its character as a reformed Church'.⁴⁷ For evangelicals, the issue of vestments was not merely a minor point of ceremonial dress, but rather a larger question of doctrinal substance; just as with the altar, vestments were inextricably associated with the Roman catholic doctrine of the mass.⁴⁸ For some, the key point was that the Church should not be seen to 'officially' condone the use of vestments. Others were prepared to agree to remove the legal stigma from those who wore vestments by excising part of the ornaments rubric of the Book of Common Prayer and rescinding the 1603 canon so that there was no 'official' position, but the Church ought not to *endorse* the practice.⁴⁹ This indicates that, while opposition to 'catholicizing' influences remained considerable within the evangelical constituency, some were beginning to acknowledge that anglo-catholicism had its place in the Church. While, in the earlier period, the party might have sought to enforce uniformity and seek disciplinary action, one leading layman who opposed the 'official' legalising of vestments, stated in 1964 that equally he had 'not the least wish to enforce conformity' to the views of evangelicals.⁵⁰

Despite the variety of evangelical attitudes towards anglo-catholicism, this series of proposed measures mobilised anti-ritualist opinion in ways not seen since the Oxford Movement centenary in 1933. Archbishop Ramsey was of the opinion that the main evangelical leaders were dead set against the measure, warning the bishop of London that: '[t]heir methods seem to me not too scrupulous, and they are out to avoid, at all costs, any legalising of vestments'.⁵¹ The evangelical press were unanimous in opposition, with the moderate *Church of England Newspaper and Record* asserting that the measure should not go before parliament,⁵² while the Reformed *English Churchman* declared: 'Under God may those whom we call laity yet rescue this Church of England, and arrest this landslide into oblivion.'⁵³ On the ground, the Truth and Faith Committee took a leading role in disseminating literature against the measure.⁵⁴ The main regional structure of anglican evangelicalism, the Federation of Diocesan Evangelical Unions, organised at its centre by the Church Society, had been planning the local lobbying of

⁴⁷ D.R. Hill, 'Canon Law: Practical Action', *Churchman*, Sept. 1956, p. 137.

⁴⁸ 'Editorial', *Church Gazette and Intelligencer*, Mar./Apr. 1958, p. 1.

⁴⁹ See the speech by R. Peter Johnston to the church assembly on 5 Feb. 1964 in *Report of Proceedings*, Church Assembly: Spring Session, 1964, xlv (1964), 62–3.

⁵⁰ See the speech by Professor J.N.D. Anderson to the church assembly on 5 Feb. 1964 in *Report of Proceedings*, Church Assembly: Spring Session, 1964, xlv (1964), 62–3, 82.

⁵¹ LPL, Ramsey Papers, xxx, f. 300: Ramsey to the bishop of London.

⁵² 'No Doctrinal Significance', *Church of England Newspaper and Record*, 24 June 1964, p. 4.

⁵³ 'Primitive', *English Churchman*, 17 July 1964, p. 6.

⁵⁴ 'Editorial', *Church of England Newspaper and Record*, 17 July 1964, p. 6.

MPs from as early as 1956,⁵⁵ with various unions reporting the 'great interest and concern' shown by politicians on the matter.⁵⁶ Predictably, the more militant anglican protestant groups were vigorous in their opposition. The Protestant Truth Society convened meetings in opposition to the measure, and its activist 'Wycliffe Preachers' lobbied members of the church assembly as the measure was debated.⁵⁷

Significantly, activity was not confined to anglican evangelical circles, with members of the free churches also engaged in the controversy. The Evangelical Alliance, declaring itself to be a 'bulwark against both ritualism on one hand and rationalism on the other',⁵⁸ in 1957 wrote to the archbishops on behalf of several interdenominational bodies and later helped organise a memorial against the perceived direction of change.⁵⁹ In contrast to 1927–8, the alliance chose, in 1964, not to organise specific action against the vesture of ministers measure on the grounds that it was an interdenominational organisation. None the less, it helped raise the temperature by stressing the danger to the protestant inheritance of Church and nation and calling for a return to 'those standards of righteousness which stemmed from the Reformation and made Britain great'.⁶⁰

