The Life and Work of Bishop John Owen (1854-1926)

Reverend Harri Alan McClelland Williams MA (Oxon), BA (Hons)

Supervised by: Professor D. Densil Morgan, Dr Robert Pope

Submitted in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

2018

Acknowledgements

There are many individuals whose support, enthusiasm, advice and love have made the completion of this thesis possible.

Firstly, I would wish to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Densil Morgan, my supervisor, for the tremendous time and commitment which he gave to me over the many years during which I pursued this research. Undoubtedly, I was a frustrating student at times, but his perseverance and confidence that the work would be completed helped to ensure that this became a reality. Diolch o galon.

Many friends have provided encouragement for my work, but in particular I would like to thank The Rt Revd Dr Wyn Evans and The Rt Revd Dr John Saxbee for their consistent encouragement and their willingness to share advice and knowledge.

My parishioners in Milford Haven have always been a source of great support and I am indebted to them for enabling me to complete this research during my tenure as Vicar.

My family have loved and supported me throughout this work, and in particular I would like to thank my parents-in law The Revd Alan and Gill Rabjohns, and my grandparents Alan & Lucy Wingrove and Jo Williams. My only regret is that my late grandfather, Peter Williams, was not able to see the thesis completed. My father, Professor Chris Williams, has consistently been on hand for advice, and my mother, Professor Siobhan McClelland, by her own example, has inspired me to persevere and complete this thesis. I am grateful for all their love and encouragement.

There are two individuals without whom this thesis would not have been completed; my friend and mentor, The Very Revd Jonathan Lean, and my wife Clare.

Jonathan's support and friendship during my adult life has been a remarkable gift, without which my life would have been tremendously the poorer. His willingness to welcome me into his life and his home fifteen years ago, enabled me to come to know and love St Davids

Cathedral and its rich history, through which I became aware of Bishop John Owen, but it also enabled me to learn from the example of a wise, kind and faithful priest.

Clare has been the greatest blessing in life which I could ever have received. Throughout our life together she has remained the passionate, caring and supportive person whom I feel in love with many years ago. She has stood alongside me throughout the great adventure of this work, and without her love completing this research would simply not have been possible.

It is to Jonathan and to Clare that I dedicate this work.

Abstract

This thesis seeks to illustrate the substantial contribution which John Owen, Bishop of St Davids, made both to the campaign against the disestablishment of the Anglican Church within Wales, and the foundation of the Church in Wales. Owen's significant contribution to this important period within Welsh ecclesiastical history has not been acknowledged. This thesis demonstrates that Owen played an invaluable role not only in opposing the various measures which sought to disestablish, disendow and dismember the Anglican Church, but also in preparing the Church for its new disestablished status following the successful passing of the disestablishment measure in 1914. The thesis draws on the extensive pamphlet material which was published by Owen during his episcopacy, a resource which has largely remained unused, which provides the basis for the distinctive voice which he provided during this period of significant religious and political change. Through the substantial use of these materials, together with other contemporary and scholarly work, it is clear that Owen's significant involvement in the debates was a crucial element of the Church's response to its opponents. Owen vigorously demonstrated through political argument and factual detail, the Church's position in respect of a wide range of issues which encompassed the disestablishment debate, and he remained committed to facilitating a positive beginning for the Church upon its disestablishment in 1920. Through the exploration of Owen's life and work, this thesis provides insight into the disestablishment campaign from an Anglican perspective, it offers new insight into the history of the foundation of the Church in Wales, and is a contribution to the history of Christianity in Wales within the twentieth century.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales plagued the political landscape of the nation for over half a century. As Owen Chadwick writes:

> And therefore the great question of constitution in Church and state affected every town and village in the county, embittered relations, bred enmity between Church and chapel, governed the utterance and programme of political candidates, entered class-room and guildhall.[1]

This great debate favoured the political agenda of the Liberal Party who in 1869 were successful in disestablishing the Irish Church, and their desire to disestablish another supposedly unrepresentative Church was strong. The campaign which Welsh Liberal MPs waged resulted in the publication of four Welsh Church bills: 1894, 1895, 1909 and 1912. Only the bill presented in the summer of 1912 became law, in the form of the Welsh Church Act of 1914. The First World War prevented the immediate disestablishment of the Church, and in 1919 an Amending Bill was introduced to redress some of the financial grievances of the Church, and upon 31 March 1920, the Church in Wales was finally disestablished.

The disestablishment campaign arose from the failure of the Church during the eighteenth century to minister effectively to the population it was called to serve. A result of this had been the Methodist movement which brought about a renewed religious interest and serviced the needs of many who found themselves displaced from the services of the established Church. It was this divergence of peoples, this estrangement of some of the population from their loyalty to the Church which resulted in the movement for disestablishment and disendowment. Although the Church's fortunes improved tremendously during the nineteenth century, the seeds of doubt and division had been sown, and by the latter half of the century, disestablishment had become as much, if not more of a political issue than a religious one. The Liberal Party was the beneficiary of the rise in both Welsh nationalism and Welsh nonconformity and therefore it could utilise its supporters in opposition to the Church which was predominantly supported by the

[1] O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* (London, 1987), p.3.

Conservative Party and the anglicized Welsh aristocracy. Certainly the leadership of both the political and religious campaigns continued to maintain the debate long after the enthusiasm for such a discussion had subsided. By the beginning of the twentieth century the arguments used in the nineteenth century when the issue was religious in nature, had largely disappeared, and the campaign for disestablishment was now an issue of nationalist discord and a target for political rhetoric. When the debate first began in earnest during the nineteenth century it would be possible to recognise, as E.T. Davies has done, that the nonconformists were plagued with many disabilities, such as: church rate, burial according to nonconformist rites in churchyards, of marriages in chapel, admission to universities and tithe.[2] Yet by the conclusion of that century all those disabilities apart from the tithe had been removed; the main issue which remained was that of status. It was the status of the Church, its privileged position, in both social and financial terms, which motivated many of the campaigners to see it disestablished. The campaign for disestablishment enveloped a whole range of issues, including: the struggle for national identity, religious radicalism, a class struggle and the notion of privileged positions within society.[3] Disestablishment was therefore a factor in motivating the religious as well as the political convictions of many within Wales.

When assessing the timeline of this campaign it can clearly be divided into two sections, the first being from 1890 to 1895 and the second from 1906 until the act was passed. The first half of the campaign had been brought about through the general election campaign of 1892 which resulted in the Liberal Party capturing all but three of the thirty-four Welsh seats. The success of the party within Wales had begun by the Reform Act of 1867 which enhanced the size of the Welsh electorate followed by the Reform Act of 1884 which enfranchised agricultural workers and miners and thereby enabled the Liberal Party in the general election of 1885 to destroy much of its opposition. Indicative of this significant political shift was the loss by Sir Watkin Wynn of the seat of East Denbighshire for the Conservative Party, a seat which his family had held for 182 years. By 1892 the Welsh Liberals held considerable political influence and power in Gladstone's administration with

[2] E.T. Davies, *Disestablishment and Disendowment* (Penarth, 1970), p.1.
[3] See K. O. Morgan, *Freedom or Sacrilege, A History of the Campaign for Welsh Disestablishment* (Penarth, 1966).

its majority of only forty and were able to press their demand for disestablishment.[4] The Welsh MPs felt that they had been given a mandate and with the growing influence of the Celtic nations within the Liberal Party it was a campaign to which leading Liberals such as Morley, Rosebery and Gladstone pledged their support. That campaign however did have a lasting impact upon Wales:

> The Disestablishment campaign was a sad affair, which bore all the hallmarks of a Greek tragedy. There were, on both sides, sincere individuals obeying their consciences and acting on lofty principles, but it gave rise to hatred and cruelty which left deep scars on the spiritual life of the nation.[5]

It is into this context that this thesis seeks to assess the life and contribution of John Owen in this time of substantial political and religious upheaval. John Owen, Bishop of St Davids between 1897 and 1926, played a pivotal role in the campaign against the disestablishment of the Church in Wales, indeed K. O. Morgan describes him as being: 'the most formidable of Church defenders'.[6] Owen was the leading orator in the campaign; he addressed hundreds of gatherings and meetings, across England and Wales to raise support against the government's measures. He formulated arguments, headed the Church's submission to the Royal Church Commission of 1906, and was instrumental in creating the foundation for the disestablished Welsh Church. Yet his role has been overlooked within historical scholarship. There is relatively little written about the disestablishment of the Church in Wales from an Anglican viewpoint. Morgan's work,[7] focuses predominantly on the nonconformist element of the dispute, although he does give some element of discussion to the anti-disestablishment campaign.

One of the motivating factors in seeking to research the life of John Owen has undoubtedly been the belief that his contribution to the life of the Welsh Church has been sorely underestimated within scholarship and the historical narratives of the period. Much of this may have been due to the lack of scholarship from a Church perspective regarding

---

[4] D. G. Evans, *A History of Wales 1906-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p.303.
[5] R. Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation, Wales 1890-1914* (Cardiff, 2004), p. 373.
[6] K. O. Morgan, 'Review of *The Later Life of Bishop Owen'*, *Welsh History Review* 1/3 (1962), p.348.
[7] K. O. Morgan, *Freedom or Sacrilege, A History of the Campaign for Welsh Disestablishment* (Penarth, 1966).

the campaign and its impact upon the Church and the Welsh nation, but it may also relate to the role which A.G. Edwards played in writing the historical narrative. A.G. Edwards with his longevity of service to the Church – having served as Bishop of St Asaph for forty-five years - and as the inaugural Archbishop of Wales for fourteen years, became the prominent figure in Welsh Church history. He himself had the fortunate position of being the brother to Henry Thomas Edwards, Dean of Bangor from 1876 until 1884 and a prominent campaigner against disestablishment. Dean Edwards was a progressive clergyman who argued that only if the Church in Wales became the Church of the masses could it continue to be the national establishment within the Principality.[8] The small amount of historical research into this period has predominantly focused on Edwards and portrayed him as the leader of the Welsh Church during a period of great turbulence. Edwards did not however play such a heroic role as is believed, his leadership was at times poor, and his close personal relationship with David Lloyd George, one of the strongest advocates of disestablishment, did little to assist the Church. Despite his loyalty to Edwards during the campaign, Owen was not averse to criticising his colleague; he once described him as 'a no-rate theologian and an irate priest.'[9] However many commentators have recognised that Edwards did possess political skills; Knight describes him as a 'sharp political operator.'[10] Edwards has overshadowed Owen due to his longevity. Owen's death in 1926 left Edwards to take the credit for the disestablished Church which by the early 1930s was flourishing. The only biography of Edwards portrays him as a disaster,[11] however this is an unfair portrayal. Edwards's role has been better recorded because he himself wrote several books upon the Welsh Church, and the issue of disestablishment, whereas Owen did not. Owen's contribution to this narrative is to be seen clearly in the significant number of pamphlets which he published about disestablishment and the foundation of the Church in Wales. Yet even in the 1920s there were those who were critical of his unwillingness to recognise Owen's substantial contribution to the cause: 'I have been very much upset by reading the Archbishop's *Memories*, as His Grace has not

[8] H.T. Edwards, *Wales and the Welsh Church* (London, 1889), p.16.
[9] K.O. Morgan, 'Liberals, Nationalists and Mr Gladstone', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1960), p.47.
[10] F. Knight in G. Williams, W. Jacob, N. Yates & F. Knight, *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment 1603-1920* (Cardiff, 2007), p. 339.
[11] G.G. Lerry, *Alfred George Edwards, Archbishop of Wales* (Oswestry, 1940).

done justice to the part played in the great campaign by your father.'[12] In that book Edwards only mentions Owen three times which seems to seriously undervalue the immense contribution which Owen, whom Edwards viewed as his lieutenant if nothing else, had made to the narrative of the history of the campaign against disestablishment as well as the foundation of the Church in Wales. Perhaps in death as in life, Edwards treated Owen abominably.[13] Morgan further argues that there existed a deep sense of rivalry between the two, for it was a 'conflict of personalities and of political philosophies as well.'[14] Certainly the disagreement between the two men became more pronounced after the turn of the twentieth century, with Owen, having obtained episcopal office in 1897, displaying greater independence as he no longer required the support or patronage of Edwards.

Some of the difficulty in ascertaining Owen's distinctive contribution to this period has undoubtedly been due to the material presented by his daughter in her two-volume biography of him. The Revd Ewart Lewis stated in a review that the *Early Life* was rather dull, and that both that work and its sequel were somewhat hagiographical: 'Miss Owen writes from the heart, her father's devoted daughter portraying his character and actions and those of others quite simply as they were seen in the Owen camp.'[15] Lewis's viewpoint is shared by many other scholars of the period. The *Life of Bishop Owen* lacks scholarship and with no referencing to sources and little input from other opinions, the work is predominantly a narrative account of his life, which is not always entirely accurate. As Morgan states:

> Miss Owen's accounts of the crises over the Parliament Act and the Ulster Crisis in 1914 are based on a limited and sometimes misleading range of sources-at least, so it would appear, for there are no footnotes and no bibliography. A more remediable defect is that the book is clearly too long.[16]

---

[12] The St Davids Cathedral Library Archive, Owen Family Collection, Letter from Canon Griffith Thomas, Vicar of Morriston, to Eluned Owen, 7 March 1928.
[13] E. Lewis, 'Review of *The Later Life of Bishop Owen'*, *Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales* 12 (1962), p.71.
[14] K. O. Morgan, 'Review of *The Later Life of Bishop Owen'*, *Welsh History Review* 1/3 (1962), p.352.
[15] E. Lewis, 'Review of *The Later Life of Bishop Owen'*, *Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales* 12 (1962), p.70.
[16] K. O. Morgan, 'Review of *The Later Life of Bishop Owen'*, *Welsh History Review* 1/3 (1962), p.351.

Although Morgan and others are certainly critical about the scholarly nature of the work and its undoubted partisan viewpoint, it has (as even Morgan himself acknowledges) to be recognised as an important contribution to the Anglican narrative surrounding the campaign against disestablishment, of which relatively little is written. When comparing this work with other material relating to leading Churchmen of the period, and their contribution, it has significantly greater content. For in respect of the other leading Churchmen, there is a very poor biography of Watkin Williams,[17] Bishop of Bangor, but again very little discussion is given in this work to an issue which dominated the Church's agenda for over twenty-five years. Historical scholarship on John Owen and the whole Anglican perspective of the disestablishment campaign has been relatively limited.

John Owen's role is fundamental to an understanding of the campaign against the disestablishment of the Church. Owen was the leading proponent of the arguments against disestablishment. He spoke at meetings, or diocesan conferences, from Barrow-in-Furness, to London, from Machynlleth to Newport. As a Bishop, Owen believed in campaigning fiercely against the Liberal government's proposals, both in 1909 and 1912. He fulfilled the call of Archbishop Benson and Lord Salisbury in 1893 for a large-scale, organized and militant campaign throughout the nation against disestablishment. Some contemporary commentators note the difficulty which some had in understanding Owen due to both his North Walian accent and his lisp, and this is testified by a Hansard record which states that during the debate surrounding the Amending Bill of 1919 he was 'indistinctly heard'.[18] However his oratorical skills remained a prominent part of his contribution to the campaign.

He also advocated the education of the people in the ideology of disestablishment, and what he believed to be the misinformation propagated by the government. Owen based his campaign upon the three key issues: disestablishment, dismemberment, and disendowment. He maintained throughout the course of the campaign that disestablishment meant two evils: the secularization of the state and the disorganization of the Church. He challenged the government to display how such measures displayed a policy of religious equality or liberty, or how disendowment would benefit the religious life of the

[17] R. A Renowden, *Genial, Kind Divine, Watkin Hebert Williams 1845-1944* (Denbigh, 1988).
[18] *Hansard,* Fifth series, xxxvi. p.909.

nation. Owen used statistical evidence to support his case, and theological arguments to enforce his viewpoint. Owen's efforts however were never going to be successful due to the passage of the 1909 Parliament Act. The Liberal government's clear majority in the House of Commons due to the 1906 election left Churchmen with only the support of members in the House of Lords, and their veto was terminated in 1909. The Church was left without any effective political power, and the bill presented in 1912 was successful. Owen did not advocate a policy of denial, or try and escape from the position in which the Church found itself; he accepted the reality of the situation. During the First World War, he laid the foundations for the disestablished Church. He sought, with support from others, to lay the framework for an administrative structure, he campaigned for a reassessment of the financial package given to the Church in 1914, this resulted in the Amending Act of 1919, which benefited the Church financially by over £100,000 p.a., and he tried to formulate a distinct Welsh, Anglican identity. The election of Edwards as first Archbishop of Wales in 1920 is not indicative of the intellectual or political superiority of one candidate over the other, rather that Edwards was the senior bishop, while Owen refused to allow his name to go forward. Owen clearly viewed their relationship as being a partnership, although the relationship did come under increasing pressure following the passing of the 1914 Act. That partnership however was recognised as being incredibly effective, for as Bishop Gore retorted: 'I am conscious that in almost all these conflicts they appear to me to have left their opponents, if not dead on the field, at any rate, unhorsed, and very seriously wounded.'[19] Owen was an active campaigner against the disestablishment of the Church in Wales. The arguments he presented were well-informed and mocked the ignorance and hypocrisy of the government's standpoint. He rejected comparisons with the Irish situation, and fought hard against what he believed to be the beginning of the secularization of the nation. Owen displayed leadership during a period of adversity, and without him, the Church in Wales would have found itself in a much more precarious situation. It was Owen who championed a re-invigorated Church, which as Knight commented: 'disestablishment meant that the Church in Wales emerged as more financially self-sufficient and perhaps also more self-confident.'[20]

[19] *Hansard*, Fifth series, xiii. p.1193.
[20] F. Knight in G. Williams, W. Jacob, N. Yates & F. Knight, *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment 1603-1920* (Cardiff, 2007), p.309.

Owen however was not immune from criticism. Morgan in his review of the *Later Life* describes Owen's career as being characterized by disappointment; that many of the ideals which he held so dearly, particularly in relation to Church unity, ultimately left him feeling disillusioned and disappointed. He is characterized as having wasted much of his energy on what was likely to be a campaign he was sure to lose: 'For over thirty of his most productive years, Bishop Owen's efforts had been consumed by a prolonged and ultimately unsuccessful rear-guard action to preserve the establishment of the Church of England in Wales.'[21] This description is unhelpful as it ignores the substantial contribution which he made to other spheres of ecclesiastical life and his vital contribution to the organizational and financial foundation of the Church in Wales. Owen's contribution to the debate was significant as had the entirety of the content of the 1894 bill been passed, it would have rendered the Church in Wales financially insolvent, with little of its key assets remaining in its possession, Owen's efforts contributed to the revision of this measure, if not its ultimate defeat. Although it is certainly fair to argue that neither Owen's counterparts in Bangor or Llandaff were as involved in the campaign, no bishop of the late nineteenth or early twentieth century in Wales, could possibly have ignored the necessity to fight for what was to be the future of the Church which they served, and for which they possessed religious and political leadership. Morgan believes that the transition from Owen in the *Early Life* to that which is seen in the content of the *Later Life* is far less appealing, he maintains that Owen consistently appears to be on the side of 'intransigence rather than of compromise.'[22] Morgan views Owen as being politically naïve at times, lacking the skill and adroitness shown by his opponents, particularly those in the Liberal Party. It would certainly seem fair to acknowledge that Owen was not as comfortable within the political spheres of Westminster politics as Edwards, which was understandably due to the difference in upbringing which they had respectively experienced. However, it must be acknowledged that the political sensitivity which Owen displayed, particularly after the passing of the 1914 bill, was highly beneficial to the future of the Church in Wales. Much of Owen's success must be credited to his careful navigation of the Church's future and fortunes, alongside the

[21] K. O. Morgan, 'Review of *The Later Life of Bishop Owen'*, *Welsh History Review* 1/3 (1962), p. 349.
[22] K. O. Morgan, 'Review of *The Later Life of Bishop Owen'*, *Welsh History Review* 1/3 (1962), p. 350.

existence of other Christian bodies, in what was a 'complex environment of religious pluralism.'[23]

This thesis seeks to demonstrate the significant, and to a large extent, unrecognised contribution, which Owen made to the campaign against disestablishment and the subsequent foundation of the Church in Wales. The first chapter provides a narrative of Owen's life prior to becoming bishop, focussing on the institutions and individuals which helped to shape his development from a Calvinistic Methodist with little use or knowledge of the English language, to an Oxford graduate who held substantive positions within ecclesiastical and educational spheres. Chapters two and three assess the arguments which Owen vigorously presented in defence of the Church and in opposition to its disestablishment and disendowment. Chapter four details the valuable contribution which Owen made to the foundation of the Church in Wales prior to its disestablishment in 1920, concentrating on his work in securing the passing of the 1919 Amending Act and his contribution to the 1917 Cardiff Convention. The final chapter assesses his leadership of the Church in Wales during its formative years until his own death in 1926. Within these chapters Owen's commanding knowledge of the subject is demonstrated and much of the material presented is taken from his publications and other original sources, a body of work which has largely been untouched in terms of its use by subsequent historians. This thesis argues that John Owen played a pivotal role in defending the Church against its opponents during the disestablishment campaign and in founding the Church in Wales.

[23] F. Knight in G. Williams, W. Jacob, N. Yates & F. Knight, *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment 1603-1920* (Cardiff, 2007), p.309.

Chapter I: The Life and Career of John Owen prior to his election as Bishop of St Davids

Life in Caernarfonshire

John Owen was born on the 24 August 1854 into a strong Calvinistic Methodist household, the eldest child of Griffith and Ann Owen. Both his parents were from large families, Griffith was one of six children, whilst Ann was one of five and they had married in the parish church of Aberdaron on the 4 June 1850.[1] Griffith Owen was a weaver by profession, however during his later life he became a prosperous wool merchant. E.E. Owen vividly describes her grandparents in her work,[2] heavily emphasising their piety. Griffith was a Deacon at Bwlch Chapel, Llanengan,[3] whilst Ann: 'She was a very decided character, strong willed and shrewd, very devout but very rigid and puritanical in her views.'[4] This description seems apt for an individual whose religious rigidity still led her to adhere to Methodism even when her son had been raised to the episcopacy. Owen's attendance at his parents' chapel was compulsory, and his father's strict religious discipline led to John Owen being able to read the Bible in English and Welsh by the age of six,[5] and as his son-in-law J.T. Davies remarked, in a lecture he delivered in 1954: 'John Owen was brought up in the atmosphere of Predestination and Election with emphasis on everything Welsh in character.'[6]

The strong values and Methodist tradition of the household at Ysgubor Wen undoubtedly played an important part in forming Owen in his Christian discipleship and for his future ministry. The Calvinistic Methodist tradition in which Owen was brought up was markedly different from the Older Dissenting movements of the seventeenth century. This tradition derived much from Anglicanism, its leaders Daniel Rowland and Howell Harris were all raised in the established church and many of their members maintained a very 'high theology' of the sacraments even though the membership, unlike its leaders, had rejected

[1] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection, Box 1-E.E. Owen general family notes.
[2] E.E. Owen, *The Early Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1958), p.12.
[3] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection, Box 1-E.E. Owen general family notes.
[4] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection, Box 1-E.E. Owen general family notes.
[5] E.E. Owen, *The Early Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1958), p.14.
[6] J.T. Davies 'Bishop Owen D.D.' (1954), p.1.

episcopal ordination.[7] Calvinistic Methodism retained its adherence to Hooker's teaching on the importance of 'scripture, tradition and reason', and although the movement was radicalised through a political shift away from the Tories to the Whig/Liberals, they retained an intellectual and political respect for the established church:

> *Yr oedd y Methodistiaid Calfinaidd, er eu bod erbyn hyn wedi torri pob cyfathrach ag Eglwys Loegr trwy ordeinio pregethwyr i weinyddu y sacramentau, eto yn gyffredin yn teimlo rhywbeth fel serch carenydd at yr Hen Eglwys*.[8]

Owen was brought up in a context in which Calvinistic Methodists now found themselves as dissenters, and with political leanings towards Liberal radicalism, which was in stark contrast to their political position several decades earlier. Owen and his family were shaped by the religious and social context in which they found themselves, as Chadwick notes: 'To many Victorians evangelical doctrine was the authentic voice and the scriptural piety of Protestant Reformation.'[9] However, Owen's outlook was dramatically altered through his education at an Anglican foundation, and he was to become even more influenced by the teachings of the established church.

Owen's education began at the British School at Llanengan until in 1865 he was offered the opportunity to commence study at Botwnnog Grammar School.[10] Botwnnog was founded by Bishop Henry Rowlands, Bishop of Bangor between 1598 and 1616. Rowlands endowed the school in his will, in gratitude for the parish in which he had been born, baptised and served as incumbent between 1572 and 1584.[11] Rowlands also founded two scholarships in Jesus College Oxford, to be held by scholars of the schools in Bangor, Beaumaris or Botwnnog. The school, which was rebuilt in 1848, was the only educational institution in the district during this period:

---

[7] D.D. Morgan, *Lewis Edwards* (Caerdydd, 2009), p.193.
[8] 'Although the Calvinistic Methodists had broken all connection with the Church of England by ordaining their own ministers to celebrate the sacraments, they still felt something like a bond of affection for the Old Church', T. M. Jones *Cofiant y Parchedig Roger Edwards* (Grwecsam, 1908), p.462.
[9] O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* (London, 1987), p.5.
[10] D.T.W. Price, 'John Owen', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).
[11] D.T. Davies. (ed.) *Hanes Eglwysi a Phlwyfi Lleyn* (Pwllheli, 1910), p.204.

> It might be stated, without fear or contradiction, that up to 1870 the Church, singlehanded in Lleyn, had provided educational advantages for all classes of the community, and in Botwnnog Grammar School that were done free of charge to all the scholars,[12]

The school prided itself on its 'semi-classical' education where boys were taught Latin, New Testament Greek, the Scriptures, English Literature and other notable subjects. The Schools Inquiry Commission of 1870 testifies to its high academic achievement.[13] Through its work, the Anglican Church had a profound impact upon the lives of all the people of this area, a fact clearly testified through the work and life of Owen and the Revd Llewellyn Thomas, who became a fellow and vice-principal of Jesus College, Oxford.

The influential member of the staff during Owen's day was a Mr David Jenkins, and he was to have a profound effect upon Owen; arguably it was his support and encouragement which eventually led to Owen becoming an Anglican.[14] Jenkins was described as '*un o'r gwyr mwyaf cydwybodol a welodd yr ysgol. Yn ôl pob adroddiad amdano yr oedd yn ddyn diwylliedig ac yn athro wrth reddf a natur.*'[15] Jenkins was an Oxford graduate who soon realised his pupil's gifts and potential. Jenkins's offer of the position of an assistant master, to an individual who lacked qualification and upon whom no religious requirement was placed, deeply moved the young John Owen. He succeeded Griffith Roberts in this position, who was later to become Dean of Bangor and an ally of Owen in later life.[16] Jenkins did not ask him to alter his religious practice or attendance at Bwlch Chapel, however Owen was so moved by this generosity that he quickly began to attend Bottwnnog parish church and would often travel three miles to Eglwys Meillteyrn where he came under the influence of the Revd Canon James Rowlands.[17] Rowlands was a graduate of St David's College Lampeter, and having served a title and a perpetual curacy, had become Rector of Meillteyrn and Botwnnog in 1860, remaining there until his preferment to an

---

[12] D.T. Davies. (ed.) *Hanes Eglwysi a Phlwyfi Lleyn* (Pwllheli, 1910), p.211.
[13] G. Parry, 'Hanes Ysgol Botwnnog' *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1957), p. 15.
[14] J. Owen, 'Atgofion', *Y Llan*, 13 May 1921, p.2, col.1.
[15] 'One of the most conscientious men that the school ever saw. According to every report, he was a cultured man and a born teacher', G. Parry, 'Hanes Ysgol Botwnnog' *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1957), p.12.
[16] J.T. Davies 'Bishop Owen D.D.' (1954), p.2.
[17] J. Owen, 'Atgofion', *Y Llan*, 13 May 1921, p.2, col.1.

Anglesey parish in 1878. He is described as having been faithful in the discharge of his pastoral duties and the number of worshippers grew during his tenure.[18]

It is crucial to value the important role which David Jenkins played in the life of the young John Owen. They lived together for three years whilst Owen undertook his work as an assistant master, and it was Jenkins's own devotion to the Anglican Church and especially to the Prayer Book which led Owen to challenge his own beliefs. Owen himself expressed the value he placed upon this friendship and support: *'O'r dechrau i'r diwedd ni chefais ganddo unwaith ddim gair angharedig na gwg.'*[19] Jenkins was remembered as one of the greatest schoolmasters who ever presided over the studies of the pupils at the grammar school, and it was undoubtedly Jenkins's invitation to serve on the staff of Botwnnog Grammar School which led Owen to gain the skills and confidence necessary to apply for a place at university, and at a college with which his school, parish and nation had strong connections.

Oxford

Owen's decision to apply for a scholarship at Jesus College to read Mathematics,[20] was undoubtedly an important moment in his intellectual and social development. Prior to this he had barely left his native Caernarfonshire and he was encouraged by both Jenkins and Rowlands to place himself in a challenging forum, where he would debate and engage with some of the greatest minds of the era. For Owen, the choice of Jesus College was a natural one. With the University College of Aberystwyth having only opened in 1872, and St David's College in Lampeter being primarily orientated towards the education of those intent on ordained ministry within the Anglican Church, Jesus College with its distinct Welsh heritage was a more comfortable setting for this young man. Jesus College had been instituted in 1571 by the endowment of a Welshman, Dr Hugh Price of Brecon, and it was the first post-Reformation College in the University. It had a history of attracting Welsh students, within the first fifty years of its inception some 230 Welsh students had been through its doors.[21]

---

[18] D.T. Davies. (ed.) *Hanes Eglwysi a Phlwyfi Lleyn*, (Pwllheli, 1910), p. 206.
[19] 'From the beginning to the end I never received an unkind word from him nor a frown', J. Owen, 'Atgofion', *Y Llan*, 13 May 1921, p.1, col.3.
[20] J. Owen, 'Atgofion', *Y Llan*, 24 June 1921, p.1 col.3.
[21] G.E. Jones and G.W. Roderick, *A History of Education in Wales* (Cardiff, 2003), p.23.

Indeed it was through the fellows of Jesus College, most notably Dr John Ellis, that the first attempts in the seventeenth century had been made to establish a University of Wales. However, Owen's arrival in Oxford was merely sixteen years after both Oxford and Cambridge had allowed nonconformists to be admitted to their respective institutions. Thomas Charles, an Anglican cleric and leading Calvinistic Methodist of the early nineteenth century, was a graduate of the college. Owen was therefore entering into a more natural environment than he might have found at other colleges, a place, which by the 1880s was at the heart of an Oxford-Welsh renaissance and which, as K. O. Morgan has indicated, was indicative of the 'New Wales' which was then being forged.[22]

Owen's agricultural background, combined with his strong Welsh accent understandably made him a noticeable addition to the college, and as he recalled in 1921 he met a fellow student who was to have a dramatic effect upon the rest of his life: 'The first of my fellow students to show me kindness when I went to Jesus College as a country boy was the present Archbishop of Wales.'[23] Alfred George Edwards was from a strong Anglican background, his father William was once vicar of Llangollen, and all four of William's sons entered the ordained ministry.[24] From 1825 onwards Edwards's family had contributed at least 125 clergymen to the Church.[25] He had been educated at home, except for one year's study at Llandovery College, an institution he would later return to as an assistant master, and then as warden. Edwards was a dominant character in the student life of Jesus College playing an important role in both the Boating Club and the Debating Society.[26] A thorough study of Edwards's life has never been undertaken. The brief biography by G. G. Lerry,[27] provides little reflection upon his character. R. L. Brown in several of his works,[28] criticises Edwards's virulently and accuses of him of high levels of political manipulation, especially within the life of the Church. Furthermore, Brown argues that a clerical 'clique', centred on Edwards, was at work during the period of nomination to the see of Bangor in 1890. This 'clique' comprised of, among others, Edwards, Owen and F.J. Jayne, later Bishop of Chester

[22] K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation, 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981), p.24.
[23] J. Owen, 'College Friends', p.1.
[24] A.S. Duncan-Jones, 'Alfred George Edwards', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).
[25] R. Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation, Wales 1890-1914* (Cardiff, 2004), p. 376.
[26] J. Owen, 'Atgofion', *Y Llan*, 8 July 1921, p.1 col. 3.
[27] G.G. Lerry, *Alfred George Edwards; Archbishop of Wales* (Oswestry, 1940).
[28] R.L. Brown, *David Howell: A Pool of Spirituality* (Dinbych, 1998) & R.L. Brown, *In Pursuit of a Welsh Episcopate: Appointments to Welsh Sees 1840-1905* (Cardiff, 2005).

and Edwards's brother-in-law.[29] If this assertion is true, then it must be the case that the 'clique' had its roots during the years which they respectively spent in Oxford during the 1870s. The assertion that a clique was formed to manipulate the politics of the Church had been strongly argued by Griffith Hartwell Jones (1859-1944), formerly Professor of Latin in the University College at Cardiff and for many years Vicar of Nutfield in Surrey.[30] The editor of Hartwell Jones's autobiography makes clear that the author was writing towards the end of his life when the disappointment of his career was beginning to take hold of him. Hartwell Jones, who had been educated at Llandovery College (whilst Owen was warden) and then at Jesus College, Oxford, and was later to serve as Chairman of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, was definite that a power group had been formed:

> The essential fact is that in the early eighteen-eighties, a knot of ambitious clerics, with their headquarters at Lampeter and Llandovery, but little known outside college walls, banded themselves together-with the object of capturing and monopolising the highest offices in the Welsh Church for themselves and their friends and supporters.[31]

Hartwell Jones went on to argue that they entitled themselves the 'Church Defenders' and that they saw themselves as men of the establishment who sought to pander to the English hierarchy. He accuses them of seeking to destroy those who opposed their opinions and alienated them to positions of little or no influence:

> Anyone who stood in their way had to run the gauntlet and be exposed to the artillery of their malice, aided by a brood of sycophants from whose fangs no one's reputation was safe, employed to rake up incidents of the past which could be distorted to the detriment or disadvantage of victims.[32]

Hartwell Jones's criticisms are very heavy handed, for the ideology purported by these individuals was certainly not anti-Welsh, indeed it would be difficult to imagine Owen as being anything else but a Welshman through and through. However, by the late 1880s and 1890s Edwards, Owen and Jayne possessed powerful positions of influence within the life of

[29] R.L. Brown, *In Pursuit of a Welsh Episcopate: Appointments to Welsh Sees 1840-1905* (Cardiff, 2005), p.231.
[30] G.H. Jones, *A Celt Looks at the World* (Cardiff, 1946); for his details see *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography*.
[31] G.H. Jones, *A Celt Looks at the World* (Cardiff, 1946), p.69.
[32] G.H. Jones, *A Celt Looks at the World* (Cardiff, 1946), p. 74.

the Church and that they sought to be involved at all levels of ecclesiastical appointment under their patronage. Certainly, a defining policy for all those appointed by Edwards during this period was that they remained firmly committed to the Church remaining part of the province of Canterbury.[33] It is difficult, however, to ascertain whether this clique was truly formed during this period. For Edwards was himself a publicly educated son of a parson, whilst Owen remained throughout his tenure at Oxford a Methodist, whose grasp of the English language was not confident. The social upbringing of the two could, in many ways, have not been more different, yet certainly twenty years after their time at Oxford the two were extremely close.

In addition to this close circle of friends or 'clique', Owen also writes reminiscently in an article entitled 'College Friends' of other relationships formed during this period. Here he names some of his close associates: Owen Evans, Thomas Williams, Thomas Jane, Eban Jones, and William Matthews, all of whom served the Church in Wales (as it became) during their respective ministries. Jane and Williams held livings in North Wales predominantly, although Williams was Vicar of St Asaph when Owen became Dean in 1889. Matthews served as Vicar of Warren for many years, although Owen rewarded him for his friendship by appointing him Vicar of Aberystwyth in succession to Archdeacon Protheroe.[34] Eban Jones was to serve successfully in many parishes including Llanbadarn Fawr and Llandingat,[35] and he nearly served as a curate under A.G. Edwards when he was appointed Vicar of St Peter's Carmarthen in 1885; however he received his first living before their paths crossed once again. Another key relationship which Owen was to form during his time at Oxford was with Owen Evans. Evans was a scholar and served his title in the Bangor Diocese; his career mirrored that of John Owen as he succeeded him both as Professor of Welsh at Lampeter and as Warden of Llandovery College. It is important to note that neither of these successions was coincidental and on both occasions Owen, and to a lesser degree Edwards, played an important part in encouraging Evans to apply and supported him wholeheartedly to the respective appointment boards. Llandovery College was in fact to witness a succession of Jesus graduates as wardens during the latter part of the nineteenth

[33] F. Knight in G. Williams, W. Jacob, N. Yates & F. Knight, *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment 1603-1920* (Cardiff, 2007), p.340.
[34] J. Owen, 'College Friends', p.3.
[35] *Crockord's Clerical Directory* (Oxford, 1909).

century. Owen Evans was later to serve as Archdeacon of Carmarthen and an influential member of the Welsh Church Commission.[36] Evans could certainly be perceived as being a member of the 'clique' whose roles in various institutions assisted in maintaining the control, which Edwards himself so much desired.

The influence which Oxford was to have upon Owen was not merely confined to friendships formed and developed over several years. He had yet to settle the matter of his denominational allegiance, remembering that during his time at Oxford he was still a nonconformist, although he had been attending the Anglican Church regularly whilst at home. Undoubtedly the 'clique' or friendship group of which he was part, was thoroughly Anglican and these social pressures combined with attendance at a variety of Anglican churches across Oxford affected his religious views tremendously. He notes that he regularly attended the University Church and heard preachers such as Liddon, Pusey, Dean Stanley and Bishop Magee.[37] He experienced the variety of Anglican liturgy through attendance at the University Church, St Aldate's and St Barnabas' Jericho. Of all the Anglican clergy, he encountered at that time, Canon Christopher of St Aldate's certainly had the greatest influence upon him.

Alfred Millard William Christopher was born in 1820 and was a graduate of Jesus College, Cambridge. He did not find evangelicalism as an undergraduate, but was confirmed in this belief prior to his ordination by Charles Sumner, Bishop of Winchester in 1849. After the completion of his curacy he spent four years as an association secretary of the Church Missionary Society.[38] In 1859, he was appointed Rector of St Aldate's, a position he was to hold for forty-six years, during which time he wrote frequently for *The Christian's Pathway of Power*. Upon assuming office, he set about re-vitalising the church through repair of the building and seeking to build an active ministry to the undergraduates. On Saturday evenings, he would hold discussion and prayer groups at which, during the 1860s, over eighty men were usually in attendance. It was undoubtedly through this ministry that Canon Christopher encountered the young John Owen and through his efforts influenced his

[36] *Crockord's Clerical Directory* (Oxford, 1909).
[37] J. Owen, 'Atgofion', *Y Llan*, 22 July 1921, p.1 col.4.
[38] J.S. Reynolds, *The Evangelicals at Oxford 1735-1871* (Oxford, 1975), p.135.

theological thinking. His influence within Oxford, especially within the world of students was described as 'immeasurable'.[39] Christopher was a definite evangelical, who would, in Anglican terms, have been viewed as nearly Calvinistic. Reynolds confirms this by stating: 'during Alfred Christopher's time, St Aldate's was the principal parochial centre in Oxford for promoting evangelical religion.'[40] Christopher encouraged Owen to become involved in the Sunday school and inspired him to consider priestly vocation and the role in which teaching and education plays within the ordained ministry.[41] Christopher operated a person-to-person ministry, he was a dedicated evangelist was who was widely respect in both the university and the city.[42] So great was Owen's admiration for Canon Christopher that he described him as 'that evangelical saint'.[43]

Owen was also deeply encouraged in his vocation by the Revd W.H. Freemantle, later Dean of Ripon. Freemantle was a graduate of Balliol College and was elected a Fellow of All Souls, during his time at Oxford he had come under the influence of Canon Christopher, for as his obituary stated: 'He had shown at Oxford an earnest Evangelical piety'.[44] During his tenure as Dean of Ripon he encouraged a large comprehensiveness, and sought to bring Churchmen and nonconformists together. In later life, he became a strong opponent of disestablishment in Wales and defended the admission of nonconformists to Holy Communion. Christopher often took Owen to Leckor, where Freemantle served his first incumbency.[45] Freemantle placed heavy emphasis upon teaching a congregation, regardless of its size, Christian education was of primary importance.[46] Owen stated that: '*Effaith dylanwad Rhydychen y pum mlynedd y bum yno oedd eangu fy syniad am Eglwys Crist.'*[47]

Oxford therefore challenged Owen's outlook upon the Church and the diversity of churchmanship and the personalities whom he met encouraged him to consider his own vocation to the ordained ministry and his thoughts regarding the relationship between

[39] K. Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England 1734-1984* (Edinburgh, 1988), p. 168.
[40] J.S. Reynolds, *The Evangelicals at Oxford 1735-1871* (Oxford, 1975), p.137.
[41] J. Owen, 'College Friends', p.8.
[42] K. Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England 1734-1984* (Edinburgh, 1988), p. 168.
[43] J. Owen, 'College Friends', p.8.
[44] Obituary of W.H. Freemantle, *The Times*, 26 December 1916, p.4; col E.
[45] J.T. Davies 'Bishop Owen D.D.' (1954).
[46] E.E. Owen, *The Early Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1958), p.38.
[47] ' The effect of the influence of five years at Oxford was to enlarge my idea of the Church of Christ', J. Owen, 'Atgofion', *Y Llan*, 22 July 1921, p.1 col.4.

Anglicans and nonconformists, of which Owen was still one. However academic rigour was also going to challenge the sheltered upbringing of John Owen. The academic standards to which Owen held himself were extremely high. In 1876, he sat his finals in Mathematics, however the large amount of pressure he placed upon himself resulted in him missing a First by only a few marks.[48] This disappointment was difficult for Owen to handle, and indeed it seems to have motivated him to obtaining further qualifications by undertaking the study of Classics. He later withdrew from this examination for fear of failure, and obtained a third.[49] His study of Classics however had drawn him into the school of philosophy: 'The lectures which left the deepest impression on any mind were those of Mr T.H. Green of Balliol.'[50] T.H. Green (1836-1882) was a pupil of Benjamin Jowett's and himself considered becoming a dissenting preacher.[51] Owen's affection for him may have stemmed from his deep commitment to the Temperance Movement, an issue which would have been of keen importance at Ysgubor Wen. His biographer R.G. Collingwood notes that Green encouraged his pupils to put philosophy into action; that was their vocation. He was deeply committed to the 'ladder of learning' principle, offering educational opportunities to all regardless of class. His political philosophy was based upon a concept of citizenship, and this is most keenly explored in his lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation. He wished to see an ethical, enabling and educative state.[52] Green's vision of a responsible society, ordered by consciousness deeply affected Owen: 'I learned from him that the first aim of every citizen should be the good of all and not, as it was supposed, the happiness of the greatest number.'[53] Owen certainly bore witness to this philosophy of life as he sought to defend the rights of the Anglican Church versus the arguments of the nonconformist majority.

Appleby

Owen's departure from Oxford in 1877 had left him deeply challenged; religiously and politically, and as he struggled with his vocation he took employment at Appleby Grammar

[48] E.E. Owen, *The Early Life of Bishop Owen*, (Llandysul, 1958), p.35.
[49] E.E. Owen, *The Early Life of Bishop Owen*, (Llandysul, 1958), p.35.
[50] J. Owen, 'College Friends', p.7.
[51] A. Vincent, 'T. H. Green', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).
[52] A. Vincent, 'T. H. Green', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).
[53] J. Owen, 'College Friends', p.7.

School, where he taught classes in Mathematics and Classics.[54] Appleby School originated as a charity school in the thirteenth century and by the sixteenth century had been awarded a Grammar School charter.[55] At the time that Owen taught there the school contained some eighty boys.[56] Very little is recorded of Owen's time at the school, suffice to say that he met Amelia Longstaff and they were engaged. Amelia was English, signalling another shift away from his background. Owen and Amelia were married in 1882 when property was made available in Lampeter for a married couple. They were to remain together until Owen's death in 1926, Amelia surviving until 1946. They had ten children, including Griffith who later became Registrar to the Diocese of St Davids and a legal advisor to the Representative Body. The most decisive moment during this period in his career was his decision to join the Anglican Church and on the 9 July 1879, when he was confirmed at South Hackney Church.[57] This decision may have been motivated by the prospect of gaining the chair of Welsh at St David's College Lampeter.

Lampeter –Professor of Welsh

It was Canon Rowlands who first fostered Owen's interest in and devotion to the Anglican Church and would have a substantial role in influencing his career path. Lampeter had not been the first consideration, as Rowlands had wished him to apply for the headship of Friars School in Bangor.[58] Rowlands failed in his attempts to persuade Owen to apply for the Bangor position, however the vacancy of the Welsh chair at Lampeter was far more alluring to the exiled Welshman, currently living in Appleby. A factor which contributed to Owen's enthusiasm to apply was the man who had newly been appointed as college principal, a certain Francis John Jayne.

Jayne was certainly a key member of the clerical 'clique' whose foundation was formed in Oxford during the 1870s. Jayne was born in 1845 in Llanelli, Brecknockshire, the son of a colliery owner, and after education at Rugby School and a First in Classical

[54] E.E. Owen, *The Early Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1958), p.40.
[55] Visit to Appleby Grammar School website (www.appleby.cumbria.sch.uk) 27/06/11.
[56] E.E. Owen, *The Early Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1958), p.40.
[57] E.E. Owen, *The Early Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1958), p.43.
[58] J. Owen, 'Atgofion', *Y Llan*, 22 July 1921, p.2 col.1 .

Moderations at Wadham College, he became a Fellow of Jesus College in 1868 at the age of just twenty-three.[59] Jayne resigned this fellowship in 1886, the year after Owen came to Lampeter, following his marriage to Emily Sarah Garland, whose sister Mary was to be the second wife of Alfred George Edwards. Therefore, not only did politics and ecclesiastical interest play a part in their friendship, but also a formalised relationship through marriage. Jayne served as a lecturer at the college of Jesus and Keble until his appointment to Lampeter in 1879.

Although Owen had been spurred on to apply due to his knowledge of the new principal, many of his friends were already supporting other candidates. Edwards was backing another candidate,[60] and was grievous that he had not heard of Owen's intention to apply for the post prior to deciding on his candidate. Although Edwards was unable to publicly support Owen, he spoke in his favour before the nominating board, and probably discussed the matter with Jayne. Owen's appointment brought him much happiness: *'Amser dedwydd iawn i mi oedd y ddau gyfnod a dreuliais yn Llanbedr.'*[61] It is not surprising that Owen relished the opportunities which lay before him in Lampeter as there was a revolution in process under Jayne's principalship.[62] He had succeeded Llewelyn Llewellin, who had also held the post of Dean of St Davids concurrently. During his first year as principal Jayne organised the promulgation of new statutes, the rebuilding of the chapel, discussions began surrounding affiliation with the ancient universities and several other measures besides.[63] Owen himself faced a challenge as he succeeded another fellow who was both distinguished and long-serving, Revd Joseph Hughes. Owen's academic abilities were apparent to his contemporaries and although the college's Welsh language ethos was certainly in decline,[64] Owen certainly preserved its high profile within academic circles:

---

[59] D.T.W. Price, 'Francis John Jayne' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).
[60] E.E. Owen, *The Early Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1958), p.42.
[61] ' I had a very happy time at Lampeter during the both periods that I spent there', J. Owen, 'Atgofion', *Y Llan*, 8 September 1922, p.6, col.1
[62] D.T.W. Price, *A History of Saint David's University College Lampeter; Volume One: to 1898* (Cardiff, 1977), p.153.
[63] D.T.W. Price, *A History of Saint David's University College Lampeter; Volume One: to 1898* (Cardiff, 1977), p.136.
[64] Lampeter was reduced to two evenings of Welsh evensong a week, D.T.W. Price, *A History of Saint David's University College Lampeter; Volume One: to 1898* (Cardiff, 1977), p.138.

> While he was professor of Welsh the study of the language achieved a stronger position in College, stress being placed on the teaching of Welsh History and Culture, on translation to and from English, and on the preparation of sermons.[65]

It is interesting to note that although Owen was perceived as having achieved a great deal during his time at Lampeter, Price notes that Welsh never gained a level of comparability with other subjects.[66] Owen, whose passion for the language was apparent, failed to achieve in a Welsh educational establishment the equality of treatment which he sought and fought for in later years. By 1888 Welsh became an optional element of the pass degree. Owen was however not to shoulder the blame for the decline in the promotion of the Welsh language in the college as a poem in the *Cambrian News* makes clear:

> There's Principal Jayne, the head of a College,
> Built in the midst of Wales and the Welsh,
> Expressly to rear young men for the Church
> Yet never a word of Welsh knows he,
> More than his Grace of Canterburie[67]

Owen in his recollections disputes this matter and claims that Jayne was reasonably fluent in Welsh although lacked the confidence to speak it.[68] Whatever the reality of the situation, the Welsh language as an academic subject and as the communal language of the college certainly faced challenges during this period, although other commentators maintain that the role of the language did develop positively during this period under Owen's direction: 'Under Jayne he had given study of the language a status and purpose previously lacking at Lampeter.'[69] There remains, however, a basis for criticising Owen, especially considering his background, together with the other members of the professorial staff for their failure in maintaining the active presence of the language in the college. Such a decision may have

---

[65] D.T.W. Price, *A History of Saint David's University College Lampeter; Volume One: to 1898* (Cardiff, 1977), p.146.
[66] D.T.W. Price, *A History of Saint David's University College Lampeter; Volume One: to 1898* (Cardiff, 1977), p. 146.
[67] D.T.W. Price, *A History of Saint David's University College Lampeter; Volume One: to 1898* (Cardiff, 1977), p.135.
[68] J. Owen, 'Atgofion', *Y Llan*, 9 September 1921, p.4 col. 3.
[69] D. P. Davies in K. Robbins & J. Morgan-Guy (eds.) *Bold Imagining* (Llandysul, 2002), p. 100.

been based on political objectives rather than cultural leanings as his role in his next position surely testifies.