As in previous decades, the evangelical propaganda machine was remarkably effective in punching above its weight to lobby members of parliament on matters relating to ritual. The bishops were taking no risks, several meeting with their local MPs in late 1962 to discuss the proposed legislation, then still being formulated within the Church. While it seemed that most parliamentarians were in favour of, or at least indifferent to, the proposals,⁶¹ there were signs of nervousness amongst others. A meeting of the bishops of St Albans, Southwark and London with nearly 60 MPs, in 1962, led the bishop of London to warn Ramsey that some were already receiving letters from constituents, disclosing that he had 'serious doubts' over whether they ought to try to push the measure through.⁶² One MP reported having received about 500 protest letters already in late 1962 (though he mentioned that all these came from two parishes).⁶³

Enough MPs were raising concerns about the letters, pamphlets and postcards they were receiving from protestants for Archbishop Ramsey to be warned by both ecclesiastical aides and political advisors about the future of the measure. In June 1964, Robert Beloe, his secretary, heard from the Conservative chief whip and leader of the House, Selwyn Lloyd, that 'opposition to the Vestures Measure had stirred up so much mud that if the Measure were introduced this summer it would be debated in an atmosphere of great heat'. Lloyd reported that some Conservative MPs were 'alarmed'

⁵⁵ Church Society Archive: Federation of Diocesan Evangelical Unions minute book, Nov. 1956–Oct. 1962, 7 Nov. 1956.

⁵⁶ Church Society Archive: Federation of Diocesan Evangelical Unions minute book, May 1963–Oct. 1978, 29 May 1963.

⁵⁷ LPL, Ramsey Papers, xxv, ff. 136–7: Ramsey to the bishop of London, 21 May 1962; 'Delegates Insult Them', *English Churchman*, 28 Feb. 1964, p. 7.

⁵⁸ 'A Statement of Policy: Fighting the Tide', *Evangelical Alliance Broadsheet*, autumn 1961, p. 8.

⁵⁹ Kennington, Evangelical Alliance Archive: minutes of the executive council of the Evangelical Alliance, 1955–64, 23 Apr. 1959.

⁶⁰ 'Letters to the Editor', *Christian World*, 4 June 1964, p. 8.

⁶¹ LPL, Ramsey Papers, xxx, ff. 303–4: bishop of Lichfield to Ramsey, 13 Dec. 1962.

⁶² LPL, Ramsey Papers, xxx, ff. 294–5: bishop of London to Ramsey, 30 Nov. 1962.

⁶³ LPL, Ramsey Papers, xxx, f. 307: bishop of Rochester to Ramsey, 21 Dec. 1962.

by the literature, and that he believed that the measure might not go through.⁶⁴ John Arbuthnot, Conservative MP and prime mover in the Commons in relation to Church legislation, confirmed that the literature had 'made an impression' in parliament and that MPs were 'getting fussed' on the matter.⁶⁵

Lloyd then took the unusual step of visiting Ramsey at Lambeth Palace, warning that some Conservative members were afraid of losing votes in the coming election, as Ramsey already knew. He argued that the vote should be postponed until the new parliament, where the measure would still safely progress since a new Labour administration would also be 'anxious to keep in with the Establishment'.⁶⁶ Ramsey, however, refused to budge, arguing that postponing the measure would 'make an ass of myself and would make a worse ass of Parliament and the Conservative Party in particular'.⁶⁷ If the government was to announce a postponement, he told Lloyd it must be made clear that Lambeth had not requested this. He later wrote to the prime minister, Alec Douglas-Home, to reiterate his view, arguing that the church assembly would assume that Conservatives had made a decision based on electoral concerns, and that disestablishment would, again, return to the agenda.⁶⁸ A week later, on 30 June, Douglas-Home wrote to Ramsey agreeing to put the measure through in July, but added 'that such information as we have indicates unfortunately that there will be a good deal of opposition in the Commons. If there is a violent controversy in the Commons it would surely defeat your object.'⁶⁹ Such anxiety suggests that the events of 1927–8 remained embedded in the institutional memory of parliament.

As the debate in the Commons neared, pressure continued to come from the Conservatives, with Eric Bullus, MP for Wembley North and Douglas Marshall, MP for Bodmin – both of whom supported the measure – warning Ramsey that the timing was inopportune, with Marshall suggesting that it could be used as a 'political weapon'.⁷⁰ Ramsey was not complacent, and wrote to all diocesan bishops on 9 July asking that they counteract protestant lobbying by ensuring that each MP in their diocese receive one or two handwritten letters from constituents in favour of the measure.⁷¹ In the build-up to the debates the pressure continued to rise, with Anthony Royle, the member for Richmond, reporting that he '[l]ike many of my colleagues', had been 'flooded with postcards asking me to vote against this measure'.⁷² The bishop of Llandaff reported a conversation with George Thomas, the methodist Labour MP for Cardiff West, which had given him the impression that a 'fairly solid group' of Conservative MPs opposed the measure, as well as a sizeable group of Labour ones.⁷³ Ramsey, none

⁶⁴ LPL, Ramsey Papers, lxviii, f. 346: report from Robert Beloe.

⁶⁵ LPL, Ramsey Papers, lxviii, ff. 53–4: 'Note of a Meeting with Arbuthnot and John Scott on 23 June, 1964'.

⁶⁶ LPL, Ramsey Papers, lxviii, ff. 348–51: 'Note on Conversation with Mr Selwyn Lloyd'.

⁶⁷ LPL, Ramsey Papers, lxviii, ff. 348–51: 'Note on Conversation with Mr Selwyn Lloyd'.

⁶⁸ LPL, Ramsey Papers, lxviii, ff. 355–6: Ramsey to Alec Douglas-Home, 24 June 1964.

⁶⁹ LPL, Ramsey Papers, lxvix, ff. 5–6: Alec Douglas-Home to Ramsey, 30 June 1964.

⁷⁰ LPL, Ramsey Papers, lxvix, f. 18: Wing Commander Bullus MP to Ramsey, 6 July 1964; lxvix, f. 19: Sir Douglas Marshall MP to Ramsey, 6 July 1964.

⁷¹ LPL, Ramsey Papers, lxvix, f. 21: Ramsey to the diocesan bishops, 9 July 1964.

⁷² LPL, Ramsey Papers, lxvix, f. 51: Royle to Beloe, 21 July 1964.

⁷³ LPL, Ramsey Papers, lxvix, f. 42: bishop of Llandaff to Ramsey, 15 July 1964.

the less, kept the pressure on the prime minister, asking on 16 July that the measure be given sufficient time: 'I do believe that Church people expect good facilities for a Church Measure in Parliament, and are likely to be very critical of a Government or a Party which did not give such good facilities.'⁷⁴ Finally, on 30 July, the penultimate day of the parliament, the measure came before the Commons and, after a debate lasting more than three hours, it was passed.⁷⁵

3

An analysis of the three votes does not suggest the existence of a determined and co-ordinated group of protestant-minded MPs operating in the house of commons. In comparison with 1927–8, and despite the evident tension in the weeks before the vestments measure debate in particular, none of the three debates saw a strong protestant vote. The ecclesiastical jurisdiction measure was, arguably, the least controversial in terms of 'ritualism', but the furthest-reaching in its effect on the law. It saw the highest level of opposition, but, none the less, succeeded by 182 votes to 60. Members voted for the holy table measure by 55 to 6; and, despite all the agitation, the vesture of ministers measure was supported by 205 MPs to 23. The voting patterns in the three divisions cast significant light on the varying motivations involved. Overall, analysis of the 74 MPs who voted against at least *one* of the measures⁷⁶ and, of these few, a mere three voted against all three. John Cordle, MP for Bournemouth East and Christchurch, was a Conservative politician in the patriotic and moralistic mould of William Joynson-Hicks, and as proprietor of the *Church of England Newspaper*, was an influential figure amongst anglican evangelicals. Captain Lawrence Orr, Ulster Unionist member for South Down, was chairman of the party and also imperial grand master of the Orange Order. John E. Maginnis, a member of the Church of Ireland, had been the Ulster Unionist member for Armagh since 1959.