Llandovery

Llandovery College was founded in 1847 by Thomas Phillips as a 'Welsh School in the Diocese of St Davids.'[70] The college was to provide a classical education, placing heavy emphasis upon the Welsh language and the study of Welsh history and literature. Its success however depended greatly upon the calibre of the warden and the teaching staff.

The appointment as warden of Alfred George Edwards in June 1875 was to be a turning point in the life of the college. Edwards 'conceived of Llandovery in terms of a great English public school'[71] and in doing so rapidly transformed its reputation. He dramatically overhauled its general life by abolishing the lodging-out system, providing more dormitory accommodation, a new dining hall and fives courts.[72] The number of pupils increased from 120 in 1875 to 178 in 1881, and during his tenure, which lasted until 1885, fifty-three pupils gained admission to the ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Edwards measured academic success solely in terms of Oxbridge awards and he felt that the teaching of the Welsh language to be irreconcilable with this aim.[73] In this vein Edwards abandoned the founding principles of the college and made Welsh an optional subject within the syllabus. This subject had formerly been compulsory for one hour every day.[74] Although this action resulted in a large increase in pupil numbers, Edwards had totally changed the ethos of the establishment and the educational principles on which it was founded. When Edwards left in 1885 to take up the position of Vicar of St Peter's Carmarthen, a successor was sought, and so Edwards ensured that one of his greatest supporters, John Owen, was appointed as warden.

---

[70] B.R. Jones (ed.), *Floreat Landubriense* (Llandysul, 1998), p.15.
[71] W.G. Evans, *A History of Llandovery College* (Cardiff, 1981), p.43.
[72] W.G. Evans, *A History of Llandovery College* (Cardiff, 1981), p.44.
[73] W.G. Evans, *A History of Llandovery College* (Cardiff, 1981), p.45.
[74] *Western Mail,* 28 July 1898, p.6.

Edwards's role in Owen's election as warden is irrefutable; Lady Llanover, a founding trustee, was a great admirer of Edwards,[75] and it was she who campaigned for Owen's appointment after meeting him briefly during the summer of 1885.[76] The eighteen letters of testimonial give evidence of an educated and diligent scholar, whose energy and vigour were aptly suited to the position of warden: 'His university distinctions are a sufficient proof that in both departments he has excellent abilities, and that he is a man of clear and vigorous understanding.'[77] Other prominent persons, including Edwards, wrote on his behalf, many of whom emphasised his Welshness. W. Hawker, Dean of Jesus College, Oxford wrote: 'In fact for intellectual and moral qualities combined, I know of no Welshman so well adapted as Professor Owen, for the post for which he is an applicant.'[78] Principal Jayne said this of him: 'He is in the best and fullest sense of the term a Welshman.'[79] Owen was certainly viewed by his contemporaries as being of a firm Welsh conviction, and yet during his tenure as warden he would not reinstate the Welsh language as a compulsory subject. This is action is in stark contrast to the heavy emphasis he was to place upon the Welsh language and Welsh culture during his time as Bishop of St Davids. He staunchly defended the Anglican Church in Wales as being faithful and true to the ethos of the nation, and yet when he presided over one of the most successful Anglican educational establishments in Wales, he continued a pattern of teaching which excluded the Welsh language from its life. It had been Phillips's intention to provide the Welsh language for future clerics of the Church in Wales. 'He wanted the College to provide the Church with Welsh-speaking clergymen since a knowledge of the Welsh Language would be an asset in ministering to a Welsh-speaking flock.'[80] It is difficult to assess why this negative policy towards the Welsh language occurred, especially considering that Owen had been, in his youth, virtually monoglot. However, it is possible to assume that he felt considerable pressure to maintain the standards and principles set by his predecessor:

---

[75] G.G. Lerry, *Alfred George Edwards; Archbishop of Wales* (Oswestry, 1940), pp. 19-20.
[76] W.G. Evans, *A History of Llandovery College* (Cardiff, 1981), p.48.
[77] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection, Box 1- Testimonial from Charles Williams, Principal of Jesus College, Oxford.
[78] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection, Box 1- Testimonial from W. Hawker, Dean of Jesus College, Oxford.
[79] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection, Box 1- Testimonial from F.J. Jayne, Principal of St David's College Lampeter.
[80] W.G. Evans, *A History of Llandovery College* (Cardiff, 1981), p.5.

Cadw i fyny safon yr Ysgol oedd fy mhrif awydd pan ddilynais ef fel Warden. ……Yr oedd cefnogaeth a chyfeillgarwch yr Archesgob yn fantais amhrisiadwy i mi, a bu dau o'i athrawon profiadol yn gymorth gwerthfawr i mi i gadw traddodiadau yr Ysgol. [81]

Edwards was clearly very influential over the young warden, and he continued to play an active part in the life of the college, especially considering that he did not live that far away. A fellow member of staff, G.G. Coulton notes: 'Much as he loved his native tongue, he favoured no violent efforts to revive it.'[82] Although both Edwards and Owen had ignored the Welsh ethos of the college, its role as a solidly Anglican institution was firmly maintained.[83] Owen himself taught the Sunday school, and attendance at the parish church was compulsory for the Anglican students.[84] During Owen's tenure the calibre of staff was certainly high, including such names as Hartwell Jones, G.G. Coulton and E.T. McClellan.[85] Apart from Hartwell Jones none of these men were Welsh, assisting the process of making Llandovery into an eminent 'English' public school. Of the forty staff appointed between 1870 and 1891, at least thirty-seven were either Oxford or Cambridge graduates.[86] Owen maintained the high academic standards of the college, and in 1887 Llandovery was listed as third on the list of twenty-two first grade public schools.[87] He was firmly involved in every aspect of college life, and knew all the pupils by name. His ambition for the boys was clear:

Prif amcan addysg yn ôl fy marn i y pryd hynny ac yn awr ddylai fod disgyblu bechgyn tra yn yr ysgol i gymryd gwir ddiddordeb yn ngwaith eu bywyd, beth bynnag a fyddo a'i wneud a'u holl egni. [88]

When Owen left in 1889 to take up the position of Dean of St Asaph, the college had continued to move forward on the lines laid by his predecessor. Academic standards were

---

[81] 'My principal aim on following him as Warden was to perpetuate the School's standards … The archbishop's support and friendship were an invaluable boon to me, and two of his teaching colleagues were of great assistance in preserving the traditions of the School', B.R. Jones (ed.), *Floreat Landubriense* (Llandysul, 1998), p.81.
[82] G.G. Coulton in B.R. Jones (ed.), *Floreat Landubriense* (Llandysul, 1998), p.76.
[83] B.R. Jones (ed.), *Floreat Landubriense* (Llandysul, 1998), p.67.
[84] J. Owen, 'Atgofion', *Y Llan*, 7 April 1922, p.4 col.2.
[85] W.G. Evans, *A History of Llandovery College* (Cardiff, 1981), p.49.
[86] W.G. Evans, *A History of Llandovery College* (Cardiff, 1981), p.85.
[87] W.G. Evans, *A History of Llandovery College* (Cardiff, 1981), p.50.
[88] 'The main aim of education in my view both then and now should be to discipline boys while they are in school to take a full interest in their lives work, whatever it should be, and to do so with all their energy', J. Owen, 'Atgofion', *Y Llan*, 7 April 1922, p.4 col.3.

high and the role of the Welsh language within the life of the college was increasingly marginalized: 'The precise intentions of Thomas Phillips had to be sacrificed on the Oxbridge altar. But there was no objection from the ambitious Victorian parents.'[89] Edwards and Owen had seized on the opportunity to transform the fate of one of Wales's most prominent public schools, and were willing to make any sacrifices necessary to achieve success. Who better in 1889 to succeed to the position of warden than another Jesus graduate, and a member of that 'clique' formed in the early 1870s than the Revd Owen Evans, now Professor of Welsh and lecturer in theology at Lampeter. He accepted the wardenship in 1889 and so he was to remain there until his appointment, by Owen, to the living of Carmarthen, in 1900. Between 1876 and 1890 the number of pupils at Llandovery College quadrupled: 'This is explicable in terms of the reputation for academic success that the school established under A.G. Edwards and his two immediate successors.'[90] There was no doubt that Owen's tenure at Llandovery was valuable, not only in the personal development which it afforded him in the sphere of education and academia, but also for the fact that it enabled him to influence and develop a substantial relationship with pupils, who in due course would exercise substantial political and religious leadership. Among those whom Owen influenced during his Llandovery years were Llewellyn Williams who later became a Liberal MP and campaigner for disestablishment, Frank Morgan who was to become the first secretary of the Representative Body of the Church in Wales and David Prosser who was to succeed Owen as Bishop of St Davids and during the 1940s became Archbishop of Wales.

Dean Owen

Edwards's appointment to the see of St Asaph, was certainly born out of a great deal of contention, he had not been a strong contender when the race to succeed Bishop Joshua Hughes had begun in the early part of 1889.[91] Indeed his brother-in-law Jayne, a former Principal of Lampeter, and now Bishop-elect of Chester, had offered Lord Salisbury the option of opting for the see of St Asaph rather than that of Chester. His correspondence

[89] W.G. Evans, *A History of Llandovery College* (Cardiff, 1981), p.53.
[90] W.G. Evans, *A History of Llandovery College* (Cardiff, 1981), p.75.
[91] R.L. Brown, *In Pursuit of a Welsh Episcopate: Appointments to Welsh Sees 1840-1905* (Cardiff, 2005), p.210.

with Salisbury indicates, however, that he lacked the ability to converse in Welsh, while there were qualified Welsh-speaking clergymen available, this being an indirect reference to the suitability of Alfred George Edwards.[92] Not only was Bishop Jayne openly campaigning for him, but it soon became clear that the Bishop of St Davids, Basil Jones, to whom Edwards had acted as secretary and chaplain, was also championing his cause.[93] Inevitably perhaps, Edwards was elected and his consecration occurred on the feast of Ss Philip and James.

On becoming Bishop of St Asaph, Edwards was faced with two immediate problems; the appointment of a new Dean, and the so-called 'Tithe War.'[94] Farmers of nonconformist conviction were refusing to pay the tithe to the parson, this quickly resulted in civil unrest, which was more acutely seen in the Diocese of St Asaph than in any other part of the country. These two difficulties led Edwards quickly to identify the candidate deemed ideal to fulfil the role of Dean, namely John Owen. E.E. Owen writes of the great rejoicing which took place in Llandovery when Edwards arrived to meet the warden.[95] This visit was not to celebrate academic achievements but rather to secure the services of a colleague, whose friendship already extended over fifteen years.

Owen's appointment to fill the Deanery in St Asaph was unashamedly political, because Owen, at the tender age of thirty-five, possessed little of the abilities required of one whose responsibility would be to run a cathedral. A document attributed to Edwards states: 'To John Owen the organisation, the ritual, the ceremonial of the Cathedral were novel and uncongenial. He was not musical.'[96] Here was an individual who possessed little or no knowledge of the diocese into which he was entering, whose liturgical capabilities were severely limited, and whose parochial experience was extremely lacking. Even the churchmanship of Owen and Edwards was acutely different. Yet as Brown argues,[97] for Edwards, appointments were far more about power, control and influence than they were about the ability to fulfil the role set out for them.

---

[92] R.L. Brown, *In Pursuit of a Welsh Episcopate: Appointments to Welsh Sees 1840-1905* (Cardiff, 2005), p.209.
[93] R.L. Brown, *In Pursuit of a Welsh Episcopate: Appointments to Welsh Sees 1840-1905* (Cardiff, 2005), p.222.
[94] A.S. Duncan-Jones, 'Alfred George Edwards', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).
[95] E.E. Owen, *The Early Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1958), p.70.
[96] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection, Box 1- Ecclesiastical Appointments.
[97] R.L. Brown, *In Pursuit of a Welsh Episcopate: Appointments to Welsh Sees 1840-1905* (Cardiff, 2005).

Even if this were this the case, Owen certainly embraced his new decanal role with zeal, as his diaries from that period readily testify.[98] He took an active part in the life of his diocese, undertaking preaching engagements and attending meetings in aid of the growth of church life, and to facilitate the defence of the Church against the increasing attack of disestablishmentarians. Perhaps Owen's greatest contribution to the life of the Diocese of St Asaph was to improve the educational abilities of his clergy, and to deepen their spiritual life, a commitment which evident throughout his ministry. This was necessary as during the nineteenth century the Welsh clergy were seen by their English counterparts to be little more than 'ordained peasants.'[99] Owen instituted theological discussion groups for clergy at the chief centres of the diocese, which eventually transformed into a diocesan branch of the Central Society of Sacred Study.[100] He also established reading groups for the younger clergy of the diocese, in Rhyl, Wrexham and Oswestry.[101] In addition to this Owen drew on his Oxford background and, in consultation with the then Archdeacon of St Asaph, Owen organised a series of theological lectures which were meant to mirror the great Bampton Lectures of Oxford.[102] Speakers at these events included Charles Gore, Henry Scott Holland and Dr Alexander, the Archbishop of Armagh. In addition to this Owen began to run 'Quiet Days', a practice which he had only become familiar with shortly before leaving Llandovery. Coupled with missions, which he ran throughout the parishes, Owen placed himself at the centre of diocesan life. It is clear from these varying activities that Owen very much saw his role as a champion of the clergy and a supporter of their continuing academic and spiritual education. Here undoubtedly the influence of figures from his Oxford days bore heavily upon him, as he recalled the importance of his vocation as teacher, and not merely as a pastor.

The political partnership of Edwards and Owen can hardly have been stronger during this period, as both were heavily involved in national political discussions, relating both to the Church and to other important issues. Owen's passion for Christian education is clear, however during his time in St Asaph he became heavily involved in the arguments

[98] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection, Box 1- Diaries 1889-1892.
[99] F. Knight in G. Williams, W. Jacob, N. Yates & F. Knight, *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment 1603-1920* (Cardiff, 2007), p. 341.
[100] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection, Box 1-Ecclesiastical Appointments.
[101] J. Owen, 'Atgofion', *Y Llan*, 16 June 1922, p.4 col.1.
[102] J. Owen, 'Atgofion', *Y Llan*, 16 June 1922, p.4, col.3.

surrounding the Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889. Although Edwards was very scathing of the bill, Owen argued for its acceptance by his fellow Anglicans. Owen continued to play an important part in national education as he was appointed to serve on the central committee for Wales and Monmouthshire and on the country committee of Flintshire.[103]

For all his pastoral and educational qualities, Owen's appointment as Dean was clearly made upon a political basis, with Owen acting as Edwards's lieutenant in the field. As J. T. Davies remarks: 'Bishop Edwards and Dean Owen became increasingly the acknowledged leaders of the Church in all matters of Church Defence.'[104] No more so was this precisely clear than in the great 'Tithe War' which swept through the Welsh nation during the nineteenth century. Tithes had a biblical precedent,[105] and had been commonplace within medieval Britain. The tithes were received by the Church, as a form of tax for its services and for use in distribution to the poor of society. The Reformation had transferred much of this revenue to secular organizations and the state, however the established church still retained a considerable proportion of these rights. During the successive centuries, as the number of nonconformist Christians grew so did the opposition to paying a form of tax to a Church to which many did not belong. It was even as early as 1798 that Thomas Roberts from Llwynrhudol proposed to constitutionally dissolve the tithe.[106] Although Parliament sought to address the measure through the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836, this did little to ease the situation. By 1853 the 'Society for the Liberation of Religion from State Patronage and Control' was founded which sought to remove the Church's ability to levy the tithe on its parishioners. The Church's view had undoubtedly been shaped during the nineteenth century by its position as a landowner. It identified itself with the local lord or squire far more than the farm labourer or industrial worker. The Church benefited from the aristocracy and the patronage of local squires and therefore ministered and supported their way of life, particularly through class leadership and land ownership.

[103] D.T.W. Price, 'John Owen', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).
[104] J.T. Davies 'Bishop Owen D.D.' (1954), p.3.
[105] See Genesis 28.22 or Leviticus 27.30-34.
[106] F.P. Jones, *Radicaliaeth a'r Werin Gymreig yn y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg* (Caerdydd, 1977), p. 74.

By the time that Owen reached the Diocese of St Asaph, the dispute regarding tithes was of significant political, social and religious importance. The relevance of this debate is that for many leading radical nonconformists, such as Howell Gee and Thomas Gee, the 'Tithe War' was inextricably linked with the campaign to disestablish the Anglican Church. The Tithe War, emphasised as Morgan has put it: '(the) growing gulf between an anglicized, largely English-speaking and English-educated gentry class and the vast majority of the population, rural and industrial.'[107] The battle regarding tithes emphasised the distinction between *Y Werin* or ordinary people and the gentry, between the nonconformists and the Anglicans, between the Liberals and the Conservatives. The Tithe War was an opportunity for the rising Liberal, nonconformist political and religious leaders to exercise their influence and power in a dynamic and populist manner, emphasizing the 'New Wales' which they were seeking to create:

> From Lloyd George to Gwynfor Evans, every major figure in Welsh radical politics was to base his crusade, at least in part, on a mass hostility towards the domination of the landlords.[108]

There were several leading activists in the campaign against the tithe, the most prominent amongst them being Thomas Ellis, who served as an MP for Merioneth, and Thomas Gee. Ellis was brought up amidst the folk memories of the political evictions of the 1850s and 1860s and following his education, influenced by leading radical thinkers in Oxford, he played a leading part in seeking to motivate the masses against the domination of the anglicised gentry. Gee, who was an active Methodist preacher, founded the 'Cynghrair Tirol Cenedlaethol' in 1887, which was a movement like that of the Irish Land League. This movement was well-organized and was strategic in its attempts to thwart the collection of tithes.[109] Indeed there were many violent incidents throughout this period, not least in the communities of Llangwm and Mochdre where the militia were called in to disperse the protestors. In some communities, Anglican clergy faced intimidation by a straw man dressed as a parson being burnt outside of the vicarage. Gee was a shrewd political operator and he saw the unwillingness of the Church, as a substantial landowner, to be

[107] K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation, 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981), p.13.
[108] K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation, 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981), p.10.
[109] F.P. Jones, *Radicaliaeth a'r Werin Gymreig yn y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg* (Caerdydd, 1977), p.91.

lenient towards the agricultural working classes as an opportunity to further emphasise the alien nature of the Anglican Church:

> … and it will undoubtedly stimulate the Welsh nation to adopt every constitutional means to hasten the disestablishment and disendowment of a Church whose hierarchy have shown no practical sympathy with the farmers in their great troubles and distress.[110]

For Gee, the issues regarding the tithe war were a social means to a political end. Gee was an advocate of disestablishment and likened the payment of tithes to the 'badge of conquest' for the English (and by implication the Church of England in Wales). Gee combined his activities in the movement with his printing press, which was responsible for the publication of the influential Welsh weekly, *Y Faner*. This publication was immensely popular, reaching a circulation figure of over 50,000 at one point. The strength of the publication undoubtedly lay in the quality of news contained within it, and the intelligent nature of the political commentary, which served to link various radicals together.[111] From 1890 onwards *Y Faner* ran regular columns attacking the Church, and especially those leading proponents of the Church's rights, notably Alfred Edwards and John Owen. Morgan viewed Gee as serving as the 'link between the mid Victorian world of S.R. and Lewis Edwards and the neo-nationalism of Lloyd George and Tom Ellis.'[112] But undoubtedly Gee's success was born out of the context in which he found himself, the context of a changing social and political system, for as Chadwick states: 'The world moved out of an age of toleration, where a single Church dominated, into an age of equality where speakers and writers sought to capture the public mind.'[113] Gee was certainly a product of that movement from toleration to equality, which enabled him as a gifted orator and political campaigner to win support through passion and commitment as much as through facts and argument.

Although Gee remained an influential figure in Welsh political and religious life until his death, the strength of the anti-tithe movement was considerably diminished by the passing of a law by Lord Salisbury's government in 1891, which placed the responsibility of

[110] I.W. Jones, *Y Llinyn Arian* (Dinbych, 1998), p.135.
[111] K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation, 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981), p.50.
[112] K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation, 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981), p.50.
[113] O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* (London, 1987), p. 4.

paying the tithe on the landlord rather than the tenant. This recognised that only 10.2% of the land in Wales was owned by those who were actively involved in working on the land.[114] The political support for Gee and his fellow radicals also waned during this period, as many felt uncomfortable with the aggressive approach which the movement was taking. Edwards viewed this period as being particularly difficult and unpleasant: 'The years 1888-1890 were grim and minatory. The bitterness of the political oratory and the exacerbation of the sectarian temper were then endemic in Wales.'[115] Gladstone stated: 'The claims of the Welsh farmer cannot possibly depend on the question of whether he is a Liberal and Nonconformist or a Conservative and Churchman.' When motions were put forward within the Liberal party to allow the movement to become an inherent part of the party, they were flatly refused. The campaign for justice surrounding land issues remained active until the latter part of the 1890s. Those involved in the leadership of this campaign drew on the example of the campaign in Ireland which resulted in the passing of the Ireland Land Act in 1881. This matter was never fully resolved, due to the inadequate nature of the report of the Royal Commission of 1892, which was chaired by Lord Carrington, and the changing economic and social landscape of Wales during the period 1890-1905. In many ways, the Tithe War was a precursor of the disestablishment campaign, but it is interesting to note that both campaigns drew their strength from the same political, social and religious ideology.

For those leading figures within the Church, they viewed the Tithe War as being as much as an assault on the moral rights of the Church as upon its finances. Edwards maintained that the Tithe War caused the spiritual influence of the clergy to be weakened 'at the cost not of their temporal possessions but of their temporal necessities'[116] and he further argued that 'tithe existed long before there was any state to create it.'[117] The support which the Church received from its natural ally, the Conservative Party, was poor. Although Salisbury's bill did a tremendous amount to dampen the tithe movement, it had been a Conservative Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, who had posed the question of why the people should pay a tithe to an alien church. As Sir William Harcourt once remarked to

[114] I.W. Jones, *Y Llinyn Arian* (Dinbych, 1998), p.144.
[115] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p. 129.
[116] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p.135.
[117] A.G. Edwards, *Landmarks in the History of the Welsh Church* (London, 1912), p.75

Edwards: 'The fact is, bishop, the Tory party will always defend the Church so long as they only are allowed to rob it.'[118]

The resignation of James Campbell, the Bishop of Bangor in April 1890, was to display once more the close relations between Owen and Edwards, and indeed the increasing power and influence of the Oxford 'clique'.[119] Several names were discussed as suitable candidates, ranging from Dean Perowne of Peterborough, to David Howell Archdeacon of Wrexham, as well as Daniel Lloyd, the Headmaster of Christ College, Brecon. But for Edwards and his supporters, namely his brother-in-law Jayne, the favoured candidate was the young John Owen. For the Welsh church historian R. L. Brown this was another prime example of Edwards seeking to exert his influence over Church appointments in Wales, indeed the theme of much of Brown's writings is Edwards's determination to character-assassinate any candidates who stood in the way of his own preferred choice.[120] Although this argument is plausible, it is important to remember that Brown has always championed the saintly qualities of David Howell.[121] Whatever the truth or otherwise of Edwards's animus towards Howell, Brown's partisanship has done little to provide a balanced view for the Welsh ecclesiastical historian. Frances Knight, however, supports this viewpoint: 'Howell', she claims, 'is an excellent example of a man who was blocked by Edwards and his clique, largely because he failed to share their implacable opposition to disestablishment, and had positive views about Nonconformists.'[122] It is clear that suspicion was growing amongst the clergy and the political classes that Edwards, Jayne and Owen had formed a ring of power, even though Archbishop Benson dismissed such a concept.[123] Owen's suitable qualities were, nevertheless, obviously clear; he was fluent in Welsh, a native of the diocese, however he had no ecclesiastical experience in the diocese. In a letter to the Dean of Bangor, Edwards noted that 'he is the son of poor but highly respected Nonconformist parents residing in Caernarfonshire. Until 16 he was himself a

[118] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p.140.
[119] R.L. Brown, *In Pursuit of a Welsh Episcopate: Appointments to Welsh Sees 1840-1905* (Cardiff, 2005), p.231.
[120] R.L. Brown, *In Pursuit of a Welsh Episcopate: Appointments to Welsh Sees 1840-1905* (Cardiff, 2005).
[121] R.L. Brown, *David Howell: A Pool of Spirituality,* (Dinbych, 1998).
[122] F. Knight in G. Williams, W. Jacob, N. Yates & F. Knight, *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment 1603-1920* (Cardiff, 2007), p. 348.
[123] R.L. Brown, *In Pursuit of a Welsh Episcopate: Appointments to Welsh Sees 1840-1905* (Cardiff, 2005), p, 231.