Of the three measures, the voting against the holy table measure fell most obviously into a party pattern. As well as Orr and Cordle, the two tellers for the noes, the measure was opposed by three English Conservatives and three Ulster Unionists. The 25 members who opposed the vestments measure were slightly more various. The number included seven Ulster Unionists (over half of the parliamentary party), two Scottish Conservatives and three Welsh Labour members, plus 13 English members evenly drawn from Labour and the Conservatives. In these two cases of single-issue measures

⁷⁴ LPL, Ramsey Papers, lxvix, f. 44: Ramsey to Douglas Home, 16 July 1964.

⁷⁵ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., dcxcix, cols 1865–935: 30 July 1964.

⁷⁶ These were: Ronald Bell (Conservative, Buckinghamshire South); John Cordle (Conservative, Bournemouth East and Christchurch); Cyril Black (Conservative, Wimbledon); Lady Gammans (Conservative, Hornsey); Donald Johnson (Conservative, Carlisle); John Page (Conservative, Harrow West); Michael Clark Hutchison (Conservative, Edinburgh South); F. Blackburn (Labour, Stalybridge and Hyde); H.W. Bowden (Labour, Leicester South West); Thomas Brown (Labour, Ince); Arthur Lewis (Labour, West Ham North); Michael Stewart (Labour, Fulham); T.W. Jones (Labour, Merioneth); G.B.H. Currie (Ulster Unionist Party, Down North); J.E. Maginnis (Ulster Unionist Party, Armagh); Stratton Mills (Ulster Unionist Party, Belfast North); L.P.S. Orr (Ulster Unionist Party, Down South), Rafton Pounder (Ulster Unionist Party, Belfast South).

with clear historic theological overtones, a general pattern of strong Ulster Unionist opposition supported by concerned protestant-minded MPs from the other parties is in keeping with previous parliamentary religious controversies. More ambiguous is the pattern of voting against the ecclesiastical jurisdiction measure. In contrast to the holy table and vestments measures, the measure contained 89 clauses, touching various parts of the law both directly or obliquely. Whilst some main points of contention were voiced during the debates, the fact that under the 1919 Enabling Act, measures had either to be approved or rejected outright, without any mechanism for revision, meant that all manner of reasons may have accounted for the decision of each individual member to vote against it; reasons largely lost to the historian along with the papers of the majority of MPs. Certainly the measure touched upon the Erastian nature of the English settlement of Church and state, quite apart from any concern about popery; and those who opposed it included figures such as the Liberal leader, Jo Grimond, and the Labour member for West Lothian, Tam Dalyell, neither of them individuals known for strong protestant convictions.

The voting against the ecclesiastical jurisdiction measure was heavily weighted towards Labour. Of the 61 members voting against, 11 were Conservatives, three Ulster Unionists, and one Liberal, whilst no fewer than 47 Labour members entered the 'no' lobby. Of these, 11 represented Welsh constituencies, from within which there may have been significant lobbying from nonconformists concerned about an apparent weakening of the authority of state over established Church. There may, however, have been another explanation, one related to a general anticlericalism amongst a section of the parliamentary Labour Party. On the eve of the vote on the vestments measure, Ramsey reminded Selwyn Lloyd that the Church had something to fear from some Labour MPs, since a number had arrived late during the debate on the ecclesiastical jurisdiction measure 'to ask which was the lobby for voting against the Bishops'.⁷⁷ Ramsey was warned by the bishop of Llandaff that the same group might do the same again in July 1964; a group perhaps numbering 50 to 60 who would almost certainly not attend the debate any more than they had attended the last similar one, but would return in time for the vote.⁷⁸

During the debates there was certainly an awareness that these were, by some distance, the most controversial ecclesiastical measures to come before parliament since the prayer book debates. As one Welsh MP said of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction measure: '[i]t is one of the most controversial Measures to come forward in my time. I was not in the House in the days of the great controversy over the Prayer Book, and in my time there have not been any really great battles.'⁷⁹ However, significantly, there was a stark contrast between the debates of 1927–8 and those of 1963–4. In comparison with the heated parliamentary disputes over the prayer book, the debates over canon law were largely non-polemical. There were, to be sure, some attempts made to raise the temperature. In the debate on the holy table measure, the Ulster Unionist group voiced concerns about the undoing of protestant principles in explicitly theological terms reminiscent of 1927–8. Rafton Pounder alerted the House to the 'quiet erosion' of Reformation principles and Maginnis explicitly associated the stone altar with Old

⁷⁷ LPL, Ramsey Papers, lxviii, ff. 348–51. 'Note on conversation with Mr Selwyn Lloyd'.

⁷⁸ LPL, Ramsey Papers, lxvix, f. 42: bishop of Llandaff to Ramsey, 15 July 1964.

⁷⁹ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., dclxxx, col. 1165: 9 July 1963.

Testament sacrifices, but suggested there was 'now no more need for sacrifice, because the sacrifice on the Cross was sufficient for the sins of the whole world'.⁸⁰ The insipient Romanising of the Church was a central theme of the speech of Ronald Bell, right-wing Conservative MP for Buckinghamshire South, who argued that the measure was one of 'victory of the Church over the Evangelicals. The Evangelicals in ritual matters, in vestment matters, are doomed to extinction.'⁸¹ There was a strong sense that not only did the measures break with the Reformation past, but that they were being brought forward in bad faith. For opponents, the measures, when taken together, constituted a co-ordinated attempt to bring controversial aspects of canon law revision in a 'piece-meal' way – an attempt to move Rome-ward one step at a time. As John Cordle put it: '[w]ith great respect, I smell a rat'.⁸² Despite the ostensibly legal character of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction measure, a clear subtext to the opposition was the fear that, if the appeal to the judicial committee was done away with, its previous decisions, including those against ritualistic innovations, would no longer be binding.⁸³

However, despite the efforts of Cordle, Orr and Maginnis, and considerable external pressure from evangelical lobbyists, the 'no popery' cry was, none the less, relatively muted in the three debates. Indeed, whereas in the signature speech of the 1927 debate on the prayer book, Rosslyn Mitchell, Labour MP for Paisley, had warned that revision would 'swing over all the children of England from the Protestant Reformed Faith to the Roman Catholic Faith',⁸⁴ in the holy table measure debate, even Maginnis appeared hesitant, suggesting that the issue at stake was *not* 'whether we should go back to the Roman Catholic Church'.⁸⁵ The debate on vestments came closest to raising the religious temperature of the House, with Orr ending his oration by saying that like Martin Luther, he could 'do no other'⁸⁶ than to oppose the measure; however, even this debate failed to spark significant controversy.

The milder climate evident in the House was, in part, due to the existence of more open and tolerant ideas of protestant national identity in parliament. Among some non-evangelical MPs there was evidence of a conception of national identity that remained consciously protestant but without anti-Roman colouring. For example, R.W. Sorensen, the septuagenarian unitarian minister and Labour MP for Leyton West, argued that: 'we are a Protestant country, and we shall remain a Protestant country so long as we believe in the spirit of free thought and free expression', but that the proposals would provide a measure of both order and liberty in the Church.⁸⁷ Enoch Powell praised the Reformation settlement, but argued that its enduring value lay in the framework of comprehensiveness and tolerance it provided, resulting in a Church '[w]ithin which all sorts and conditions of men can find, and do find, their spiritual home'. Contemporary churchmen now looked back with 'astonishment and almost

⁸⁰ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., dcxcii, col. 963: 7 Apr. 1964.

⁸¹ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., dcxcix, col. 1926: 30 July 1964.

⁸² Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., dcxcii, col. 958: 7 Apr. 1964.

⁸³ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., delxxx, col. 1177: 9 July 1963.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Maiden, *National Religion*, 1.

⁸⁵ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., dcxcii, col. 963: 7 Apr. 1964.

⁸⁶ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., dcxcix, col. 1885: 30 July 1964.

⁸⁷ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., dcxcix, cols 1913–14: 30 July 1964.

incredulity' at the party strife of earlier periods.⁸⁸ By the 1960s, while some MPs continued deliberately to identify both themselves and the national religion as protestant, few displayed the same fear of 'catholic' influence which had made MPs so suspicious of Church legislation in 1927–8.