Nonconformist.'[124] His educational abilities were of a high calibre and he had the support of other leading Anglicans such as Owen Evans, Archdeacon Edmondes and John Rhys, the Principal of Jesus College, Oxford. Even the *Church Times* hailed him as, after the Bishop of St Asaph, the greatest figure in Church life in north Wales.[125] The London *Times,* for its part, referred to him as 'that splendid Welshman'.[126] Despite this high praise, Owen's candidature was dismissed, partly on the basis that he was an odd character, he was young, his English pronunciation was difficult to understand, and his father's role with a dissenting church was portrayed negatively by his opponents. His candidature was strongly opposed by the Bishop of Llandaff, Richard Lewis, and by Dr Vaughan and Davidson who maintained that his lack of parochial experience rendered him unable to serve as a bishop.[127] Edwards, being a shrewd politician, quickly turned his support towards Watkin Williams, who was eventually elected to the see. This glimpse into Welsh ecclesiastical politics, however, provides a fascinating insight into the extraordinary determination of Edwards's to get 'his man' elected. Although it is interesting to note that the *Western Mail* stated that 'it was more difficult to prophecy who will be made bishop of a Welsh see than to foretell the winner of the Derby.'[128] Therefore in the opinion of reporters and political commentators, issues surrounding the surety of the candidature of individuals were not as clear as others may have identified with hindsight. What remains unanswered is Owen's own thoughts on the matter, as his diary records nothing of such discussion, and his daughter does not mention in it in her biography, even though Owen must have been complicit in the campaign.

Although Edwards developed a strong relationship with the political elite, during his tenure in North Wales, and with other figures within the ruling elite, Owen developed a relationship with W.E. Gladstone which displayed by its very nature the divisions and personal strains which were brought about by the cause of disestablishment. Gladstone had been involved with Welsh ecclesiastical matters throughout his political career; as early as

---

[124] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection, Box 1- Ecclesiastical Appointments, Letter 11/03/1890.
[125] *Church Times*, 25 April 1890, p.415.
[126] R.L. Brown, *In Pursuit of a Welsh Episcopate: Appointments to Welsh Sees 1840-1905* (Cardiff, 2005), p.248.
[127] R.L. Brown, *In Pursuit of a Welsh Episcopate: Appointments to Welsh Sees 1840-1905* (Cardiff, 2005), pp. 248 & 252.
[128] R.L. Brown, *In Pursuit of a Welsh Episcopate: Appointments to Welsh Sees 1840-1905* (Cardiff, 2005), p.245.

1836 he had voted in favour of a measure which sought to appoint Welsh-speaking clergy to Welsh benefices, and in 1870 he devoted an incredible amount of time and energy to securing a Welsh-speaking successor in the Bishopric of St Asaph, particularly as it came in the shadow of the first legislative attempt to secure the disestablishment of the Welsh Church. In correspondence with a colleague in 1882 he wrote:

> A vacancy in a Welsh see costs me more trouble than six English vacancies. I feel it my duty to ascertain if possible by a process of exhaustion whether there is any completely fit person to be had among men of Welsh mother tongue. In the main it is a business of constantly examining likely or plausible cases and finding they break down. The Welsh are to be got at through the pulpit; and yet here is a special danger, for among the more stirring Welsh clergy there is as much wordy and windy preaching as among the Irish.[129]

Gladstone therefore felt substantial personal pressure to select an appropriate candidate, whom he felt had to be Welsh-speaking, yet he faced considerable opposition to this work. Notable figures such as Earl Cawdor and the Archbishop of York opposed him, particularly in relation to the appointment to the see of St Asaph, where Gladstone was seeking to appoint Joshua Hughes, as they stated that the BA from Cambridge which was entered in Hughes' *Crockford* entry was found to be false. Despite all of this, Gladstone recognised the positive impact such an appointment would have: 'The choice of Hughes, a man of few obvious gifts, was widely criticised, but its effect upon Welsh national feeling was profoundly stimulating.'[130] The reason for this, as Cragoe maintains, is that

> Gladstone accepted the argument that the only way for the Church to survive as an establishment in Wales was by adopting a wholly different set of cultural standards and expectations from those in England. Henceforth, the Church in Wales, would be essentially middle-class and Welsh, rather than upper-class and English.[131]

He maintained a similar political campaign when the see of Llandaff fell vacant in December 1882. In this, he, like Owen, recognised the need for the reform of the Church, especially in relation to its bilingual ministry to the people.

---

[129] H.C.G. Matthew, *Gladstone, 1875-1898* (Oxford, 1995), p.271.
[130] K.O. Morgan, 'Gladstone and Wales', *Welsh History Review* 1/1 (1960), p. 68.
[131] M. Cragoe, 'A Question of Culture, Welsh Church and St Asaph', *Welsh History Review* 18/3 (1996), p.231.

Gladstone's view on disestablishment developed over his political career, even though that put immense pressure on his relationship with those clergymen whom he admired, such as Owen. Certainly when he first came to power in 1868, Gladstone had little sympathy with the nonconformist radicalism which was beginning to emerge, but his focus on the Irish Question, particularly after 1886, caused him, to be left open to political manoeuvring and even blackmail by the Welsh members of his party.[132] H. C. G. Matthew, for his part, maintains that Gladstone saw 'Welsh Nonconformity as a late and perhaps transitory phenomenon.'[133] However, when Watkin Williams presented his measure in 1870, Gladstone denounced this attempt at disestablishment, claiming that any comparison made with the Irish Church was invalid. When Lewis Llewelyn Dillwyn, the MP for Swansea Town, presented a second disestablishment measure in 1886, Gladstone abstained, as he did on a similar Scottish motion which was presented a few days later. Gladstone was not politically naïve in his failure to recognise the substantial shift which occurred in the political landscape at this time. The reliance upon Welsh MPs' support following the 1886 election placed him under considerable political pressure to advance their causes. Indeed in 1886 John Morley had stated categorically that disestablishment had to be one of the main objects of the party, and by 1887 Liberal Federations in both north and south Wales had been formed to secure this measure. The local federations were affiliated to the National Liberal Federation and as such, could play an important part in the development of party policy, and ensure that at least those measures such as land reform and disestablishment would be considered by the national party. Although Gladstone recognised the shift in the power of the argument, he remained unwilling to commit himself to disestablishment, and this elicited criticism from Ellis, Gee and other nonconformist leaders. Rendel, who was a political and personal friend of Gladstone commented: 'I don't think that Mr. Gladstone understands or can understand the kind of suspicion and uneasiness that exists in Wales as to his views.'[134]

[132] K.O. Morgan, 'Gladstone and Wales', *Welsh History Review* 1/1 (1960), p.65.
[133] H.C.G. Matthew, *Gladstone, 1875-1898* (Oxford, 1995), p.324.
[134] K.O. Morgan, 'Gladstone and Wales', *Welsh History Review* 1/1 (1960), p. 74.

By 1892, however, Gladstone did commit himself to the principle of disestablishment and it was one of the matters which was presented and discussed at the first cabinet of his new government. When the Suspensory Bill was debated and eventually published in 1893, Gladstone argued in favour of the measure, based on legislative precedence, the strength of the Church, and the numerical arguments in favour of nonconformity. Once again, the issues relating to Ireland caused the bill to be removed from discussion and by 1894 Gladstone had resigned the premiership. Throughout the period of his later premiership, Owen and Gladstone corresponded with one another, indeed in 1893 Gladstone wrote to state his support of the disestablishment measure as: 'I do not in the least apprehend that the actions of the Church would be paralysed by the adoption of such a measure.'[135] This letter testifies to the personal nature of the relationship which existed between the two correspondents and that, although they remained divided upon the principle of disestablishment, Gladstone remained supportive of the work of the Church and of its leadership.

Principal Owen

Owen's return to Lampeter came as little surprise to the ecclesiastical and educational establishment. His tenure in St Asaph, although productive, had been very much focused on providing assistance to Bishop Edwards and fighting campaigns. Owen's high profile and clear educational abilities had left little doubt in the matter.

> At the age of 38 he came back to College having been already a professor, a headmaster of a public school, and a dean. Here was a second Jayne, full of energy, but thoroughly Welsh, the most completely Welsh Principal Lampeter had yet had, or, with the exception of Dr Maurice Jones, was to have in the future.[136]

Owen certainly took over the role during a period of great change in the life of the college, he was the third principal to assume office in six years, and the college was deeply embattled with its possible membership of the University of Wales.

---

[135] K.O. Morgan, 'Gladstone and Wales', *Welsh History Review* 1/1 (1960), p. 77.
[136] D.T.W. Price, *A History of Saint David's College Lampeter; Volume One: to 1898* (Cardiff, 1977), p.160.

The controversy surrounding the University of Wales had its roots in the political, religious and social divides which existed in nineteenth century Wales. St David's College Lampeter had been founded in 1822 and was opened in 1827 at a cost of £20,000, having been granted its first charter in 1828. It was a college primarily concerned with the education of ordinands, and by 1852 it could offer a Bachelor's degree in divinity. Notable nonconformists had resented the development of this partisan higher educational establishment and both the Calvinistic Methodists and the Baptists opened colleges in the 1830s and 1840s. By the 1850s there was a growing movement to establish a University of Wales, and the leading proponents of the idea were active nonconformists, amongst them: Thomas Charles, Lewis Edwards, Henry Rees, as well as those involved in the political sphere, most notably G. O. Morgan.[137] By the 1860s the movement had established a London Committee which sought to raise funds and awareness for the establishment of a national university. Initial discussions with Lampeter had been favourable, with the proposition being that another college be established which was unsectarian and the two institutions form a federal body. This never occurred due to the refusal of the Lampeter authorities to rescind full control over certain administrative and teaching matters. The hostility from Churchmen towards the creation of a Welsh university was heightened by the appointment of Bishop Basil Jones to the see of St Davids in 1874, who argued that Wales did not warrant its own institution for he believed that Welsh nationality was no more than an 'exaggerated provincialism.'[138] Edwards also argued that apart from training institutions for those wishing to enter the ordained ministry, colleges of advanced education in Wales were unnecessary. Nonconformists, passionately emphasised the increasing concept of Welsh nationhood, highlighting the cultural and social identity of Wales, and for some, an aspiration for the potential of home rule, if not independence. The opening of the University College of Wales in 1872 was hailed as a great achievement and the appointment of Thomas Charles Edwards as its first principal was an educational coup.

The Aberdare Commission of 1881 set about to investigate both intermediate and higher education. Its report noted many failures of the education system but it was criticised

[137] J.G. Williams, *The University Movement in Wales* (Cardiff, 1993), p.21.
[138] J.G. Williams, *The University Movement in Wales* (Cardiff, 1993), p.32.

for lacking a concise understanding of the specific needs of the Welsh people and their culture. The report did recommend the creation of a University of Wales, however there was considerable objection to such a university existing in one central location.[139] Principal Jayne, under whom Lampeter had undergone something of a renaissance, wished to encourage nonconformists to enrol in his college, however the bishops, led by Edwards, were unconvinced on this matter. Neither were they prepared to allow Lampeter's right to confer degrees to be downgraded in any way. It is also likely that the religious tension of the time would have done little to encourage nonconformists to attend such an institution. The opening of colleges in Cardiff and Bangor in 1883 and 1884 respectively further promoted the demand to create a federal university.

In 1891 Lord Aberdare had resolved to ask for a charter for the University, which consisted of the colleges at Aberystwyth, Bangor and Cardiff. Lampeter was excluded on the basis that it was a theological college, even though Principal Edmondes had argued strongly in opposition to this, noting that of the seventy-two examination papers set in June 1891, only nineteen had been in theology.[140] This exclusion was particularly insulting to both Edwards and Owen who had been participants and attendees at the Welsh University Conference held in Shrewsbury in November 1891. D.P. Davies argues that Lampeter's exclusion was also based upon its ability to offer degree courses in arts as well as theology, which irritated the other prospective constituent colleges, as they wished to have a monopoly on arts degree courses in Wales.[141] Although the college had accepted its fate briefly during the summer of 1892, due the direction and guidance of Bishops Jones and Edwards, Owen fought back, especially through his membership of the Court of the College at Bangor. Owen used his address on degree day in 1893 to challenge the decision, arguing that it was not based on educational principles but rather was a political move intended to alienate an Anglican institution. Much of the criticism made of the institution by nonconformists was that it lacked independence from the Church, and that its academic standards were not sufficiently rigorous. In his report, however, O. M. Edwards noted that Lampeter was the only institution where the teaching was of a university character and

[139] J.G. Williams, *The University Movement in Wales* (Cardiff, 1993), p.71.
[140] D.T.W. Price, *A History of Saint David's College Lampeter; Volume One: to 1898* (Cardiff, 1977), p.159.
[141] D.P. Davies in K. Robbins & J. Morgan-Guy (eds.) *Bold Imagining* (Llandysul, 2002), p.102.

standard.[142] E.E. Owen presents a rather different view of her father's opinion, citing that he was far readier to accept exclusion, and work on the basis that Lampeter should become a high quality theological college in its own right.[143] This viewpoint seems to be quite misguided. Owen himself notes that he was in favour of such a move in his reminiscences, the '*Atgofion*',[144] and he certainly drove the campaign to petition the Privy Council that the college be afforded equal treatment. During his residency in St Asaph during the summer of 1893, although he was not able to persuade Gladstone in this matter, he did manage to influence him to insert a clause into the charter allowing the number of constituent colleges to be increased 'so in the future Lampeter might enter the University.'[145] Undoubtedly the hope which Owen held through this move was that a Conservative government would bring Lampeter into the fold of the University. Not content however with this amendment, Owen also lobbied the Bishops of London, Ely, Salisbury, St Asaph and St Davids to defeat the Charter Measure until Lampeter was included. This motion was carried in the Lords, but the government ignored it and the University Bill was passed on 30 November 1893. Owen therefore lost his campaign, however his political campaigning stood him in good stead for the work he was to do in opposing the Suspensory Bill of 1893.

Owen's campaign for inclusion into the University of Wales did however spur him on to reform the college and create a new charter. This new charter enabled the college council to take over many of the powers of the visitor, and furthermore the appointment of the principal would be vested in the council rather than in the turn of patronage which had led to Owen's own appointment. This clause states clearly that the purpose of the college was to receive and educate any (male) person, whether destined for Holy Orders or not.[146] Clearly Owen was seeking to emphasise the position of the college as an educational establishment rather than a theological college and place of ministerial formation. Here the principal was taking a long-term view for the college, hoping that by stating clearly in foundational documents the prime purpose of the college, further arguments would be made for its inclusion within the University of Wales in the future.[147]

---

[142] J.G. Williams, *The University Movement in Wales,* (Cardiff, 1993), p.141.
[143] E.E. Owen, *The Early Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1958), pp.158-160.
[144] J. Owen, 'Atgofion', *Y Llan*, 8 September 1922, p.6, col.2.
[145] D.T.W. Price, *A History of Saint David's College Lampeter; Volume One: to 1898* (Cardiff, 1977), p.163.
[146] D.T.W. Price, *A History of Saint David's College Lampeter; Volume One: to 1898* (Cardiff, 1977), p.166.
[147] Lampeter was not admitted into the University of Wales until 1971.

During Owen's tenure at Lampeter he remained actively involved with the Diocese of St Asaph, and therefore with Edwards, by remaining a Canon of the Cathedral, and would take up his residence there for two or three months of the year. Whilst he was in residence, he continued with his passion of educating the clergy by organizing the School for Clergy which would happen for a week every year during the summer. In his address about his father-in-law, Davies makes clear that Owen was of the opinion during his concerted effort to fight the disestablishment of the Church that the clergy on the ground needed to gain a greater understanding of the meaning of the Church and its mission to the people of Wales.[148] He therefore organised a series of these schools to better equip the clergy for the task at hand.

Owen certainly brought a higher profile to the college than many of his predecessors, and this was mainly achieved through his involvement in national campaigns. Little is known of his work at Lampeter except for the charter, although student numbers were still relatively high during his tenure, 216 students were admitted between October 1892 and May 1897.[149] Price notes that complaints were continually made regarding the poor provision offered to the Welsh language, especially in liturgical services, and that Welsh sermons were seldom heard. It is also important to recall that during Owen's tenure as Principal, a second theological college, St Michael's, was opened in Aberdare in 1892, where Welsh was often used in both pastoral and liturgical circumstances. It is therefore ironic that a principal who had once been Professor of Welsh and tried to raise the profile of the language in the life of the college, did little to encourage its use when he held a position of power and authority. However, this is perhaps not that surprising considering the emphasis he placed upon Welsh during his tenure at Llandovery. No doubt it was his high profile, and considerable support from leaders in both religious and political spheres which led him to be nominated for the see of St Davids in 1897, from which he developed a distinct leadership in the campaign against the disestablishment of the Church.

[148] J.T. Davies 'Bishop Owen D.D.' (1954), p.7.
[149] D.T.W. Price, *A History of Saint David's College Lampeter; Volume One: to 1898* (Cardiff, 1977), p.169.

Chapter 2: Disestablishment: a Justified Position?

i. The Numerical Argument

> There is nothing in the past history, or the present work, or the future responsibility, of the Church in Wales which can justify Welsh disestablishment.[1]

The main argument in favour of the disestablishment of the Church within the four Welsh dioceses was that it no longer counted a majority of the population amongst its members. Leading Welsh Liberal politicians argued that a majority of the population wanted disestablishment. Gladstone, himself a committed Anglican, remarked in 1891 of Wales being a 'nation of nonconformists.'[2] As early as 1873, Gladstone had admitted, albeit reluctantly, the weakness of the Church in all four Welsh dioceses, and the importance that any established church should comprise of the majority of the population it claimed to serve.[3] It is interesting to note that from the 1870s onwards all indications of Church performance, such as the number being baptized, confirmed and receiving communion, underwent a substantial increase.[4] However, within Wales the majority of the population were not adherents of the established Church and this matter was further complicated by the religious revival of 1904. It is estimated that 34,000 conversions occurred during this time, although some declare that as many 100,000 took place. Despite the varying facts in relation to the revival what is apparent is that the membership of the four main nonconformist denominations did grow considerably during this period from 463,000 in 1903 to 549,000.[5] This increase did not occur without controversy, as Evans states:

> the 1904-5 revival had been a clear attempt to reverse the structure of chapel authority, to ignore ministerial guidance and break with tradition. It was an attempt to put the laity, and especially the young people, in charge of the spiritual renaissance.[6]

---

[1] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection, J. Owen, 'Paper delivered at the Manchester Congress 1908'.
[2] K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation, 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981), p.96.
[3] K.O. Morgan, 'Gladstone and Wales', *Welsh History Review* 1/1 (1960), p. 73.
[4] M. Cragoe, 'A Question of Culture, Welsh Church and St Asaph', *Welsh History Review* 18/3 (1996), p.228.
[5] D. G. Evans, *A History of Wales 1906-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 38.
[6] D. G. Evans, *A History of Wales 1906-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 240.

Tudur Jones argues that the revival can be viewed as 'lamentable rather than creative'[7] and that it failed to create a long-lasting positive impact upon Welsh nonconformity. E.E. Owen questions whether the religious revival was meant in the mysterious providence of God to bring peace to the churches of Wales.[8]

The effects of the revival therefore further complicated the ability of either side of the controversy to draw on conclusive and proven evidence. The Bishop of St Asaph, for his part stated that Liberal spokesmen had varied their assessment of the proportion of nonconformists to Anglicans from thirteen to one, to three to one.[9] Edwards further remarked that: 'The figures grew until in some districts the Nonconformists were more numerous than the population.'[10] Some commentators estimated that the combined total of nonconformists was no more than 42% of the population.[11] The concerted call for disestablishment had arisen following the religious census of 1851, while a disestablishment society had been formed in Merionethshire as early as 1833.[12]

Although the campaign extended throughout the British Isles, by 1870 the English campaign led by Edward Miall had largely dissipated. This, though, was not the case in Wales. In his autobiographical work *Memories*, Edwards traces the history of the disestablishment campaign back to the activities of Henry Richard, the son of a Methodist minister in Cardiganshire.[13] Richard was himself a minister within a Congregationalist Chapel in London between 1837 and 1850, prior to being elected Member of Parliament for Merthyr Tydfil in 1868. Richard was a prominent speaker at the Liberationist Conference held in Swansea in 1862, at which he stated:

> Churchmen imagine that the country is theirs, and that we exist only on sufferance. Hence the mingled resentment and disdain with which they look down on the persons of dissenting ministers. But this is a gross misconception; the country is not theirs, but ours; we claim it as a rightful possession. It is ours

[7] R. Tudur Jones, *Hanes Annibynwyr Cymru* (Abertawe, 1966).
[8] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.76.
[9] A.G. Edwards, *A Handbook on Welsh Church Defence* (London, 1895), p.9.
[10] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p.118.
[11] J.W. James, *A Church History of Wales* (Ilfracombe, 1945), p.185.
[12] F.P. Jones, *Radicaliaeth a'r Werin Gymreig yn y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg* (Caerdydd, 1977), p. 77.
[13] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p.115.

> by spiritual conquest. Our forefathers found it overrun by the enemies of all truth and righteousness, and that because of the neglect of its official guardians; and when the Nonconformists and early Methodists went forth to reconquer the land, the clergy of the Established Church were foremost in opposing them. It is ours by spiritual cultivation.[14]

Richard and others like him established a narrative that nonconformity had rescued the soul of the Welsh people due to the neglect of the established Church. The strength of their argument was supported by the sheer volume of adherents to the nonconformist tradition. The 1862 Conference played a pivotal role in promoting the cause of disestablishment and according to Edwards it paved the way for an 'effective organisation of Welsh Nonconformists in the interest of religious equality.'[15] Edwards accused Richard and other opponents of the Church of using outdated and irregular information to support their cause, indeed they were accused of quoting parochial scandals dating back to the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, the substance of their argument remained valid and the formation of local branches of the Liberation Society throughout the land, only strengthened the disestablishment cause in Victorian Wales. Such was the groundswell of support that on 24 May 1870 Watkin Williams, MP for Denbighshire had called for a debate on the disestablishment of the Welsh Church proposing that its endowments be used for the purposes of nondenominational education, although his motion was lost by 209 votes to forty-five.

This measure was the precursor to the Suspensory Bill which was presented to parliament on 23 February 1893, the aim of which was to prevent the further endowment of the Anglican Church in Wales, especially in respect of establishing new parishes or dioceses within the rapidly changing demographic of the Welsh population. The bill, and all subsequent measures, show how closely the fortunes of the disestablishment campaign were tied to those of the Liberal Party: 'Churches and ministers actively supported the Liberal Party and there had emerged a common ideology based on the importance of individual choice and personal freedom.'[16] The cause of disestablishment had reawakened a sense of identity within Welsh Liberalism which had not been prevalent for a considerable

[14] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p.116.
[15] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p. 117.
[16] D. G. Evans, *A History of Wales 1906-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 37.

period. So ideologically united were the Welsh Liberals on this matter, that they could exercise considerable influence upon successive Liberal governments. Of Gladstone's majority of forty-two in 1893, thirty-one members of his party came from Wales alone. Such was the influence of the Welsh MPs that Lord Randolph Churchill criticised the Liberal Party for continually being at the mercy of members from both Wales and Ireland.[17] Although Gladstone was undoubtedly influenced by the behaviour of his Welsh MPs, he too supported the principal of disestablishment (although not disendowment), stating that 'there is a strong presumptive argument for disestablishment wherever the adherents of establishment are in a small minority.'[18] The Suspensory Bill of 1893 had its roots in a document produced by Thomas Gee which advocated that Welsh clergy should be provided with none of the compensation which their Irish counterparts had received some twenty years previously. He also proposed that all palaces, parsonages and glebes should be sold and that the proceeds should be given to the tithe fund in each county. The cathedrals should also be handed over to the county councils. Gee's plans however came to nothing as the Suspensory Bill was withdrawn in September of 1893, though the need to address the principle of disestablishment within Wales was now recognised by the Liberal Party.

This manifested itself that on 30 April 1894 a bill to disestablish the Welsh Church was introduced in parliament by Asquith. Its effect would be that; the Church were disestablished, that all rights of patronage be extinguished, that all corporations be dissolved, that the bishops would no longer sit in the House of Lords, no appeals could be made to the sovereign in council, and private benefactions before 1703 were to be alienated. Along with this the total gross of £279,000 of ecclesiastical income, representing endowments of parochial benefices and of episcopal and capitular offices would be alienated and the surplus, paid by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners' English revenues, would to go back to England. The total gross income to be viewed as 'Welsh' and to be used for the benefit of the whole of the Welsh public. Cathedrals would become national monuments and burial grounds were to be vested in the hands of local authorities. This bill encapsulated all the hopes and aspirations of Welsh Liberal MPs who supported the disestablishment of the Church: 'it quieted for a space the nerves of the Welsh party and tempted the

[17] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p.146.
[18] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p.149.

extremists with the offer of what they most desired.'[19] Although Gladstone had allowed the bill to be presented, and in previous debates surrounding disestablishment had asked for himself to be paired, he did express in both the 1894 and 1895 bills his disquiet, for he viewed the financial measure as being extreme, and actively intervened in relation to the cathedrals and churchyard measures which he felt were unnecessary.[20] The sense of triumph within the Welsh Liberal group was quickly diminished by the retirement of Gladstone and the appointment of Lord Rosebery as Prime Minister, which left Sir William Harcourt as leader of the Liberal Party within the House of Commons, who had little appetite for the measure and the bill was withdrawn on 18 July 1894.