There were also signs that the opponents of the measures were drawing on wider, less controversial, concerns; and that the focus of evangelicals in parliament was shifting away from anti-Romanism. A main speech in the vestments debate was given by Cyril Black, Conservative MP for Wimbledon and a prominent baptist layman. Black's speech, however, showed little sign of full-blooded anti-catholicism. Rather, he spoke tactfully of the measure being 'hurtful to the consciences' of many British christians, warning (with reference to the ecumenical discussion between anglicans and methodists) that the proposals would 'unquestionably put back the hands of the clock so far as the movement towards reunion is concerned', and suggesting that the vestments issue itself was, in fact, peripheral. Since 'nine-tenths of the people of this country' were not active churchgoers, did the measure present a positive image of the church or represent a good use of resources; would moral standards improve or 'one more worshipper be present in our churches next Sunday' if the measure was passed?⁸⁹ Overall, for all the concerns that the Reformation watchdog would bark in the Commons' debates, and for all the awareness of the prayer book controversy of nearly four decades earlier, in the end, both the voting patterns and frame of reference for the debates of 1963–4 indicate little more than a protestant whimper in parliament.

4

In recent years, due in large part to the work of Callum Brown, the 1960s have become central to narratives of secularisation in British religious and public culture.⁹⁰ It is, therefore, a matter of some note that, not long after the Lady Chatterley trial and the Beatles' first LP, the house of commons should divide, not once, but three times, over the seemingly arcane details of the reform of the canon law of the Church of England. Debates not heard in parliament since the prayer book crisis of 1927–8, over the nature of the established Church, its relation to the state and the protestant nature of British national identity, were once more held. This article has sought to examine the importance of this seemingly strange irruption of religious controversy in the heart of swinging London.

That the orchestrated campaign of agitation directed towards MPs was taken very seriously was evident from the correspondence that passed between the office of the archbishop of Canterbury and members, particularly Conservatives concerned about the electoral impact of such an issue in the final days of the 1961–4 parliament. The pressure felt by MPs was real, and their reactions testify to the length of the shadow cast by the events of 1927–8. For parliamentarians in the mid 1960s, religious opinion demanded to be taken seriously still.

⁸⁸ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., dcxcix, cols 1895–6: 30 July 1964.

⁸⁹ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., dcxcix, col. 1907: 30 July 1964.

⁹⁰ Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularization 1800–2000* (2001).

However, much of the alarm was unnecessary, as all three of the contested measures passed through parliament without ever coming close to the defeat that some commentators had thought possible. Significantly, the period 1963–4 was, in fact, to be the last in which any serious attempt was made to influence the matters of the Church of England by means of parliament. There had been no little discomfort amongst some MPs at being asked to deal with such matters at all. Eric Lubbock, Liberal member for Orpington, asked the prime minister to find some means of removing such matters from the House on grounds of their triviality.⁹¹ Chuter Ede, veteran nonconformist MP for South Shields, regretted that such matters came to the House, and expressed sympathy with anglicans that: ‘persons who are not in communion with them and, indeed, do not even agree that their Church should be the Established Church of the country, have to vote in the Division Lobbies on the way in which it is to be administered’.⁹² The changing atmosphere was evident in the easy progress of the prayer book (alternative and other services) measure in February 1965; arguably a measure with a far more fundamental effect on the relationship of parliament and the Church. Captain Orr once again opposed the measure in the Commons, and his Ulster Unionist colleague, Rafton Pounder, again referred to the strategy of piecemeal change by those determined to de-protestantise the Church. On this occasion, however, the House did not divide.⁹³ Viscount Brentford, leader of the protestant cause in the House, recognized that, in approving the measure: ‘we are laying it once again in the hands of Convocations and the House of Laity to introduce authorised Services for our worship in our Church which may, in the opinion of some of us, depart from the true doctrine of the Church of England’. In a striking change in tone, the same peer who had described the vestments measure as ‘the greatest act of appeasement which has taken place since Munich’,⁹⁴ continued: ‘Nevertheless, for my part I feel that the time has come when we have to accept that risk, relying upon the assurances contained in the Measure . . . and upon the good will and the integrity (upon which I am, indeed, very happy to rely) of the Bench of Bishops to ensure that those provisions are carried out.’⁹⁵ The 1970 report of the archbishops’ commission on Church and state interpreted the events of 1964, and the subsequent reticence of parliament to intervene, as an implicit invitation to bring forward proposals for even greater liberty.⁹⁶

Not only had the mood of parliament changed decisively; the passing of the vesture of ministers measure also catalysed a change in tactics amongst anglican evangelicals at large. The events of 1963–4 were a sign that parliament could no longer be relied upon to act as a ‘lay synod’ representing evangelical interests; a state of affairs that had been noted and welcomed by many others in the Church for many years. One evangelical noted the reluctance of MPs to be dealing with such issues at all, and concluded that future evangelicals ‘must withdraw their trust from princes and politicians and set their sights on the Church Assembly – for on this showing it is there that the voice of the

⁹¹ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., dcxcix, col. 689: 23 July 1964.