Although the bill's withdrawal might have been viewed as a victory for Owen and his fellow campaigners, the support for the measure within the Liberal Party was substantial and the government knew that it was a policy which would need to be implemented if they were to retain electoral credibility. The bill was withdrawn for political purposes rather than any loss of confidence in the principle of disestablishing the Anglican Church. The strength of nonconformity was certainly not in dispute, even amongst the leading opponents of disestablishment. However, the refusal of the Liberal Party to enact a religious census rendered the situation a significant matter of contention. Even in 1911, Sir Arthur Griffith-Boscawen MP, introduced a bill in Parliament for a religious census, although the Liberal Party opposed this, stating that it would be impossible to agree on the methods by which such a census should be undertaken. In addition to this it was argued that some adherents of nonconformity might be forced to provide an alternative religious affiliation following pressure from a landlord or employer. Owen remained determined to press for a religious census, if only to record adherence to the Anglican Church even in a general sense: 'A Parliamentary Religious Census alone would show the number of people in Wales who are so far influenced for good by the Church as to consider themselves Church adherents.'[21] There was a precedent, in that a similar census had been deployed when seeking to address the issue of the disestablishment of the Church in Ireland. He also argued that if an assessment was based upon adherence rather than active membership, then the Church

[19] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p. 161.
[20] K.O. Morgan, 'Gladstone and Wales', *Welsh History Review* 1/1 (1960), p.79.
[21] J. Owen, *The Church in Wales Royal Commission-An Address* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.3 .

would have a figure equalling that of the nonconformist denominations combined: 'The number of Church adherents in Wales today is larger than it has ever been at any previous period in the history of Wales.'[22] This view was supported by a number of commentators including Canon Robert Williams who stated that there was 'among those who advocate Disestablishment an uncomfortable conviction that a parliamentary religious census would effectually destroy the force of the minority argument.'[23]

The only clear evidence regarding the state of religion within the Welsh nation is drawn from the work of the Royal Commission. In 1906 the government appointed a Royal Commission to enquire into the religious situation within Wales, and this commission took over four years to produce its final report. Its purpose as agreed at the cabinet meeting held on 9 March 1906 was:

> to enquire into the origin, nature, amount and application of the temporalities, endowments, and other properties of the Church of England in Wales and Monmouthshire, and into the provision made and the work done by the Churches of all denominations for the spiritual welfare of the people; and the extent to which the people avail themselves of such provision.[24]

Some commentators argue that this was merely a delaying tactic used by the Liberal government to maintain focus on other, more pressing, domestic political policies.[25] The Commission was chaired by Lord Chief Justice Vaughan Williams and its members were Lord Hugh Cecil, Sir John Williams, Frank Edwards, Archdeacon Owen Evans, S.T. Evans, A.M. Fairbairn, John Ernest Greaves and Henry Jones. Certain individuals such as Sir C.A. Cripps had refused to serve on the body, stating that it was constituted on 'political lines for political purposes.'[26] The disquiet regarding the nature, purpose and conduct of the Commission was not restricted to its establishment, for throughout the period of its investigation there was continual disagreement over the methods and procedures of gathering the necessary statistical information. Indeed so substantial was the dispute that by 1907 three members had resigned. Their published memoranda complained of the

[22] J. Owen, *The Church in Wales Royal Commission-An Address* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.4.
[23] R. Williams, *The Attack on the Church in Wales* (London, 1912), p.28.
[24] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.82.
[25] K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation, 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981), p. 141.
[26] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection-Bundle 7, Box 2.

conduct of the chairman of the Commission, whom they accused of behaving in an arbitrary and overbearing manner. This viewpoint is supported by later scholars such as D. Densil Morgan who argue:

> Rather than contributing to the resolution of tensions between Anglican and Dissenter it merely added to them: the waspish condescension of its chairman, the Rt Hon. Sir Roland Vaughan-William, towards those who had volunteered as witnesses was often little short of scandalous.[27]

Many Liberals argued that their witnesses had been treated most unfairly and that its results were therefore not to be considered definitive or accurate.[28] There was certainly some element of scepticism from both sides regarding the beneficial nature of the Commission's work. Undoubtedly there were those who felt that such an investigation would prove little, and its findings could continually be challenged by the religious and social changes which were continuing to impact Wales during the early part of the twentieth century. However, within the Church defence movement there were many who felt that the Commission's work would serve to further their cause. Such a viewpoint was made by the Archdeacon of Carmarthen, a member of the commission, when writing to Owen on 3 April 1906: 'Personally I may say that I think the result of such an enquiry cannot but be advantageous to the Church.'[29]

In order for the result of the enquiry to be successful, there was a need for the Church to provide an accurate and co-ordinated response. Unsurprisingly this role fell to Owen. The first meeting of the Commission took place in July 1906 while the bishops concurrently had selected Owen to represent the Church on their behalf. This was indicative of the level of support which Owen received from his fellow bishops. Edwards wrote to Owen highlighting the areas which he felt his lieutenant in the field should concentrate on, namely: the history of each of the four dioceses, the development of the Church during the previous one hundred and fifty years, the influence which the Church possesses upon the moral and religious character of the people whom it is called to serve, and how effectively it

---

[27] D.D. Morgan, *The Span of the Cross*: *Christian Religion and Society in Wales, 1914-2000* (Cardiff, 1999), p. 9.
[28] *South Wales Daily News*, 13 May 1908.
[29] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection-Box 7, Bundle 3.

had fulfilled its trusteeship of its ancient endowments.[30] Owen was determined that, from the outset, the full facts of the Anglican position should be made known and therefore he called together a team to supply the Church's representatives with the information they required. His course of action was to send an enquiry in book form to every incumbent in Wales in order, to establish the truth about the Church's position both statistically and financially. Edwards was later to describe this work as creating 'storehouses of information of permanent value.'[31] Owen's distinctive contribution to the Church's defence is clearly illustrated by the substantial work he did in respect of the commission and as Canon D.A. Jenkins described Owen's character as being grounded in the love of truth,[32] it is clear that Owen was determined to present an accurate and fair portrayal of the Church's position. Included in Owen's team were: Frank Morgan, Sir Edward Marlay Sampson, who served as the Chancellor of the Diocese of St Davids, and the Revd Ben Davies who served as the Professor of Mathematics at Lampeter. In addition to this, Canon Camber Williams, Archdeacon Owen Evans and the Revd D.A. Evans, who served as bishop's chaplain, also provided support. Owen ensured that in every diocese, individuals were made responsible for the statistics which were to be presented and witnesses were briefed prior to their interview by the Commission.[33] Owen himself was lauded for his appearance before the Commission: 'He was rigorously cross-examined, his statements were challenged, his deductions from them were disputed, but he proved a match for his opponents.'[34] There was substantial debate surrounding the validity of method used by the Commission, although it is clear from its findings that the nonconformists and their Liberal allies did not possess the majority of adherents which they had based their arguments upon for a considerable period. The idea that Wales was a 'Nation of Nonconformists' had been dealt a considerable blow by the work of the Royal Commission. Although Owen may have been hostile to the principle of the Commission, favouring a religious census instead, he did however use its findings as a basis for his future political arguments, arguing in 1909 that the case against disestablishment was 'strong in the light of the facts ascertained by the Royal Commission.'[35] What is noteworthy from the conclusions of the Welsh Commission

[30] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection-Box 7, Bundle 2.
[31] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.107.
[32] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.137.
[33] J.T. Davies 'Bishop Owen D.D.' (1954), p. 11.
[34] Obituary of John Owen, *Daily Telegraph*, 5 November 1926.
[35] J. Owen, *The Present Position of the Church in Wales* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.4.

was that the Chairman, Lord Chief Justice Williams, did concur with the evidence of the nonconformist representatives that their membership was predominantly drawn from the working classes. The Church was undoubtedly at its weakest in the industrial, Welsh-speaking districts.

Much of the Church's weakness in these areas was due to the increasing anglicization of the gentry, many of whom were relied upon for benefaction and patronage by the established Church, which resulted in the Church increasingly ministering in the language which they knew and which nurtured them. The Church was increasingly forced to minister in two very different spheres and many clergy were unable or unwilling to minister in Welsh, thereby making an effective ministry virtually impossible. Many of the wealthier livings were often in the towns, and therefore many of those presented to industrial, often Welsh-speaking parishes were wholly inappropriate for appointment. Clarke maintains that appointments were frequently made for party purposes as a reward for services rendered, rather than for any spiritual or intellectual gifts.[36] These appointees usually ignored their parishioners and their religious and social needs, and were often unavailable for pastoral offices or other duties. It was in this context that the Methodism Revival of the eighteenth century occurred. The early leaders of the movement advocated the mass teaching of the people, preferably in their native tongue, and evangelists such as Howell Harris of Trevecca, Daniel Rowlands of Llangeitho and Thomas Charles of Bala began their work. Most of these men were Anglican clergymen yet they were at such odds with their bishops, who were English and monoglot English-speaking, that there was little opportunity or possibility of compromise. By the early part of the nineteenth century they seceded from the Church and became increasingly radicalised and influenced heavily the older nonconformist bodies such as the Presbyterians, the Baptists and the Independents. These denominations invested heavily in places of considerable population increase, and developed a sense of identity based upon chapel, nationhood and language at the expense of the established Church. Owen was not oblivious to the contribution of the nonconformist denominations in this respect, indeed in 1911 he stated: 'though statistical mistakes which used to be urged in favour of Disendowment and Disestablishment have to be corrected, it is no part of our case

[36] H.W. Clarke, *A History of the Church in Wales* (London, 1896), p.163.

against Mr Asquith's bill to minimise the work done by Welsh Nonconformists.'[37] The importance of the contribution of nonconformity was not sought to be diminished by Owen, neither did he wish to see it ignored in the work of the Royal Commission, but he did feel strongly its work and membership had to be placed within a fair and accurate context.

One of the outcomes of the establishment of the Royal Commission, together with the calling of a general election in 1906, was the mobilization of the Church's forces against the disestablishment campaign. This was predominantly achieved through the formation of a Church Defence League in every diocese throughout Wales. Owen had considered such a move necessary as early as February of that year, when in a circular letter sent to all clergy in his own diocese, he requested them, together with their churchwardens, to meet him, in a private conference in order that every parish could mobilize its resources for the campaign. So great was the support that nine large-scale meetings were held within the diocese in support of the Church Defence League in that year alone.[38] Owen displayed his determination to see the Church answer its critics through whatever means possible, and in establishing the Church Defence League he clearly saw an opportunity for parishes to provide a robust defence of their position as the established and national Church:

> The Welsh people have a right to expect us Welsh Churchmen to tell them what we believe to be true about the Bill and the Church. There is much truth in a letter recently written by a well-educated Welsh Nonconformist Minister, who candidly said that the younger generation of Welsh Nonconformist electors, including himself, had yet much to learn upon this subject.[39]

The meeting of the Welsh Bishops held at the Athenaeum Club in May 1906 also indicates that Owen was determined to passionately pursue the establishment of the league within his own diocese but was also intent on motivating his episcopal colleagues to assume responsibility follow his example within their own jurisdictions. The bishops agreed that the Church Defence League should be established within every diocese with the possibility of forming parochial committees where possible. Membership was to be open to those aged twelve or older, subscription rates were to be voluntary and the motto was to be *'y Gwir yn*

[37] J. Owen, *The Church in Wales Royal Commission: An Address* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.4.
[38] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection-Box 3.
[39] J. Owen, *The Duty and Encouragement of Welsh Churchmen* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.3.

erbyn y Byd,' ('Truth in the face of the World'). This was a rather bold move considering that particular phrase was always used at the installation of the Bard at the National Eisteddfod, a movement predominantly controlled by the nonconformists. The bishops also agreed to encourage every parish to form its own committee, to organize events and to provide to their respective diocesan, the names of laymen who would speak about Church defence, at local or national meetings. Each group was to be asked to educate its members in what disestablishment would mean, to distribute literature, to watch local newspapers for attacks on the Church and to hinder any political action whose aim was to destroy the establishment. The detail of consideration given to the organization of the league is testimony to Owen's determination to see the Church respond effectively to its detractors. Throughout this period, Owen felt that it was the power of information which would win the argument, that both laity and clergy should be mobilised as advocates for the anti-disestablishment campaign, and that its leadership should be both parochial and national. He feared that if such a rigorous and mobilised campaign was not fought, the outcome would be dire: 'I thought it right to warn Churchmen against being lulled by the delusion of false hopes into dangerous procrastination of the duty of Church defence.'[40] Certainly by 1911, Owen was extremely complimentary about the work of the Church Defence League both within his own diocese and in the diocese of Llandaff testifying that his efforts had mobilised the membership of the Church, although its effectiveness was yet to be proven.[41] In 1912 Owen, addressing the Diocesan Conference, acknowledged the challenges that lay ahead:

> The meetings held all over the Diocese have made a distinct impression upon public opinion, and the effective services rendered at meetings in Wales and England by laymen show what a large reserve of strength the Church possesses in the devotion and ability of faithful laymen. The many thousands of meetings held in all parts of England, at a large number of which Welsh Churchmen spoke, have done much to bring home to English public opinion the truth about the Church in Wales and the truth about the Bill.[42]

[40] J. Owen, *The Present Position of the Church in Wales* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.2.
[41] J. Owen, *The Duty and Encouragement of Welsh Churchmen* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.4.
[42] J. Owen, *The Welsh Disestablishment Bill, Facts and Principles* (Cardiff, 1912), p.1.

Throughout his involvement with the work of the Church Defence League Owen always sought to call its membership back to the primary purpose and nature of the Church:

> It is as difficult as it is indispensable, never to forget, however pressing this duty may be at a time like this, that it must always remain a duty strictly subordinate to the primary duty of service. Church defence takes its proper place when it is viewed as the discharge of a trust handed down to us of this generation from the past for the future: a trust to retain for the benefit of the future, if God will, opportunities and resources now possessed by the Church for service.[43]

Owen was consistent in seeking to focus the minds of his supporters on viewing their work in respect of Church defence within the primary purpose of the salvation of souls. The position of the Church was, in Owen's view, being defended for the purposes of her sacred mission, and not for political or financial benefit:

> Are you going to take quietly the wrecking of Church work proposed in this Bill, when it is so sorely and urgently needed? No, I think too much of your manhood. I believe in your love for your Church. I believe in your love for your country.[44]

Undoubtedly it was orations such as this which gained Owen such acclaim for being able to stir the hearts of his supporters into action, as he did so powerfully through the work of the Church Defence League.

Whatever work was done in seeking to defend the position of the Church, the strength of the nonconformist position was acknowledged by leading opponents of disestablishment, and its growth, which had been substantial during the previous two centuries, was also recognised. In 1715 there were only thirty-nine nonconformist chapels in Wales; by 1801 this number had increased to 954.[45] During the period 1801-41 the population of Wales doubled and by 1881 it had tripled to 1,572,000, and therefore it would be admissible to reckon that the number of nonconformists also grew tremendously during

---

[43] J. Owen, *The Call of the Church to Service and the Unity of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1909), pp.6-7.
[44] J. Owen, *The Principles of the Welsh Disestablishment Bill* (Cardiff, 1909), p.20.
[45] A.J. Johnes, *An Essay on the Causes which produced dissent from the Established Church in the Principality of Wales* (London 1832).

this period. Within the two southern counties of Glamorgan and Monmouth the population doubled from 593,307 in 1871 to 1,152,248 in 1901 and amounted to well over half the total population of Wales.[46] It is recognised that nonconformity's original strength in the beginning of the nineteenth century lay in the rural parts of Wales, but the vast expansion of population due to the industrial revolution brought about a new a wave of nonconformity within industrial areas, to the extent that Swansea, for example, was nicknamed 'the Mecca of Nonconformity.'[47] The migration of so many from the countryside undoubtedly resulted in the foundation of firm nonconformist values within the industrial communities. John Owen was himself a product of that substantial numerical growth within nonconformity in Wales. Nonconformity's growth during the nineteenth century had been aided by the rise of the temperance movement and in particular the printed word. Before 1855 the national press was the preserve of the traditional holders of power but by the beginning of the twentieth century it was estimated that Welsh periodicals had a circulation of 50,000 a week,[48] thereby enabling discussion on political, social, economic and religious matters. By 1884 the number of nonconformist chapels in Wales had grown to 4,200. The erection of buildings however is not wholly indicative of increase in membership, rather it was indicative of the denominationally minded nature of the Welsh people, who sought to build and establish the chapel of their choice, as Edwards remarked:

> Pride and high-mindedness … often dictates the building of small and would be Independent chapels on the lonely hillsides to gratify the conceit and personal feeling of some ten or twelve members …[49]

Edwards's own work illustrates that although the Calvinistic Methodists opened 171 new chapels from 1877 to 1887, their total gain in membership was only ten per new chapel.[50] When considering that the Royal Commission's work was undertaken in the wake of the Welsh Revival it is important to recognise the prolific building work which was undertaken in this period, but which may not have had the lasting effects first anticipated by the leaders of nonconformity. By 1908, David Evans states that around 26,000 members of

---

[46] J. Owen, *The Call of the Church to Service and the Unity of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1909), p.10.
[47] K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation, 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981), p.14.
[48] D. G. Evans, *A History of Wales 1906-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 222.
[49] 'The Social and Religious Condition of Wales' *Church Quarterly Review* (1883) p.64.
[50] A.G. Edwards, *Facts and Figures about Church and Dissent in Wales* (Carmarthen, 1888), p.6.

nonconformist bodies were no longer attending a place of worship.[51] He argues that this indicates that the Welsh Revival significantly changed the religious landscape of the nation, but that its effects were not long lasting, and that the figures which were produced during this period were not truly reflective of the Christian composition within Wales during this wider period. R. Tudur Jones also reflects this viewpoint in his assessment of the numbers attending religious institutions between 1851 and 1905.[52] During this period the total number of nonconformists increased by 104% and the Anglican figure increased by 91%, Therefore even in the wake of the Welsh Revival, the success of the nonconformist denominations in recruiting a substantial number of new adherents is not proven by the statistics presented. Both Anglicans and nonconformists benefitted from the religious and social changes of the period which helped them all to grow numerically.

The established Church had certainly not witnessed the building boom experienced by their nonconformist brethren. The census of 1851 had confirmed that the people of Wales were far more religious than their counterparts in England which was testified by the fact that 75% of the total population of Wales could be seated in a place of worship in comparison with 51.4% in England. Provision was greatest in rural areas, with districts such as Machynlleth able to hold 124% of the population.[53] Asquith had maintained that this situation displayed the strength of the nonconformist tradition within Wales, however it was recognised by the Royal Commission, together with other observers, that the seating capacity of the nonconformist tradition was far larger than that which was needed, and that across five of the Welsh counties there was greater seating capacity within the chapels than there was population.[54] Although Clayton notes that such over-capacity came at a significant cost to the nonconformist denominations, as the Calvinistic Methodists had accumulated debts amounting to £668,429 in 1908 and the Congregationalists had debts of £318,048 in 1906.[55]

[51] D. G. Evans, *A History of Wales 1906-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 38.
[52] R. Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation, Wales 1890-1914* (Cardiff, 2004), p.35.
[53] D. G. Evans, *A History of Wales 1906-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 218.
[54] J. Owen, *Mesur Dadgysylltiad i Gymru, beth ydyw* (Carmarthen, 1912), p.1.
[55] H.J. Clayton, *The Indictment and Defence of the Church in Wales* (London, 1911), p.11.

The expansion of building for the Church had not been necessary during the early part of the nineteenth century as it already had one structure within every parish, although the fast-growing nature of urban areas often rendered the Church at a considerable disadvantage. As K. O. Morgan remarks: 'From the outset, the coming of industry and the population explosion brought new strains for the ancient, parochial structure of the Church.'[56] Even in 1851 the Church could only seat 29% of the population in its buildings.[57] During the period 1875-84 however over 134 parish churches were either enlarged or restored and a further sixty-eight were built. This significant rise in Anglican fortunes was certainly the result of a determined effort by the leadership of the Church to invest heavily in infrastructure. In 1910 it was estimated that around £3.3 million had been expended in building new churches, parsonages and schools, and securing the establishment of new parishes, particularly within the fast-expanding industrial areas,[58] signifying the substantial investment which the Church had made to ensure its parochial system was fit for the demands of an ever growing urban population in particular.

The established Church also continued to retain dominance when it came to the issue of the delivery of pastoral offices. Figures collated from 1875 onwards support the view that the number of baptisms, marriages and funerals within the Church had increased considerably, paralleling the substantial rise in population which had also occurred. During the period 1905-09 the number of marriages which were undertaken within the Anglican Church in Wales was 31.55%, whilst all nonconformists represented a figure of only 27.98%. The number of baptisms recorded also indicated that 33% of children born in Wales between 1900 and 1903 were baptised into the Anglican Church. An indication of the vitality of Welsh Church life by the end of the nineteenth century and the commencement of the twentieth century was that between the period 1851 and 1910, 347 new churches were built in Wales and almost 1,000 others were either renovated or rebuilt.[59] Within the Diocese of St Davids, considerable progress had been made during the latter part of the nineteenth century. In 1888 there 621 places of worship within the diocese which could accommodated approximately 128,000 persons. Between 1846 and 1888 131 parsonages

[56] K. O. Morgan, *Freedom or Sacrilege, A History of the Campaign for Welsh Disestablishment* (Penarth, 1966) p. 4.
[57] D. G. Evans, *A History of Wales 1906-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 220.
[58] M. Cragoe, 'A Question of Culture, Welsh Church and St Asaph', *Welsh History Review* 18/3 (1996), p.229.
[59] F. Knight in G.Williams, W. Jacob, N. Yates & F. Knight, *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment 1603-1920* (Cardiff, 2007), p.358.

were built and the number of non-resident incumbents dropped from 174 to seven, which was a substantial achievement. This reduction was probably linked to the augmentation of stipends attached to benefices during this period which saw those clerics receiving less than £100 per annum falling from 167 to fifty-five, although clergy poverty remained an issue even after the disestablishment of the Church in Wales. Within the Welsh Church, confirmations also rose from 7,131 between 1881 and 1883 to 9,000 in 1887-89. The number of pupils attending schools administered by the Church also rose dramatically from 15,799 in 1831 to 63,637 in 1888 and the number of clergy serving the Church increased by over 700 from 1855 to 1890.[60] The Church did respond to some of its areas of weakness however Evans notes that it took a considerable amount of time for the established Church to accept its responsibilities within the industrial areas in particular,[61] thereby signalling its weaknesses during the vast part of the nineteenth century. This is an indictment of the poor leadership of the Church for much of this period and the failure to recognise that the parochial system was no longer effective for the dramatic changes in demographic which had occurred.

The report of the Royal Commission, which was published in 1910 produced the following figures: Congregationalists-175,147, Calvinistic Methodists-170,617, Baptists-143,835, Wesleyans-40,811 and other denominations-19,870. The Anglican Church had a communicant figure of 193.081.[62] Even in the wake of the Welsh Revival in 1905, Anglicans still represented 25.9% of the total religious membership within Wales.[63] This surely is indicative that even the substantial numerical growth achieved during this period of religious revival did not cause the Anglican Church to lose its position as the most substantial numerical religious body within the nation. But neither the established Church nor nonconformity could claim a majority of the population. Anglicans however still had over 40,000 more communicants than the Calvinistic Methodists and were larger by 17,934 than the number of Congregationalist members, and had a further 30,025 Sunday School scholars than the Congregationalists. Owen was also vociferous in acknowledging that

[60] The information contained within this paragraph was taken from *The Progress of the Church in Wales* printed by the Church Defence Leaflet, Anti-Liberation Society, Leaflet No.xxx, London, 1890.
[61] D. G. Evans, *A History of Wales 1906-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 230.
[62] P.M.H. Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales* (London, 1969), p. 274.
[63] R. Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation, Wales 1890-1914* (Cardiff, 2004), p.11

numerical comparisons were not the only basis by which an assessment of the spiritual state of the nation should be judged. As he stated in a speech in 1911:

> The evidence laid before the Commission shews, as is recognised in the Report, that through the pastoral care, which is a prominent feature of the parochial system, the Church unlike Nonconformist denomination ministers to a large number of people in their homes who do not attend any place of public worship.[64]

What Owen sought to highlight was that even though the proportion of the population adhering to the Anglican Church was higher than any other singular denomination, there was also a need to consider the wider pastoral remit of the various bodies. He also argued that such an acknowledgement was necessary at a time when increasing numbers within the population were no longer presenting themselves for public worship. The Church's ministry therefore had to be set within a wider context of serving the needs of the whole population, rather than purely the membership alone, which was a pattern of ministry exercised to a far higher degree within the nonconformist tradition.

What is apparent from the Anglican perspective is that the adherence to the Church varied dramatically across the nation. Within Cardiganshire for example some 61.8% of the population were communicants whereas the figure within Flintshire was 27.7%.[65] Interestingly it does not seem that the variation in communicant figure translated in any way into a variation in political support, for during the 1906 election every seat bar one in Wales was won by the Liberal Party. Criticism for the report and workings of the Royal Commission was substantial for, as an article in the *Manchester Guardian* in December 1910 stated: 'its inquiry has touched no fresh ground, opened out no new field of research and produced no new crop of results.'[66] There were many commentators who felt that the work of the Commission had only been to deepen the divisions between denominations, fuelling the hostility and political tension which already existed and further weakening the possibility of reconciliation as so little of the information published and reported upon offered a new perspective regarding the religious settlement within Wales. This is testified

[64] J. Owen, *The Church in Wales Royal Commission: An Address* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.2.
[65] R. Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation, Wales 1890-1914* (Cardiff, 2004), p. 11.
[66] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection-Box 7, Bundle 5.

by the fact that by the early part of the twentieth century the population of Wales was roughly two million, the number of communicants of the Church in Wales were therefore only 10% of the population, with nonconformists only being able to claim some 25%. The Welsh Church was the largest single religious body within Wales. This situation had remained the same throughout the nineteenth century.

One of the central points which the advocates of disestablishment drew upon was a comparison with the situation in Ireland, where the Anglican Church failed to represent a majority of the population. Many would argue that it was the success in disestablishing the Irish Church in 1869 which encouraged Liberationists to turn to Wales as the next weak link in the Anglican structure, this is testified by the fact that the first bill presented by Watkin Williams on the matter in the House of Commons occurred in the following year. Although the provisions to disendow the Irish Church were far less harsh than those which were seeking to be applied to the Welsh Church. Gladstone himself had been a strong advocate of the Irish disestablishment measure:

> An Establishment that neither does nor has the hope of doing, work, except for a few, and those few the portion of the community whose claim to public aid if smallest of all; an Establishment severed from the mass of the people by an impassable gulf and by a wall of brass; an Establishment whose good offices, could she offer them, would be intercepted by a long unbroken chain of painful and shameful recollections an Establishment leaning for support upon the extraneous aid of a State which becomes discredited with the people by the very act of lending it-such an Establishment will do well for its own sake, and for the sake of its creed, to divest itself, as soon as may be, of gauds and trappings, and to commence a new career, in which renouncing at once the credit and the discredit of the civil sanction, it shall seek its strength from within, and put a fearless trust in the message it bears.[67]

Many of the principles which he and his fellow Liberals outlined at that time were felt to be applicable to the Welsh Church. This, however, was hotly disputed. Owen and his supporters maintained that were compelling differences in the respective situations of the Christian life within those nations. There were only two major denominations within Ireland:

[67] W.E. Gladstone, *A Chapter of Autobiography* (London, 1868), p.63.

Anglican and Roman Catholic. The differences between them were therefore of considerable theological and doctrinal importance, whereas within Wales the differences were far more to do with social identity and religious expression. Owen also sought to emphasise that the Irish situation was dramatically different as it was legislation which had caused the establishment of the Church, and it was legislation which could thereby alter that situation, a situation utterly different to that of the Welsh religious landscape:

> What Parliament did in that Act was to repeal a provision of another Act of Parliament passed in 1800. What the Government asks Parliament to do in its Welsh Disestablishment Bill is not repeal a union created by statute 69 years before, but to tear up by the roots the historical Church unity of centuries, which neither was created nor has ever been touched by any Act of Parliament.[68]

Within many Welsh communities, nonconformists continued to be involved in the life of their local Anglican Church through attendance at festivals, pastoral offices being held within their confines and even attending services where a noted preacher was present.[69] Within Ireland however such involvement did not exist as Roman Catholics comprised over 90% of the population, they were the majority denomination, and as Edwards argued in a letter to *The Times* in May 1908:

> let me observe that in Ireland the majority of the people belonged to one Church, whereas the Nonconformist denomination in Wales whom the Prime Minister regards as one body are by no means one in doctrine or organization.[70]

There was no majority denomination within Wales, as Williams commented:

> The Church in Wales, on the other hand, is confronted by a number of denominations, often in disagreement with each other, having little or no unity save that of antipathy, whose respective doctrines are at least indefinite,[71]

[68] J. Owen, *The Present Position of the Church in Wales* (Carmarthen, 1911), p. 6.
[69] H.T. Edwards, *Wales and the Welsh Church* (London, 1889), p.183.
[70] A.G. Edwards, *The Times*, 2 May 1908, p.13.
[71] R. Williams, *The Attack on the Church in Wales* (London, 1912), p.79.

In Wales, the four main nonconformist denominations were: the Baptists, the Wesleyan Methodists, the Calvinistic Methodists and the Congregationalists. These between them, alongside a small number of Roman Catholics, made up the total of non-Anglican communicants. Owen persisted throughout the campaign that Wales was not a 'Nation of Nonconformists',[72] and that Anglicans were still the largest denomination by nearly 20,000 members, in a similar way to which the established Church of Scotland did not boast an absolute majority of the population. Owen disputed the notion that it was nonconformity vs. Anglicanism, as the ecclesiological and doctrinal differences amongst the nonconformists were as great as those between the nonconformists and Anglicans. Nonconformists were not united; they did not profess one clear statement of faith as the Anglican Church did, and as has been shown, Owen was supported in this argument by Edwards. There was no historical precedence, in Owen's view, of disestablishing a Church which was the largest denomination within the nation. The case of the Welsh Church could not be compared with the Irish situation of 1869. Interestingly, although the Anglican Church was the largest denomination in Wales, there were even Anglicans, such as Canon Henry Scott Holland of St Paul's Cathedral, who maintained that it was necessary to bow to the will of the majority rather than seek to cling on to a noble ideal.[73] Holland was not wholly supported in this view point, indeed the MP for Bradford East, Byron Reed, stated in the House of Commons that there was no reason to single out one particular location in which the Church should be disestablished while it remained in its original position elsewhere within the same nation:

> If the mere question of numbers is to be considered conclusive on such a subject, are we simply to balance the number of Churchmen in Wales against the number of Dissenters there, or ought we not rather to treat England and Wales as one undivided whole? Or why should we not employ the same rule in smaller communities still, and determine upon the same principle of whether in each town or village the Church shall, or shall not, be forthwith disestablished and disendowed?[74]

[72] J. Owen, *The Church in Wales Royal Commission: An Address* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.1.
[73] 'Canon Scott Holland on Welsh Disestablishment', *Spectator*, LXX, 1893, p.697
[74] *Hansard*, Fourth series, cccxxxvi, p.88.

But despite this, Owen's opponents continued to argue that to follow the Irish precedent would undoubtedly be beneficial to the life of the Welsh Church. Supporters of the measure in Ireland such as William Edwards, principal of the Baptist College in Cardiff, maintained:

> Fearful prophecies as to its ruin, in consequence (of disestablishment) were uttered; but they have all been falsified. In fact, the Episcopal Church in Ireland has been far more prosperous, and has accomplished more good than when in union with the state.[75]

This viewpoint was strongly disputed by Edwards who stated:

> With regard to Ireland there can be no doubt about the results. Since 1869 the Church in Ireland has numerically decreased. Disendowment has had the effect of seriously crippling the work of the Church in rural districts, of mischievously lessening the independence of the clergy, of lowering their social status and educational attainments and of narrowing the sympathies and energies of the clergy of the Church of Ireland to one school of thought. I have already pointed out that as far as rural districts are concerned the results in Wales would be far worse than they were in Ireland.[76]

Owen also sought to highlight, within the debate surrounding a comparative situation with Ireland, that the third clause of the Irish Home Rule Bill expressly prohibited a majority in an Irish Parliament from altering the constitution of any religious body without the consent of its members and from diverting its property from it without some form of proper compensation. He went further to state that 'no political Welsh nationalist had tried to show how what would be wrong in Ireland under Home Rule could be right in Wales without Home Rule.'[77] What Owen was seeking to exemplify in the context of this argument was that the comparative with the Irish situation was only being used by nonconformists and liberals when it proved beneficial to their argument, and that the lack of a comprehensive reflection on the nature of the situation failed to recognise the true reality of the situation.

---

[75] W. Edwards, *Four Centuries of Nonconformist Disabilities* (London, 1912), p.126.
[76] A.G. Edwards, *A Handbook on Welsh Church Defence* (London, 1895), p.50.
[77] J. Owen, *Welsh Nationality and the Welsh Church Bill* (Carmarthen, 1914), p.5.

Owen's ability to expose the flaws of his opponents' arguments was something which Edwards often remarked upon: 'He seemed to know intuitively the workings of the Welsh Nonconformist conscience and the exact angle at which it could be pricked by the arrows of truth and religion.'[78] Having been brought up within nonconformity, Owen was acutely aware of the difference between the denominations, and indeed between nonconformity and the established Church. However, this tension brought about a tremendous amount of unease within Owen during his ministry. Robbins remarks:

> that change of allegiance was not made without a struggle and he afterwards declared that he would not himself dare to proselytise since he had no wish to cause anyone else to suffer what he did.[79]

Paradoxically Owen was caught in a moral dilemma. Owen, the son of a Calvinistic Methodist deacon, who through his engagement with academia and the Anglican Church had converted and attained to the ordained ministry, indeed the episcopal ministry of the Church, was not prepared to seek out others to follow his example. The pain of transferring allegiance, of severing ties not only religious but undoubtedly political and social, must have been a continuing source of anxiety to Owen and this must, to some degree, have affected his dealings, with those, with whom he was once in full communion. The knowledge which Owen had through his background, as Edwards denoted, was of huge advantage to the cause of Church defence, but it came with a self-inflicted wound which left him in a more unyielding position than that of the Anglicised Bishop of St Asaph. His position was much more to be seen, during the debates surrounding disestablishment, as defender rather than as converter to the cause, and it would be interesting to reflect whether this lack of passion to see further converts, undoubtedly weakened his position not only in the eyes of his opponents, but also in the eyes of those who sought leadership from him, and the further expansion of the Anglican Church, to which they and he owed allegiance.

ii - The Alien Church Argument

[78] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p. 239.
[79] K. Robbins, 'Episcopacy in Wales', *Journal of Welsh Religious History* 4 (1996) p.76.

> The Anglican Church's chief difficulty lay in its cultural alienation from the population. A large majority of the religious population had created for themselves a way of life, social, political and, to some extent, economic, at the centre of which stood the chapels.[80]

The Church was challenged by its opponents on the basis that not only did it fail to represent a majority of the population of Wales, but also that it failed to represent the national identity of the country it was supposed to serve. The grievance with the established Church within Wales was not viewed primarily as a religious one but rather was a founding principle of the nationalist movement. The notion that the established Church was an alien Church, stemmed from this gulf between the Church's own understanding and relationship with the people of Wales and the emerging sense of Welsh nationhood. This concept had been reinforced within the Diocese of St Davids by Owen's predecessor, Bishop Basil Jones, who described Wales in his episcopal charge of 1886 as nothing more than a geographical expression.[81] An incredibly inflammatory remark to make at a time of increasing cultural renewal, it emphasised that the Welsh Church was, as E.T. Davies argues 'out of sympathy with, if not antagonistic to Welsh life.'[82] Jones was not alone in his disregard for Wales and its people, there were others such as the incumbents of Builth, Llandeilo and the curate of St Mary's Brecon who made derogatory remarks about the Welsh people.[83] However it is important to recognise that this sense of alienation had occurred long before the end of the nineteenth century, indeed most of this feeling of alienism towards the Anglican Church stemmed from the hostility of the government to appoint Welsh bishops to Welsh bishoprics, which ran from the 1830s until the appointment of Hughes to the see of St Asaph in 1870. Cragoe argues that the policy of appointing men who were 'alien' in race had been catastrophic:

> It was not simply that English-speaking bishops found communication difficult, and could not, for example, maximize the spiritual and psychological potential of the confirmation service by delivering it in the native tongue; it was, rather, that

[80] M. Cragoe, 'A Question of Culture, Welsh Church and St Asaph', *Welsh History Review* 18/3 (1996), p.230.
[81] K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation, 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981), p.3.
[82] E.T. Davies, *Disestablishment and Disendowment* (Penarth, 1970), p.2.
[83] M. Cragoe, 'A Question of Culture, Welsh Church and St Asaph', *Welsh History Review* 18/3 (1996), p.233.

> their occupancy of the episcopal palaces of Wales symbolized the divorce of the Church in Wales from the people to whom it was intended to minister.[84]

The Ven William Sinclair, Archdeacon of London between 1889 and 1911, commented that the damage inflicted upon the Welsh Church was deliberate:

> A cruel thing was also done by the Liberal Party to the Welsh Church in the period between the Stuarts and the present generation. It was the deliberate policy of the Hanoverians to discourage the loyalty of the Welsh by sending Whig Bishops to Welsh Sees who knew no Welsh.[85]

In the context of Welsh episcopal appointments, combined with the views of leading figures such as Basil Jones, it is clear how some could have viewed the Church as holding a disdainful attitude towards Wales and its people. The Church was also at fault because there were many English clerics who took livings in Wales yet resided in England and so parochial life was poor, and services rarely occurred. The Church was therefore viewed by many as being 'alien'; she was accused of failing to connect with the people, through the culture and language of the nation. Throughout the nineteenth century, chapels increasingly became the cultural centres of their rural and industrial communities. Within these nonconformist denominations emerged a common folk culture, *'diwylliant y werin'* ('the culture of the ordinary people') which represented the striving of the working classes for a more prosperous life, based on a distinctive Welsh identity, which was not considered to be prevalent in the life of the established Church.[86] This was one of the major arguments promoted by the Welsh Liberals during the latter half of the nineteenth century, and a concept which lingered throughout much of the early part of the following century as well: 'The chapels nurtured a feeling of Welshness, and Nonconformity almost became synonymous with Welshness.'[87] The chapels were popular foci for social and cultural activity, particularly expressed through the use of the Welsh language. Opposition to this notion however did not merely stem from Owen and his Welsh counterparts, Bishop Stubbs,

---

[84] M. Cragoe, 'A Question of Culture, Welsh Church and St Asaph', *Welsh History Review* 18/3 (1996), p.232.
[85] S.H. Gem (ed.) *The Proposed Robbery of the Churchpeople of Wales* (Oxford, 1912), p.13.
[86] D. G. Evans, *A History of Wales 1906-2000* (Cardiff, 2000) p.220.
[87] D. G. Evans, *A History of Wales 1906-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p.314.

who served as Bishop of Oxford between 1889 and 1901, in response to Asquith's bill of 1894 stated: 'The Church which we are now defending is not an alien Church. It is not alien in origin, nor alien in history, nor alien in sympathy or in spirit.'[88] The proponents of disestablishment, as so clearly outlined by Bishop Stubbs dealt with the notion of an alien Church on two levels: historical and cultural.

Historically the proponents of disestablishment contended that the modern Anglican Church within Wales did not have clear lineal descent from the ancient Celtic Church of St David. Many argued that the Church was a product of the English establishment, forced upon the nation at some point in the historic past:

> From the earliest times until the present it has been regarded in the Principality as an alien Church. It has never taken root in Wales proper. By the large majority of the people it is looked upon as an exotic and a foreign weed rather than a flower. It was introduced at the point of the sword. There was a British Church, which had been founded early in this country, and its prospered greatly. But there was really no connection between this Church and the English Church….[89]

Although many leading nineteenth century Liberal proponents sought to emphasise the difference between the Celtic Church and its modern-day equivalent, the two were clearly connected, although that is not to acknowledge that the Church had undergone several reforms and structural changes during the period. However, no clear act of breakage could ever be proven, the continuity of the Church certainly remained intact, as Owen remarked:

> no theory of Welsh Nationality could be true which despised as alien the Church which was the only institution existing in Wales which covered all the centuries of Welsh history. The Church was in Wales before Iberians, Goidels and Brythons were welded gradually into Welsh people mainly through the Church's influence and it would be here, when all the present shibboleths of the party politics of today had passed into oblivion.[90]

---

[88] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p.168.
[89] W. Edwards, *A Plea for the Disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales* (Pontypool, 1892), p.10.
[90] J. Owen, *Welsh Nationality and the Welsh Church Bill* (Carmarthen, 1914), p.7.

Many proponents of disestablishment maintained that within the modern era the Church had become an alien institution. Some looked towards the period of the Civil War and then the Act of Uniformity as the time when the established Church failed to meet the needs of the people of Wales and that religious dissent was truly born. The establishment of various nonconformist denominations during the eighteenth century was proof that the institution had become alien by this period. The counter argument to this proved to be difficult. Throughout the nineteenth century, religious freedom had been granted to all, and although many chose not to avail themselves of the provision provided by the Anglican Church, it seemed intolerant to demand not only disestablishment but also disendowment in response to this. Of course, it was this notion of the distance between the Church and the society which it was called to serve during the seventeenth century, which provided the argument for the removal of all endowments prior to 1662.

Fundamental to the disestablishment viewpoint was the concept that the Celtic Church, the Church of the Saints, was based upon a tribal society rather than a diocesan or parochial system and that such a system was imposed by the English during the Norman Conquest. For it was in 1108 that the first Noman Bishop was appointed to the see of Llandaff, with St Davids following in 1115, Bangor in 1120 and St Asaph in 1143. Other positions of influence and power within the Church also fell into the hands of Norman conquerors. The Baptist, William Edwards went as far as to argue that the amalgamation of the English Church with that of the Welsh Church was against the wishes and the best interest of Wales.[91] Anglicans however, maintained that such opposition was due to political opinions, and the refusal of Welsh tribal chiefs to engage with their Anglo-Saxon counterparts rather than any deep rooted religious reason. Owen maintained that the modern Welsh Church was not an English creation but rather the manifestation of two churches which had, over a period of centuries, merged together in a natural manner. Owen, who fought vigorously to maintain the catholicity of the Church within Wales, argued that that throughout the Middle Ages it would have been inconceivable to have maintained an independent church outside of the bounds of the Papacy. However, for those in favour of disestablishment, the Reformation, pointed to a definitive break in the continuity of the

[91] W. Edwards, *Four Centuries of Nonconformist Disabilities 1500-1912* (London, 1915), p.6.

Welsh Church. English ecclesiastical laws were imposed and historic endowments were re-assigned. Critics of the established Church would often ask the question: 'Where was the Church of England before reformers and the Reformation?'

For those proponents of disestablishment who were prepared to accept the continuity of the Church, their sense of alienation was linked to the presence of a predominantly nonconformist population within Wales. The Church had become increasingly alien throughout the eighteenth century and so many of the population left to worship in the chapels. It is interesting to note, that as the Church grew stronger during the later nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the notion of alienation became less prevalent. Whereas in the 1895 debate the notion of an alien church was often referred to, very little reference was made to this during the debates of the 1910s.

Owen argued that disestablishment would not further Welsh identity, but rather would contribute to disunity within Wales, and this would result in the weakening of the nation, as such disunity had done in the past.[92] Further to this, he stated that to describe English people as aliens, did nothing but encourage tribal behaviour and insult the intelligence of the people.[93] By arguing thus, Owen was seeking to display that the disestablishment campaign merely fuelled cultural and social animosity within a rapidly changing Wales. Owen acknowledged the pace of change when he remarked:

> It is difficult to express adequately the magnitude of the changes in Welsh life and thought which have taken place during the last thirty years, and which are likely to go on, probably at an accelerated pace, for many years to come.[94]

There is relatively little evidence to indicate that Owen was supported in the view that disestablishment would result in the fragmentation of the nation, indeed in an article in the *South Wales Daily News* in 1908, disestablishment was viewed as being a means of uniting the people of Wales.[95] Owen's warnings were not taken seriously, otherwise greater focus would have been placed upon the effects disestablishment would have on Welsh

[92] J. Owen, *Welsh Nationality and the Welsh Church Bill* (Carmarthen, 1914), p. 6.
[93] J. Owen, *Welsh Nationality and the Welsh Church Bill* (Carmarthen, 1914), p.5.
[94] J. Owen, *The Call of the Church to Service and the Unity of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1909), p.10.
[95] 'Welsh Disestablishment & the Royal Commission', *South Wales Daily News*, 6 March 1908, p.3.

nationhood and questions of nationality by contemporary commentators. Owen's position was also weakened by the words and actions of the Liberal-Unionists. Although they were in favour of disestablishment, ultimately, they fought against it for they believed it would lead to the breakup of the United Kingdom. Led by Joseph Chamberlain they believed that it was not possible to allow disestablishment without at least some element of Home Rule. To vote for one was in effect to support the other. Succumbing to the demands of Welsh nationalists could lead to the dissolution of the union:

> For what is the contention on which the whole case for Welsh disestablishment rests? Is it not that Wales is a separate country from England, and the Welsh a separate people from the English? The language of the Welsh advocates of disestablishment always points in this direction. Their refusal to acknowledge that the Church in Wales is an inseparable part of the Church of England is merely a part of their refusal to acknowledge that the Principality of Wales is an inseparable part of the Kingdom of England … Today what they want is a distinct ecclesiastical system; tomorrow it will be a distinct land law; the day after it will be a distinct legislature.[96]

The difficulty for Owen was that even those from whom he derived support when seeking to oppose disestablishment, were not helping him whilst they sought to undermine concepts of nationhood and identity at the same time. Such behaviour only served to re-enforce the notion that the Church and its supporters were unable to connect effectively with the current political and social attitudes of the time.

Owen resorted to emphasising that it was the Church which embodied Wales; this institution alone had true Celtic roots. The Church, he maintained, was the natural successor to the Church of St David,[97] and it was not imposed upon the people by violence or compulsion. For as he remarked in 1914:

> It was the continuity of the Nation and of the Church which made 'National' a just title to be applied to the Church which had brought the Gospel into Wales and had given the Welsh people their Welsh Bible. No Act of Parliament could annul history or prevent the Church in Wales, as an integral part of the Catholic

[96] 'Some Side Aspects of Disestablishment', *National Review*, XXIII, (1894), p.131.
[97] J. Owen, *Mesur Dadgysylltiad i Gymru, beth ydyw* (Carmarthen, 1912), pp. 3-4.

> Church of Christ, from humbly continuing to endeavour to fulfil its Divine mission to the Welsh nation.[98]

Owen was often candid that the Church had not always been culturally, socially or linguistically connected with the people of Wales, and that the imposition of English bishops had worsened the situation. The behaviour of Bishop Luxmoore, appointed to the see of St Asaph in 1815, was a shining example of the appalling episcopal leadership exercised during this time. Entitled the 'King of Nepotists,' under his administration several incumbents were absentee pluralists, and the Bishop, his two sons and two nephews received a total of £25,225 per annum whilst the entire working clergy of his diocese were paid only £18,000.[99] As H.J. Clayton noted,[100] certain English bishops such as Thomas Burgess, did contribute to the development of the nation. Burgess had founded St David's College, Lampeter, which was Wales's first higher education institution. He had also licensed Anglican grammar schools at Carmarthen, Lampeter, Brecon, and Ystradmeurig. He also founded libraries, established National and Sunday schools and gave grants for the training of clergy. Despite being an Englishman, he even learned Welsh and administered confirmation in the Welsh language when requested.[101] Welsh Episcopal appointments had improved dramatically during the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the following century. Roger Brown argues convincingly that the government and the crown were no longer ignoring the needs of the people, and that the importance of the Welsh language in national life was not being disregarded.[102] Dean Henry Edwards, brother to A.G. Edwards, stated that unless the Church was served by native bishops and native clergy it would never prove to be effective or valid in the eyes of the people.[103] He maintained that the common people had turned their back on the Church because the Anglicized clergy insulted them and their culture.[104] Undoubtedly the tide turned in 1870 with the appointment of Joshua Hughes, a Welsh-speaking Welshman, to the see of St Asaph. As Cragoe argues:

---

[98] J. Owen, *Welsh Nationality and the Welsh Church Bill, Mr Asquith's Tactics and Pledges* (Carmarthen, 1914), p.5.
[99] H.W. Clarke, *A History of the Church in Wales* (London, 1896), pp.143-4.
[100] H.J. Clayton, *The Indictment and Defence of the Church in Wales* (London, 1911), p. 5.
[101] J.W. James, *A Church History of Wales* (Ilfracombe, 1945), pp.171-2.
[102] R. L. Brown, *In Pursuit of a Welsh Episcopate* (Cardiff, 2005), p. 245.
[103] R. Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation, Wales 1890-1914* (Cardiff, 2004), p.28.
[104] R. Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation, Wales 1890-1914* (Cardiff, 2004), p.374.

> an essentially British, upper-class view of the Church to one more explicitly Welsh and middle-class' which in turn 'may explain why the Church was able to revive so dramatically at the same times as Conservatism ceased to be an electoral force in the principality.[105]

Furthermore, it is remarkable therefore that by 1905 all four of the Welsh sees were occupied by fluent Welsh-speaking Welshman. For as G.K.A. Bell remarked: 'all four Bishops were Welsh patriots, and two at least very eloquent patriots, with a gift of fervid oratory, namely St Asaph and St Davids.'[106] The symbolic importance of Welsh fluency amongst the bishops of Wales cannot be underestimated as K. O. Morgan contends:

> Not until the dawn of a new century, through the lead of such patriotic Churchmen as Bishop John Owen of St. David's, a Welsh speaking native of Llŷn in Caernarvonshire, was it argued more effectively that historically and, increasingly, in contemporary terms, the Church was just as Welsh in spirit and outlook as were the non-conformist chapels, themselves seventeenth century imports from England.[107]

This stands in significant contrast to the situation in the majority of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when between 1714 and 1870 no Welsh-speaking Bishop was appointed to a Welsh see, and many of the sees were held in plurality with English benefices and appointments. Within Wales however issues of language, ecclesiology and nationality were inevitably linked together.