⁹² Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., dcxcix, col. 1897: 30 July 1964.

⁹³ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., dccvii, cols 296–332: 23 Feb. 1965.

⁹⁴ Hansard, *Lords Debates*, 5th ser., cclx, col. 29: 13 July 1964.

⁹⁵ Hansard, *Lords Debates*, 5th ser., cclxiii, col. 663: 8 Feb. 1965.

⁹⁶ *Church and State: Report of the Archbishops’ Commission* (1970), 19–20.

laity will be heard. There, not in Parliament, lie what vestiges of hope are left.⁹⁷ This was not a knee-jerk reaction, nor was it a mere grudging acceptance of political reality; in 1969 one prominent evangelical, John King, would write that many had gladly ‘repudiated the more woodwormy planks in their fathers’ Erastian platform’.⁹⁸ The kind of political protestantism which had its last resurgence in 1963–4 came to be confined more and more to the peculiar conditions of Northern Ireland.⁹⁹

It was also the case that this conscious shift of tactics was accompanied by a reallocation of concern amongst evangelicals. As the mood within the churches became progressively gloomier when the decade progressed, greater attention came to be paid to the revolutionary programme of legislation regarding divorce, abortion, homosexuality and other pillars of the moral law. Much work remains to be done on the reaction of British Christians to this raft of permissive legislation, much of which passed through parliament in the five years after 1964.¹⁰⁰ However, the Ramsey Papers at Lambeth, at least, do not show the same level of orchestrated lobbying of the archbishop from evangelical groups. Although there was no shortage of correspondence on the matters, it tended to be from individuals, by no means all of whom were evangelicals (so far as it can be known). Such orchestration was more evident in the early 1970s with the foundation of groups such as the Nationwide Festival of Light.¹⁰¹ However, a shift in priorities was already evident in 1964 in Cyril Black’s concern that the Church should not be distracted from fighting ‘secularisation’ and immorality by older battles over matters of ritual. There were greater and more urgent issues in the life of the nation than the details of canon law. The concerns of conservative Christians were shifting as society was changing.

This shift in both priorities and tactics was also part of a broader generational shift amongst English evangelicals. Recent and forthcoming work by both Andrew Atherstone and one of the present authors will show the period to be one in which the generation of Anglicans that included figures such as James Packer and John Stott, shifted focus towards greater engagement with ecclesiastical decision-making structures and with the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church.¹⁰² Amongst this group, the traditional combination of liturgical rigidity, anti-Catholicism and reliance on the lay synod of parliament to govern the Church no longer suited their purposes. Political protestantism of this type was no more.

⁹⁷ Michael Saward, ‘Vested Interests’, *Church of England Newspaper and Record*, 7 Aug. 1964, p. 1.

⁹⁸ John C. King, *The Evangelicals* (1969), 42.

⁹⁹ Steve Bruce, *God Save Ulster! The Religion and Politics of Paisleyism* (Oxford, 1986), *passim*.

¹⁰⁰ See Nigel Yates, *Love Now, Pay Later: Sex and Religion in the Fifties and Sixties* (2010), 88–108.

¹⁰¹ On the Festival of Light see Amy Whipple, ‘Speaking for Whom? The 1971 Festival of Light and the Search for the “Silent Majority”’, *Contemporary British History*, xxiv (2010), 319–39.

¹⁰² John Maiden, ‘Relations between Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics, 1928–1983’, in *Evangelicals and the Church of England in the Twentieth Century*, ed. John Maiden and Andrew Atherstone (Woodbridge, forthcoming), 2014; Andrew Atherstone, ‘The Keele Congress of 1967: A Paradigm Shift in Anglican Evangelical Attitudes’, *Journal of Anglican Studies*, ix (2011), 175–97.