Language was the key foundation for this new concept of Welsh nationality. As Edwards states:

> so distinctive is the speech which men have fashioned for themselves, that where a language is the only language used within a definite area, it gives to those who speak it an individuality and a separateness which is one of the factors of nationality.[108]

---

[105] M. Cragoe, A Question of Culture, Welsh Church and St Asaph', *Welsh History Review* 18/3 (1996), p.253.
[106] G.K.A. Bell, *Randall Davidson* (Oxford, 1952), p. 640.
[107] K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation, 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981), p. 41.
[108] A.G. Edwards, *Landmarks in the History of the Welsh Church* (London, 1912), p.228.

In 1866 the Welsh language had been described by *The Times* as being the curse of Wales, but the cultural and linguistic renaissance experienced during the latter part of the nineteenth century clearly challenged that viewpoint. At a time when then the University of Wales was founded, a Chair in Celtic Studies at Oxford University was created and new towns were emerging, populated by a new bourgeoisie who embodied the Welsh National Movement,[109] clearly the Church had not recognised the shift in society. Owen however resented the statement that the Church was alien in linguistic terms by the time of his episcopacy. Scholars dispute the quality of the Church during the eighteenth century however there were certainly some English bishops and English clergymen who showed little regard for the cultural and linguistic heritage of the nation. Many anglicized landlords also sought to push through linguistic reforms within their parish churches, thereby seeking to make their workforce conform to their new wishes. The mass of the population turned away from the established Church because its services were conducted in the language of the upper-class minority. It was the Methodist revivalists who grasped the use of the Welsh language as a tool for evangelization, and which rendered nonconformity as the residuary of the Welsh linguistic and to a certain extent, cultural tradition.

Seeking to counter this argument Owen and his supporters were insistent upon pressing the fact that it was the Church's ministry which enabled the flourishing and continuation of the Welsh language following the Reformation era. Owen maintained that the Church could no longer be described as the English Church within Wales; it served the people according to their linguistic needs. The Church was still failing in terms of providing a Welsh-language religious press; however, it was proud of its role in salvaging the language: 'The supreme debt which Welsh nationality owes to the Church in Wales is that of the elevation of its language from a dying patois into a classical and literary speech.'[110] The Church sought to provide a national basis for the re-invigoration of the language. Owen argued persistently that without the translation of the Bible into Welsh by William Morgan, a bishop of the Welsh Church, the language would have died. This viewpoint is supported by David Williams who stated:

[109] K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation, 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981), p.7.
[110] A.G. Edwards, *Landmarks in the History of the Welsh Church* (London, 1912), p. 234.

> The Welsh clergy, subject to the control of Canterbury and closely associated with their English counterparts, were a medium through which English influences came into Wales. But this anglicizing element was more than counteracted by the deep influence of the translation into Welsh of the Bible and of the Book of Common Prayer. Together they form the greatest contribution of the Reformation to Wales. The translation was grounded in the best Welsh literary tradition, so that in the Church services the Welsh people became accustomed to hearing good Welsh continually, and this familiarity with the Bible prevented the Welsh language from degenerating into a number of dialects and gradually disappearing.[111]

The Church was therefore seen by Owen and indeed other scholars of the twentieth century as the vehicle by which the Welsh language was preserved within the use of its people.

Owen pressed upon his audiences the importance of recognising that the Church would never fulfil everyone's linguistic demands, but that its Welsh language provision had improved dramatically. By the latter part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth the Church was increasingly offering further Welsh language provision. As early as 1835 an act had ordered that all clergy officiating in Welsh-speaking parishes should at least possess an adequate knowledge of the native language. In 1911 the number of Welsh Sunday services constituted 29.4% of the total, whilst the number of people who were monoglot Welsh was only 15.1% of the population.[112] Interestingly however the number of Welsh speakers within the population was diminishing. In 1901 49.9% were fluent Welsh speakers, a figure which had decreased to 43.5% by 1911.[113] Within a broader context it is important to consider that in 1871 it was estimated that 1,006,100 of the 1,426,514 population of Wales spoke Welsh, but by 1901 this figure had reduced to 929,824 of the 1,858,046 population. This represents a decline of over 20% during this period,[114] a result of the fact that during the first decade of the twentieth century over 100,000 immigrants crossed the border into the Welsh valleys which dramatically changed the nature and use of

[111] D. Williams, *A History of Modern Wales* (London, 1977), p.78.
[112] H.J. Clayton, *The Indictment and Defence of the Church in Wales* (London, 1911), p. 15.
[113] R. Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation, Wales 1890-1914* (Cardiff, 2004), p.13.
[114] *General Census of England and Wales*, 1901, p.166

the language. As Owen commented in 1909: 'There is no natural boundary between Wales and England, but formerly the Welsh language used to form a practical boundary.'[115]

The linguistic demands of the people were changing due to the fast expansion of urban areas and the continuing developments in the industrial economy. The weakening of the use of the Welsh language within industrial areas diminished the influence of chapels upon the lives of those communities, and it is remarkable that between 1900 and 1901 three of the four main denominations reported a decrease in numbers. Within this context it is important to recognise that the volume of the population who would have felt alienated by the Church's lack of Welsh language provision was diminishing at a considerable rate, and the Church had to adapt to meet its evangelistic needs: 'it is the business of the evangelist to use the language which is best calculated to influence the people and to save souls.'[116] Such a need to change evangelistic strategies was argued for by Edwards, who maintained as early as 1885 that the nonconformist Churches could find themselves in a similar situation to that of the established Church:

> At the beginning of this century the Church by her neglect of the Welsh language, lost the Welsh people, and now the spread of English seems to have a similar fate in store for Welsh nonconformity, and threatens to leave its ministers like infants 'crying in the night.[117]

This a view supported by Evans in his work who states:

> The provision of competent clergy was, therefore, related to the question of language. The Established Church had to find clergy to serve the Welsh population of the new parishes; whereas the Nonconformists had the reverse problem of having to make provision for an Anglicized population.[118]

However, Edwards was not immune from criticism:

---

[115] J. Owen, *The Call of the Church to Service and the Unity of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1909), p.11.
[116] R. Williams, *The Attack on the Church in Wales* (London, 1912), p.37.
[117] A.G. Edwards, *Facts and Figures about Church and Dissent in Wales* (Carmarthen, 1888), p.13.
[118] D. G. Evans, *A History of Wales 1906-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 234.

> On the other hand there was criticism of Bishop A.G. Edwards for his lack of sympathy for the Welsh language and culture; particularly since he breached the terms of the deeds of Llandovery College when he was warden there, attempting to drive the Welsh language out.[119]

Edwards himself contributed to the negative view of the importance of the Welsh language when he indicated in his response to the Royal Welsh Commission that:

> there is no concealing the fact that the young people in Wales, in our towns generally and increasingly in all our parishes, read and think in English and therefore prefer attending English services.[120]

It is important to recognise that the contribution of the Church to the wellbeing of the Welsh language could not wholly be disentangled from the attitudes and actions of its episcopal leadership. The stark contrast between Owen and Edwards in this regard could not be more apparent. Undoubtedly it was Owen's rural, Welsh upbringing which enabled him to relate much more easily to the concerns and views of those who feared the demise of the Welsh language within public life.

The difficulty was that throughout the 1900s the debate regarding disestablishment was linked with the issue of Welsh nationality: 'the issue had become merged in a far wider crusade for national recognition for Wales as a separate entity.'[121] The concept of Welsh identity was furthered by the revival of ancient traditions and customs, such as the National Eisteddfod in its modern guise which was begun in 1880,[122] which was symbolic of a cultural re-awakening. The concept had been embraced particularly by the chapels during the 1840s and the institution of a national celebration enabled the Eisteddfod to become a forum for intense public debate on a whole variety of issues.[123] Most Welsh historians would also recognise that the Commissioners Report on Education of 1847, which caused a huge

[119] R. Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation, Wales 1890-1914* (Cardiff, 2004), p. 30.
[120] H.J. Clayton, *The Indictment and Defence of the Church in Wales* (London, 1911), p.15.
[121] K. O. Morgan, *Freedom or Sacrilege, A History of the Campaign for Welsh Disestablishment* (Penarth, 1966), p. 33.
[122] Beth yw'r Eisteddfod? http://www.eisteddfod.org.uk/index.php?lang=CY;navId=0 (28 February, 2010).
[123] D. G. Evans, *A History of Wales 1906-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 227.

amount of resentment, particularly amongst the Welsh-speaking nonconformist sections of society, contributed to a deepening desire for national identity and Cragoe argues that:

> those who rushed to defend the Welsh from the Commissioners' accusations created, in effect, an 'ideal Welshman' free from all moral failings- a prototype who became the embodiment of the Welsh 'national character.'[124]

The concepts of nationhood had been developing over a considerable period of time, but supporters of the established Church did seek to identify the fact that the Welsh Church had played a role in developing this sense of nationhood:

> The oldest and most distinguished patriotic institutions Welshmen can boast of are the Society of Ancient Britons, established in 1715; The Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, 1751; the Eisteddfod, 1819; and the Cambrian Archaeological Association, 1845; and it was by the efforts of Welsh Churchmen all four were started, and at a time when the Church in Wales is said to have been at its lowest ebb.[125]

Throughout the nineteenth century Wales gradually became much more distinctive in its culture and social identity, but it also received preferential political treatment. Gladstone, who lived in Hawarden, believed that he understood the needs of Wales, and was willing to legislate for a distinctive Welsh agenda. During the latter part of the 1880s the Welsh Liberal MPs discussed the need to establish a Welsh Grand Committee in order to facilitate specifically Welsh legislation through Parliament.[126] Although such action was felt to be unnecessary at the time, the notion of treating Welsh legislative matters differently from their English counterparts had been accepted through the provision of the Welsh Sunday Closing Act of 1881, and the Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889. Gladstone supported the latter motion, which was presented by Stuart Rendel, the member for Montgomery, and commented on the Sunday Closure Bill by stating: 'Where there is a distinctly formed Welsh opinion upon a given subject which affects Wales alone …, I know of

---

[124] M. Cragoe, 'A Question of Culture, Welsh Church and St Asaph', *Welsh History Review* 18/3 (1996), p.239
[125] V. Cambrensis, *The Rise and Decline of Welsh Nonconformity* (London, 1912), p.81.
[126] G.V. Nelmes, 'Stuart Rendel and Welsh Liberal Political Organisations in the late Nineteenth Century', *Welsh History Review* 9 (1979), p. 477.

no reason why a respectful regard should not be paid to that opinion.'[127] Gladstone and his legislative partners were realistic about the need to identify specifically 'Welsh' matters and to make the necessary political provision for them. These decisions however were not taken solely for principled reasons, but were also cognizant of the political pressures which were keenly felt by Gladstone throughout his various premierships. Nevertheless, as K. O. Morgan has argued:

> Throughout this period, when political nationalism reached its fullest flood, Gladstone did infinitely more than any other major political figure, by precept and by action, to advance the various Welsh causes, and to bring to them a greater measure of understanding from English opinion. He placed the seal of his sanction upon Welsh nationality.[128]

Consequently, the disestablishment of the Church was considered by the radicals and nonconformists a means of furthering a sense of nationhood. As Herbert Asquith stated in March 1895: 'We assert that the Welsh people are a nation, whether you look at the test of race, religion, literature, temperament, and genius, or national memories and traditions.'[129] Owen rejected the argument that it was politics that was awakening a sense of nationhood. In an article written in 1912 Owen argued that Welsh nationalism stemmed from literary rather than political developments.[130] He held that Welsh nationalism grew from an increasing sense of solidarity amongst the people of Wales, that many of them had common interests and that there was a determination to promote and develop these interests for the betterment of the nation. In his speech in Aberdare in 1914 he stated:

> The political theory of Welsh nationality put forward by Welsh disestablishers was not only absurd for the aggressive purpose for which it was framed, but was also in itself a mischievous theory, because it degraded the fine poetry of Welsh patriotism into the bad prose of party politics.[131]

---

[127] K.O. Morgan, 'Gladstone and Wales', *Welsh History Review* 1/1 (1960), p. 70.
[128] K.O. Morgan, 'Gladstone and Wales', *Welsh History Review* 1/1 (1960), p. 66.
[129] R. Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation, Wales 1890-1914* (Cardiff, 2004), p. 378.
[130] J. Owen, 'Welsh Nationalism', *Wales* 2/6 (1912), p.343
[131] J. Owen, *Welsh Nationality and the Welsh Church Bill* (Carmarthen, 1914), p.5.

Owen believed that those campaigning for disestablishment were using Welsh nationalism for political benefit, that nationhood should not be ground in political uniformity, but rather, within the Christian context, upon unity of faith and fellowship. It was this division in political uniformity which had led to the existence of four nonconformist denominations within Wales and which did little to further the common sense of identity which should have been grounded in social and cultural factors. Those campaigning for disestablishment were by their very actions creating disunity, and Owen stated that 'the weakness of Wales throughout its history had been its imperfect unity.'[132] Rather than using nationhood as a means of uniting people, nationhood was now being used as a means of dividing communities and separating indigenous people from those who had moved into both rural and industrial areas. Although Owen recognised that nationalism had the potential to be divided across political and religious lines, he clearly held out hope for a more promising future:

> There are real and deep differences of opinion on politics and religion among Welshmen. But there is also a large area of common ground on which we are all partially agreed. I am not without hope that the present revival of Welsh sentiment marks the dawn of a new era in the history of Wales.[133]

Owen clearly viewed the revival of a sense of nationhood and common identity as something to be welcomed for the future development of the people of Wales. His hope, perhaps founded in his Christian faith, was that the freedom of discussion and the difference of opinion which ensued, enabled a greater recognition of the common humanity of the people of Wales and resulted in a broader outlook for the nation: 'I contend that Welsh Nationalism, as every intelligent Welshman understand it, does not at all tend to isolation or to narrowness.'[134] Further to that he maintained that:

> Everybody who lived in Wales or was connected with Wales, whatever be his language, his race, or his opinions, if he put the welfare of Wales as a whole before his own self-interest and did his best, according to his rights, to serve the

[132] J. Owen, *Welsh Nationality and the Welsh Church Bill* (Carmarthen, 1914), p.6.
[133] J. Owen, 'Welsh Nationalism', *Wales* 2/6 (1912), p.343
[134] J. Owen, 'Welsh Nationalism', *Wales*, 2/6 (1912), p.343

> common weal, was a Welsh patriot, or if they preferred a new-fangled term, a Welsh nationalist.[135]

Both these remarks are significant as they portray Owen's own sense of national pride and his determination to emphasise Welsh nationalism as being an identity which all could affirm regardless of religious denomination. Thus the Church and its members could contribute distinctively and beneficially to a developing sense of nationhood and identity. Sadly, the Church was often viewed as dismissive of the importance of a developing sense of nationhood; as Morgan comments upon the Church Defence campaign: 'all too often (it) had the appearance of denying the existence of Welsh nationality at all.'[136] Edwards, perhaps due to his upbringing and aristocratic connections, viewed the debate in a much more British-defined content. He remained firm in his belief that such notions of nationhood and identity were an attack upon the very fabric of British identity, indeed in his essay of 1912 he remarks:

> therefore the Welsh representatives have no more right on the grounds of nationality to rend the Church in Wales from the Church of England than they have to sever the Principality of Wales from the Crown of England.[137]

Clearly Edwards rejected any notion of nationhood as providing a valid political or social basis for the disestablishment of the Church. He confirmed this when he claimed that the campaign to disestablish the Church: 'was a lapse from a national to a racial ideal, from the idea of the community to the demands of an individual.'[138] This reflects his very aristocratic, politically naïve, view of the Welsh political scene by the early part of the twentieth century. He was very dismissive of his opponents, commenting: 'Welsh crowds were moved by the claim of their distinct nationality, and by the assertion of the delinquencies of the Church given without dates or easy verification.'[139] Having already spent nearly twenty-five years in office as a Bishop, he may have failed to recognise the significant cultural and social changes which had occurred during the tenure of his episcopacy. Edwards's own nephew, William Alfred Edwards who served as Rector of Llan-gan commented: 'The bond between the

[135] J. Owen, *Welsh Nationality and the Welsh Church Bill* (Carmarthen, 1914), p.6,
[136] K. O. Morgan, 'Review of *The Later Life of Bishop Owen'*, *Welsh History Review*, 1/3 (1962), p. 349,
[137] A.G. Edwards, *Landmarks in the History of the Welsh Church* (London, 1912), p.259,
[138] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p.331,
[139] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p.167,

Church and Welsh people could only be restored when the Church was truly national and truly Welsh.'[140] So there were those within the Church who recognised that the unwillingness of some within the hierarchy to identify themselves with the increasingly nationalist sentiment of the day militated against the establishment cause. The criticism of Edward's leadership, particularly during the early part of the twentieth century, led to a rebellion amongst his own diocesan clergy. Seventy-five of the total of 206 within his diocese signed a petition objecting to his stance and policies believing that they would be detrimental to the future of the Church. Edwards seemed alienated both from the views of his own clergy, and those of the the wider Church. Perhaps it was his distance from the vocalisation of nationhood which was endangering the Church's position. For Owen, the notion that the Church was an 'alien' institution was very hurtful both professionally and personally. For who could describe the weaver's son from Ysgubor Wen as alien?

Owen also sought to highlight the significance of the loss of the Welsh bishops within the legislature of the United Kingdom: 'while the proposal, which put four English Bishops instead of four Welsh Bishops in the House of Lords, simply reduced Welsh nationality to contempt.' The loss of a distinctive Welsh ecclesiastical voice within Parliament was of considerable importance, for it denied the people of Wales another platform from which their views, in the wake of a re-awakened sense of nationhood, could be presented. The dismissal of the bishops from the House of Lords, was symbolic, in Owen's opinion, of the unwillingness of the government to recognise a distinctive Welsh viewpoint stance, not only in relation to ecclesiastical matters, but to a whole range of measures which affected the lives of the people of Wales.

An interesting argument which Owen also made was that as no nonconformist denomination operated solely in Wales, and that, as with one exception, all nonconformist denominations at work in Wales had the great majority of their members in England or elsewhere, then if 'because of its unity with the Church in England, the Church in Wales is alien, then the Free Church Council and every Nonconformist denomination is likewise alien

[140] R. L. Brown, 'Traitors & Compromisers: The Shadow Side of the Church's Fight against Disestablishment' *Journal of Welsh Religious History* 3 (1995), p.41,

in Wales.'[141] The concept of an 'alien church' could not, in Owen's opinion, be formed by an institution's unity with another body which shared the same beliefs, but which happened to exist within another nation. Nonconformists faced a similar charge of alienism in respect of service to the general population, if such alienism was based solely upon exclusive service to the nation in which the institution exists, with ties to no other body. Clayton supported Owen's argument in this respect when he commented:

> Neither Wesley nor Whitfield was a Welshman, nor was Browne, the founder of the Congregationalists, nor were the originators of the Baptists. The only denomination of native growth is the Calvinist Methodist body, all the rest being aliens imported from England since the Reformation period.[142]

Owen, himself a product of that distinctively Welsh Calvinistic Methodist body, valued the unity of the Church and considered it to be ultimately beneficial to the Anglican Church's ministry within Wales, and that all religious bodies gained by union with a larger body, testimony to his Catholic viewpoint.

Iii - *The Secularisation Argument and the Freedom of the Church*

> The two main principles involved in the Act were the national recognition of religion, and the question of diverting to secular purposes money devoted to religious purposes.[143]

Owen was a pragmatic politician. He realised that securing the support of nonconformists for the Church to maintain a superior status was unrealistic, however campaigning against disestablishment on the basis that it would contribute to the secularization of the nation, displayed his political adroitness. Nonconformists were placed, through Owen's arguments, in an ideological position whereby if they supported disestablishment, they supported the secularization of the Welsh nation. As Owen stated in his presidential address to the Diocesan Conference in 1910, the measure separated Wales from the national profession of

---

[141] J. Owen, *Welsh Nationality and the Welsh Church Bill, Mr Asquith's Tactics and Pledges* (Carmarthen, 1914), p.5.
[142] H.J. Clayton, *The Indictment and Defence of the Church in Wales* (London, 1911), p.1.
[143] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xxxvi, p. 917, Bishop Edwards speaking during the Amending Act 1919 debate in the House of Lords.

religion and thereby lowered and secularised the ideal of the state within Wales as a whole.[144] In 1912 he went further by stating that: 'what these clauses do for Wales is to put an end once for all to that national recognition of religion which has been a prominent characteristic of Welsh national life throughout the whole course of Welsh history.'[145] Undoubtedly some of his thoughts on this issue had been moulded by Brooke Fosse Westcott, formerly Bishop of Durham, who had argued that the proposition of disestablishment raised the question of whether religion was an accident of humanity or an essential element of national society. Westcott believed that disestablishment was to 'deprive the Nation of its spiritual organ.'[146] This was an argument with which Owen would certainly have concurred.

Support by the nonconformists for secularization, or the destruction of traditional Christian values, would place the Church in a strong moral and religious position. In a paper on Church Defence in 1906, Owen stated that disestablishment meant the withdrawal of the nation from its profession of religion, without the substitution of any form in its place.[147] To disestablish the Church would, in his opinion, place the nation in a dangerous position. Secularization was feared by Anglicans and nonconformists alike, as it symbolised the destruction of the fabric of the nation. As he stated at a speech in Newport in 1909:

> It is a dangerous thing to set up secularism as an ideal of the state, when the place of the state in the life of the nation is being more and more rapidly enlarged. No one would keep adding storeys to a building and at the same time undermine its foundations.[148]

He reinforced this viewpoint in 1910 when he stated: 'To injure the work of the Church in Wales in the face of the advance of indifference and secularism must be offensive to the consciences of religious men.'[149] He even developed a prophetic voice when considering this subject, for as he remarked in 1911:

---

[144] J. Owen, 'Presidential Address at the St Davids Diocesan Conference at Aberystwyth', 21 September 1910.
[145] J. Owen, *The Welsh Disestablishment Bill, Facts and Principles* (Cardiff, 1912), p.6 .
[146] J. Owen, *The Principles of the Welsh Disestablishment Bill* (Cardiff, 1909), p.4.
[147] J. Owen, *Principles of Welsh Church Defence* (Carmarthen, 1906), p. 3.
[148] J. Owen, *The Principles of the Welsh Disestablishment Bill* (Cardiff, 1909), p. 6.
[149] J. Owen, 'Presidential Address at the St Davids Diocesan Conference at Aberystwyth', 21 September 1910.

> I am strongly convinced that the secularisation of the State, which is what Disestablishment means, would do great harm to the whole cause of religion in Wales. I hold that if this principle be adopted in Disestablishment, it would carry with it as consequences at no distant time a State system of secular education and the legislative secularisation of Sunday-two evil consequences which would be as unwelcome to the majority of Nonconformists as to Churchmen.[150]

Owen also saw the disestablishment of the Church within Britain as being a substantial blow to the Christian witness throughout the world. In his 1906 address he commented that such an action could have a serious impact upon the Church's missionary work in areas such as India, Japan and China, which required substantial support from the established Church to maintain their work. He further argued that the educated populous of those nations would question why such a nation as Wales had sought to withdraw itself from its historic national profession of Christianity at a time when it was seeking to spread that religion across the world?[151] This contribution is significant as it testifies to Owen's consideration of the broader picture of the Church Catholic. To reject establishment would undermine the spreading of the Gospel in parts of the world in which the Christian faith struggled for recognition, for this was a 'time when the Church needs more than ever a broad as well as deep sense of its message to mankind.'[152]

Further to this Owen maintained that for the government to force the measure through based on its political power, was to ignore the moral principles which all those in authority bear when considering the promotion of the Christian Gospel. He maintained that the government was being lured into temptation to 'use its power irrespective of moral principles.'[153] He argued that the abandonment of such principles only sought to cause the degradation of the religious cause and further distanced the state from any professed religion, thereby enabling secularization to inhabit the natural territories of the Christian tradition. He also maintained that the secularization of any law would also lead to a substantial loss in respect for the operations of the national state:

---

[150] J. Owen, *The Duty and Encouragement of Welsh Churchmen* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.5.
[151] J. Owen, *Principles of Welsh Church Defence* (Carmarthen, 1906), p.4.
[152] J. Owen, *Principles of Welsh Church Defence* (Carmarthen, 1906), p.5.
[153] J. Owen, *The Welsh Disestablishment Bill, Facts and Principles* (Cardiff, 1912), p.6.

> This dangerous temptation to loss of respect for law would be seriously enhanced by a measure of disestablishment based on the unscriptural notion that the State as a State is merely a secular power which has nothing to do with religion and that behind its laws there is nothing more worthy of respect than merely the political majority of the moment.[154]

Here Owen sought to show that those who opposed the establishment principle lacked the foresight to imagine the state of the nation in future generations were their actions to be implemented. Owen's challenge to the nonconformists was not only that they were supporting secularization, but that this would set a precedent: 'for tyranny which secularists, when their turn came, might apply to Nonconformist denominations'.[155] He was supported in this by Edwards who wrote in 1912:

> but the strength and the value of any religious organization depends upon its ability to keep the lamp of truth alight amid a progressive society in which the conditions are constantly changing.[156]

Owen was strongly of the view that should a referendum be held on the matter, the secularization of religious endowments would not receive the support of a majority of the electorate.[157] His views on secularization were also supported by Archbishop Benson, who believed that the general public would suffer through the secularization of public life.[158] A letter of Appeal, from May 1913, written by the Archbishops and bishops of the provinces of York and Canterbury stated that the Church's: 'power of rendering effective service to the whole community would be gravely impaired by the alienation to secular purposes of money given for distinctly religious use.'[159] One of Benson's successors, Archbishop Davidson also spoke of the disestablishment measure as weakening the Christian witness in the nation. Following the passing of the Act, he commented in 1919 that:

---

[154] J. Owen, *The Welsh Disestablishment Bill, Facts and Principles* (Cardiff, 1912), p.7.
[155] J. Owen, *Welsh Nationality and the Welsh Church Bill, Mr Asquith's Tactics and Pledges* (Carmarthen, 1914), p. 7.
[156] A.G. Edwards, *Landmarks in the History of the Welsh Church* (London, 1912), p.250.
[157] J. Owen, *The Prime Minister and Welsh Disestablishment* (Carmarthen, 1909), p.4.
[158] P.M.H. Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales* (London, 1969), p.261.
[159] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection-Box 1, Letter of Appeal from Arch and Bishops, 26/05/1913.

> My conviction remains quite unshaken that the course of action followed was unnecessary, was unwise, was harmful to the religious well-being of Wales and indirectly of England, and was calculated to cripple the activities for religious purposes, and other purposes as well, of a body which has used magnificently (though, like other bodies, with occasional failures) the large opportunities which have been given to it in our constitution of Church and Realm.[160]

Further to this, Owen noted that the government was more than able to provide for the endowment of secular objectives should it choose to do so:

> What makes the meanness of this Bill revolting to the conscience of reasonable men is, that the Government of the wealthiest State in the world had no better use for months of Parliamentary time than to attempt to deprive the Church in Wales of meagre endowments which it needs, and is admitted to use faithfully, when full provision could be made for the secular objects to which the Bill alienates these endowments at less than the amount cheerfully voted by members of Parliament to pay themselves.[161]

Secular purposes were already benefiting from significant governmental funding and further opportunities could easily be found therefore there was in Owen's opinion little substance to the argument that the monies were needed elsewhere for social or cultural purposes which were more deserving than the work of the Church.

Owen, supported by clergy and laity alike, consistently argued that the disestablishment of the Church would result in national life being set on a secular basis which were a violation of the divine principles of society. In the letter of Appeal from 1913, the bishops went as far as to advocate that disestablishment was an obstacle to the furtherance of the kingdom of God. For as Owen remarked in 1914, it was the established Church which had borne witness to the Christian truth through times of great upheaval, doubt and change:

> the Church had an unique responsibility for serving the nation by bearing its witness to the permanence and universality of the Gospel in all ages and all

[160] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xxxvi, p.889.
[161] J. Owen, *The Financial Position of a Welsh Diocese and the Welsh Bill* (Carmarthen, 1913), p.9.

> lands, and to the essential difference which there was between the permanent truths of the Christian faith and the changing opinions of men about them.[162]

Owen also promoted the need for Christian unity in much of his campaign against disestablishment. The social evils which Christianity had to face within Wales were of greater importance, he advocated, than the issue of the establishment of the Church:

> I hold firmly that the time is coming and is not so far distant as may seem, if this unrighteous Bill is defeated, when the central principle of Christianity on the one hand, and the menacing advance of indifference and secularism on the other hand, will draw all who believe in the old Gospel gradually together,[163]

The Church provided the foundation for society: to diminish its role would be to compromise the social, political, and religious well-being of the people of Wales. The Archbishop of York, Cosmo Gordon Lang drew attention to this in his speech in the House of Lords in 1913:

> It seems to me, to speak only of Wales, that the Church in Wales is fitted by its character, its order, and its historical position to be a rallying ground for all those who believe that the spiritual foundation of the people must be set upon a stronger basis than the shifting sands of time, and must reach a rock which has been tried and tested by the experience of centuries.[164]

Owen focused his thoughts upon religious ideals, such as unity, which were supposed to be the goals of all Christians; and sought, through his arguments to embarrass the nonconformists into agreement regarding the effects of disestablishment. In 1909, he argued that:

> It is further an undoubted fact that all Christian people in Wales are gravely concerned about the growth of materialism and indifference, and the effect in the near future upon evangelical belief of certain disquieting tendencies of

---

[162] J. Owen, *Welsh Nationality and the Welsh Church Bill, Mr Asquith's Tactics and Pledges* (Carmarthen, 1914), p.5.
[163] J. Owen, *The Duty and Encouragement of Welsh Churchmen* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.12.
[164] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xiii. 1215.

> modern thought, especially in the populous and industrial districts, with their growing majority of the total population of Wales.[165]

He espoused similar sentiments in 1906 when he argued at the Church Defence Congress that the pressing need for Christians within Wales was to unite, in order to battle against the 'growing forces of materialism and sin', and that it should be the call to Christian brotherhood which should remain paramount in the consciousness of Christian bodies within Wales.[166] Time and again within his addresses he sought to win over his opponents by emphasising that their Christian duty should demand greater loyalty than their denominational allegiances, especially in the face of increasing secularization.

Although Owen sought to portray opposition to secularization as something which concerned the general Christian population it must be acknowledged that such a portrayal was certainly not accurate, and that opposition to the move was based on a variety of factors. Amazingly over 100,000 nonconformists had opposed the disestablishment bill of 1894 on the basis that it would enhance the position of the Church of Rome.[167] Within this context it is important to recognise that the 'voluntary principle' of nonconformity is that the modern nation is a heterogeneous, rather than a uniform society. Through this principle nonconformists believed that the state should be secular though through the voluntary participation of its population, become a righteous state.[168] Therefore the viewpoint of many nonconformists radically differed from that of Owen. Their standpoint was clear, that enforced religious observance was not appropriate or edifying for the development of a nation and only disestablishment would enable the people of Wales to develop politically and religiously. It is interesting that the concept of 'voluntary principle' is not one which Owen addresses anywhere in his work, particularly considering his own religious background. It may have been that he recognised that the nonconformist denominations did not fear secularization in the same way as the established Church, as they had long been viewed as the opponents of ordered religion within the life of the nation. The nonconformist ideal of individual freedom stood at odds with the principles of the established Church

---

[165] J. Owen, The Prime Minister and Welsh Disestablishment (Carmarthen, 1909), p.4.
[166] J. Owen, *Principles of Welsh Church Defence* (Carmarthen, 1906), p.11.
[167] F. Knight in G. Williams, W. Jacob, N. Yates & F. Knight, *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment 1603-1920* (Cardiff, 2007), p.321.
[168] R. Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation, Wales 1890-1914* (Cardiff, 2004), p. 375.

which sought adherence to traditions and order. During the latter part of the nineteenth century many nonconformist ministers were accused of becoming secular in their preaching as they focused more on the political campaign for disestablishment than they did on the spiritual needs of their members. For some critics, it was suggested that their tendency to focus on political matters lowered their position within the eyes of the public in Wales.[169] Secularization was viewed by the nonconformists as being a political development rather than a social or religious one. This is testified by the Calvinistic Methodist Assembly passing a motion in favour of disestablishment as early as May 1890.[170] Owen also believed that much of the sluggishness in the campaign during the early part of the twentieth century concerned disendowment, and how uncomfortable so many of those in favour of disestablishment felt in relation to this section of the legislation:

> I am persuaded that the growing doubt about disendowment is sapping the energy of the movement for disestablishment, and this was perhaps the chief reason why the attempt made to get up an agitation in Wales in favour of the Welsh Disestablishment Bill at the beginning of last summer turned out a conspicuous failure.[171]

Although there were many who were hesitant in relation to this, it must be acknowledged that there was a body of opinion who believed that such an act would grant the Church the freedom which she hitherto did not enjoy:

> So helpless is the Church of England, in a religious sense, that were Heaven again to grant the Church a pillar of cloud and of fire to guide her through the wilderness of the world, the pillar would have to go on unfollowed, except by the Free Churches, while the Established Church would have to remain behind, waiting orders from the Home Office.[172]

Disestablishmentarians used the word 'liberation' in much of their arguments regarding this measure. They maintained that since the Reformation, the Church had faced interference from the state and that this had caused the Church in Wales to fail as a national religious

---

[169] H.T. Edwards, *Wales and the Welsh Church,* (London, 1889), p.155.
[170] R. Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation, Wales 1890-1914* (Cardiff, 2004), p. 376.
[171] J. Owen, *The Prime Minister and Welsh Disestablishment* (Carmarthen, 1909), p.5.
[172] 'Welsh Nonconformity and the Welsh Representation,' delivered at the Liberation Society Conference, 1866, p.37.

institution. That argument could certainly have been made to greater effect during the first half of the nineteenth century. However, by Owen's time there was considerable change in the state's attitude and management of the Church. Gladstone's own work in seeking to appoint suitable Welsh candidates highlights that government no longer wished to interfere for purely political purposes, but rather for the betterment of the Church as an institution serving its people.

Those in favour of disestablishment continued to contend that, if passed, the Church would also encounter a much more active and robust laity, who would be instrumental in Church governance and remove power from the bishops. H. Evans argued:

> More than half the parochial livings and all the Cathedral patronage is in the hands of bishops. The Bishop of Bangor appoints the Dean, three out of four of the canons, two archdeacons and eighty-seven out of two hundred and sixty-three benefices … The Bishop of St Davids appoints the dean, archdeacons, and all cathedral clergy and one hundred and seven out of two hundred and ten benefices.[173]

Amusingly of course when the measure did finally pass, the power of the laity diminished as all lay patronage was dissolved and bishops retained, through personal, diocesan or provincial bodies, the ability to make appointments in every sphere of the Church.

Realistically Owen and his supporters recognised that the arguments made in favour of liberating the Church were disingenuous. It would be difficult to argue effectively that to liberate the Church, over three quarters of her assets should be taken away and her position within society be diminished in the sight of the general populace. Further to that, clergy were not dependent on the will of the parishioners to maintain their positions. Whereas nonconformist ministers were often reliant on other work, and at times could see their income diminished if the voluntary sources providing their stipend withdrew support, the clergy did not live with such fear. Furthermore, defenders of the Church maintained that in practice, state interference was so limited as to be virtually equal with the level of

[173] H. Evans, *The Case for Disestablishment* (Carmarthen, 1907), pp.46-7.

legislation needed to protect and defend the interests of nonconformists. Disestablishment however would see the level of state involvement rise considerably:

> Nonconformists are no more free from Government control than the Church. But if the Disestablishment bill passes, then state will have to pass a re-establishing act to create, constitute and establish a new Church in Wales[174]

Owen also campaigned against disestablishment on the principles of righteousness, both personal and national, and of the preservation of respect for lawful authority, which he argued was intrinsically linked with the profession of a national religion. He argued that love of righteousness combined with respect for the law had been the main foundation of natural strength within Britain for centuries.[175] In his 1911 address to the Diocesan Conference, in which this argument is most powerfully made, Owen maintains that there had never been a challenge to establishing national life on a secular basis until the eighteenth century. He argues that such a challenge would violate the divine principles of society, which is the profession of a national religion, this being a prominent principle of the Old Testament. Owen argues the divine training of Israel was an example for all nations and that the Great Commission contained within St Matthew's Gospel, also indicates that religion is meant to be held on a national as well as a personal basis: 'All the nations of modern Europe were made nations because the Church at their conversion taught them the social as well as the individual side of the Gospel of Christ.'[176] In drawing on these Biblical arguments, Owen was claiming that the Liberal Party, which prided itself in being the National Party of Wales, was in fact removing the profession of the Christian religion from the public square. He felt that the:

> lowering of the Scriptural ideal of the State was an evil, the consequences of which would tell more and more deeply upon national tone and character as one generation succeeded another, and the end thereof nobody could foresee.[177]

---

[174] W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore, *Welsh Disestablishment and Disendowment* (London, 1912), p.67.
[175] J. Owen, *Welsh Disestablishment and Political Tactics* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.3.
[176] J. Owen, *Welsh Disestablishment and Political Tactics* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.4.
[177] J. Owen. *Three addresses on the Disestablishment Bill* (Carmarthen, 1912), p.10.

He viewed the act of disestablishment as being a repudiation of the national recognition of the Christian religion. Owen maintained that disestablishment

> is not really at bottom an issue between Church and Chapel, but an issue between 'New Theology', or rather between New Philosophy and the Old Religion of the Bible. It is a question of the permanent authority of the moral teaching of the Old Testament, of the relation of the New Testament to the Old, of the unity of the Word of God.[178]

This argument draws attention to the concept that Owen was seeking to frame the issue of disestablishment within the wider context of a redefinition of the Christian landscape and the political, social and religious construct of the Welsh nation. Disestablishment, was in Owen's opinion, the gateway to a radical change in understanding of both the political and religious character of Wales and its people, and it was that change which Owen viewed as being wholly negative, which was a motivating factor in his continuing opposition of the measure throughout his ministry.

Iv - The Pastoral Provision Argument

> The Church in Wales stands today, after Mr Asquith's speech, in a position of real peril, and upon the result of this election may depend whether the work of the Church in this diocese and the other three Welsh dioceses may not be wrecked for a generation.[179]

Although Owen was sympathetic to the work of nonconformists, he was not fearful of emphasising the supremacy of the Church, especially when it came to issues such as pastoral concern and ministerial provision. Such was his confidence that in his presidential address to the Swansea Congress, he stated that service to the nation must come first, and that the defence of the Church must be a secondary concern. Defence was only necessary for the sake of service.

---

[178] J. Owen, *Welsh Disestablishment and Political Tactics* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.4.
[179] J. Owen, *The Prime Minister and Welsh Disestablishment* (Carmarthen, 1909), p.7.

Owen argued throughout the campaign regarding disestablishment that due to its parochial structure, the Church was the only religious body which could provide pastoral care to the whole of the people of Wales: 'as the Church exists everywhere for service, so it exists in Wales to serve the spiritual welfare of Wales as a whole.'[180] The Church was called to minister to its poorest parishioner in an equal manner to some of the wealthiest families within the land. Nonconformity did not have a national parochial structure, because it was not one denomination. Owen, in 1912, was keen to indicate the weaknesses of nonconformists' ministerial provision, especially within rural areas. He stated that in his own diocese, out of a total of 371 parishes: 241 were without a Calvinistic Methodist minister, 234 were without a Baptist minister, 218 were without a Congregationalist minister, and 339 were without a Wesleyan Methodist minister. The situation was even more desperate, however, because 130 parishes had no nonconformist minister within their boundaries.[181] Owen stated that although the Church may have been guilty of absenteeism in the past, the ministers of the nonconformist denominations were failing over one third of parishes within the Diocese of St David's; a similar statistic was true within the Diocese of St Asaph. When assessing the situation of a national level within Wales and Monmouthshire there were 1,081 parishes 485 of which did not have a resident nonconformist minister.

The historian D. Gareth Evans argues that during the closing decades of the nineteenth century, nonconformity paid more attention to disestablishment than to the 'pains and problems of industrial society'.[182] Owen sought to prove that the Church was no longer failing the communities with which it was charged to serve. Regardless of location, Church presence was guaranteed. This contrasted with the nonconformist tradition, of which Edwards memorably stated: 'The Church in Wales is everywhere; the Nonconformist bodies are only somewhere.'[183] In 1911 Owen identified that the Welsh Church Commission had benefited the Church's position on the issue of disestablishment by highlighting the poor provision made by nonconformists to the adequate maintenance of ministry within Wales. He further added that criticism of such bodies was now being heard from Members of Parliament, much of it focussing on the monetary support offered to the ministers:

---

[180] J. Owen, *The Call of the Church to Service and the Unity of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1909), p.6.
[181] J. Owen, *Mesur Dadgysylltiad i Gymru, beth ydyw* (Carmarthen, 1912), p. 10.
[182] D. G. Evans, *A History of Wales 1906-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p.243.
[183] A.G. Edwards, *Landmarks in the History of the Welsh Church* (London, 1912), p.246 .

> In a leading article last week the daily organ of the Liberal Party in South Wales singled out this inadequate provision for the Nonconformist ministry as a chief cause of the recent decline in Nonconformist membership.[184]

Such decline was not only the result of poor financial support for, as Owen argued:

> The importance of the essential difference between the Church system and the Nonconformist system of pastoral care is seen from the fact that those who most need this care will not ask for it. It has to be brought to them in their homes without their asking. When thus brought, especially in sickness and sorrow, it is almost always welcomed. The parochial system of the Church is in this respect, day by day all the year round a 'Home Mission' and a 'Forward Movement' and I would lay stress on the pastoral care of the parochial clergy as one of the chief causes of the progress of the Church in Wales.[185]

Owen was arguing that the Church was the only body, able and willing to provide for the needs of the people, and that disestablishing the Church would severely weaken the pastoral care offered to the people of Wales. Owen may have been shaped in his views upon the pastoral care of the people of God by his predecessor, Basil Jones. Jones, who is perhaps best remembered as the bishop who remarked that Wales was no more than a 'geographical expression', who believed that the way in which the Anglican Church would eventually triumph over the nonconformists was not to 'out-preach' them, but rather to provide better pastoral provision to those entrusted to their care.[186] This is testified by the fact that although the number of ministers, assistant preachers and students, whom the chapels could draw on for the provision of worship was 4,841 in 1905, in comparison to 1,597 clergymen within the Church (which represented an increase of 897 from 1850),[187] the Church was still able to provide better pastoral provision on a denominational basis. For every 1,315 members of the general population there was an Anglican clergyman able to service their needs, this clergy to parishioner ratio was far lower than was possible in any other denomination. This was due to the strength of the parochial system which enabled the Church to provide appropriate pastoral care across the geographical landscape of the

---

[184] J. Owen, *The Duty and Encouragement of Welsh Churchmen* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.10.
[185] J. Owen, *The Church in Wales Royal Commission: An Address* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.3.
[186] F. Knight in G.Williams, W. Jacob, N. Yates & F. Knight, *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment 1603-1920* (Cardiff, 2007), p. 331.
[187] R. Tudur Jones, *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation, Wales 1890-1914* (Cardiff, 2004), p. 15.

nation, in relation to the 1,546 churches and 318 mission rooms which it possessed at that time, in comparison with the nonconformist denominations who were often competing against one another in substantial numbers in one area and were bereft of a nonconformist presence in another. Indeed, the number of nonconformist chapels outweighed those of the Church by a ratio of at least 3:1 by the early part of the twentieth century.

Owen, clearly viewed that the pastoral provision which the Church provided was a substantive argument against disestablishment. In his sermon at his enthronement as Bishop of St Asaph in 1889 Edwards testified that the best form of Church defence was the Church's ministry in the community: 'I ventured to conclude by saying that meeting for Church defence were all very well, but the most telling Church defence argument in the world was a well-worked parish.'[188] Such a viewpoint was supported by many who were active within the work of anti-disestablishment campaign, such as Canon Powell Jones of Llantrisant who argued that Church work was the Church's best defence.[189] He like others, believed that the campaign was absorbing far too much of the Church's energy, rendering it exhausted to meet the substantial pastoral needs of its people. Through his episcopal authority Owen could challenge the disestablishment campaign by improving the work of the Church both on a national and a local level, recognising that the harvest was plentiful but the labourers (for the Church at least) were still too few. Within his own diocese the number of clergy between 1877 and 1905 had risen by 77, the number of Sunday services by 429, the number of communicants by 36,976, the number of baptisms by 1,988 and the number of confirmees by 4,891.[190] Further to this since 1877 twenty-two parishes had been formed, 104 new parish churches built and 292 were enlarged or restored. The population of Easter communicants within the diocese was 8.68% which was 2.40% higher than the average in England and Wales. In addition to this in 1890 the suffragan see of Swansea had been established to assist with the pastoral care of its increasing population. These figures and acts testify to the increasing capacity and viability of the Church and its ability to minister to an increasing number of the population, despite its limitations both in terms of finance and manpower. Nonconformists became increasingly critical during the latter part

[188] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p. 124.
[189] R. L. Brown, 'Traitors & Compromisers: The Shadow Side of the Church's Fight against Disestablishment' *Journal of Welsh Religious History* 3 (1995), p. 45.
[190] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection- Bundle 7, Box 5.

of the nineteenth century of the advances which the Church was making and were fearful of losing members back to the establishment. For many within the Church, the end of the nineteenth century was a time of great renewal:

> If the Church has only half the population, at least she is striving with great zeal and energy to win the other half, and with great success; she is rapidly increasing and dissent is decreasing, and this is the real cause of the bitterness of the attack upon her. It is not that she is an effete Church, but that she is too full of energy; not that she is too small, but that she is growing so large as to seem likely to fill the land.[191]

In his 1913 speech at the Diocesan Conference, Owen further highlighted the substantial growth which had occurred between the submission made to the Royal Commission and the present situation of the Church, namely an increase of 8,795 communicants, and 7,680 in the number attending Sunday School.[192] These were further strengthening indicators that the Church was renewing its common life and growing in membership.

Furthermore, there were those prominent nonconformist ministers who felt that the disestablishment campaign failed to recognise the good work which the Church had done. Ministers such as G. Campbell Morgan, A.E. Gregory and Richard Glover were uncomfortable with much of the language used in the debate surrounding the inadequacies of the Church, and by being in favour of disestablishment were thereby allying themselves to radicals and atheists who were opposed to all religions.[193] Owen sought to bring such sympathetic voices on board and encouraged them to speak out in favour of the Church, indeed Joseph Parker, Congregational minster of London's City Temple had stated:

> I am a rather cold supporter of the Liberationists nowadays, for the simple reasons that they welcome any free thinker who can speak with energy and force, utterly forgetful of his atheism … Am I going to tear down a Church that has done so much good and is still doing so grand a work in order that it may be replaced by I know not what?[194]

---

[191] E. Cutts, *The Case of the Welsh Church* (London, 1893), p.20.
[192] J. Owen, *The Financial Position of a Welsh Diocese and the Welsh Bill* (Carmarthen, 1913), p.3.
[193] W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore, *Welsh Disestablishment and Disendowment* (London, 1912), p.16.
[194] 'A Nonconformist Indictment of Nonconformity', *Church Eclectic* XXI, 1893-4, p. 246.

By 1912, the minister J.F. Bradley was arguing that for nonconformists to keep silent whilst another Church was being destroyed was nothing but a 'blameable shrinking of both their religious and moral responsibility.'[195] Owen regularly acknowledged that the disagreement and ill feeling between the Church and nonconformity was increasingly diminishing, and that many felt that the need to unite behind the Gospel as the primary focus for attention:

> *Nid oes ychwaith unrhyw sail i'r gred fod y teimlad gelyniaethus yna, sydd wrth wraidd yr ymdrech bresennol, yn debyg o barhau. Yn wyneb cynnydd brawychus anffyddiaeth a difaterwch yn ardaloedd gweithfaol Cymru nis gall y fath deimlad, sydd eisoes yn wannach, nag y bu, barhau, oblegid y mae'n hollol groes i'r egwyddorion sylfaenol a goleddir gan bob Cristion, mae'n groes i ddyheadau uwchaf Ymneilltuwyr ac Eglwyswyr y dyddiau hyn, y mae'n groes hefyd i hiraeth yr oes am frawdgarwch*.[196]

Owen understood that by now there were a substantial number of fellow Christians, whatever their denomination, who had come to feel that disestablishment would not in any way benefit the wider Christian life and witness of the nation. He was very conscious of the considerable time and effort that had been spent on the matter throughout his episcopacy, time which could have been better spent on the work of the Gospel:

> The future usefulness of the Church in Wales will turn largely upon the issue of whether or not we can cultivate in our spirit and practice in our lives the real catholicity of the Church of Christ, whether or not we can eschew the strong temptations, which beset us nowadays, to a spirit of sectarianism, and set our hearts and minds steadfastly upon the religious welfare of Wales as whole. It is true that a considerable part of the people of Wales do not avail themselves of the ministrations of the Church, but there is no limit to the general power for good,[197]

---

[195] J.F. Bradley, *Nonconformists and the Welsh Church Bill* (London, 1912), p.4

[196] 'There is no basis for the belief that the enmity at the root of the present campaign is set to last. In the light of the fearsome increase in unbelief and apathy in Wales' industrial areas, this feeling, which is already weaker than it was in the past, cannot continue as it is wholly opposed to the shared principles of all Christians; it is against the highest current desires of both Nonconformists and Churchmen and contradicts this age's longing for brotherhood' J. Owen, *Mesur Dadgysylltiad i Gymru, beth ydyw* (Carmarthen, 1912), p.2

[197] J. Owen, *Church Work and Church Defence* (Cardiff, 1910), p.2

In this address, as in so many others he seeks to maintain the focus of the Church upon its primary task. Despite the hardships and unfair treatment which he, and many others, felt the Church was enduring, the importance of maintaining pastoral provision, of undertaking the work of the Church in every community continued to be vital in his mind, as the Church moved forward.

During this period Owen also feared for the fate of the general population in respect of its legal rights to call upon the Church for pastoral care and provision.[198] According to the establishment ideal every inhabitant of the land had a right to call upon their parish priest to offer them the Christian rites of baptism, marriage and burial. As individuals, they were also entitled to have their name entered upon an electoral roll which enabled them to express their opinions in a democratic manner through congregational meetings and by electing office holders. With the advent of disestablishment these rights would be swept away. Owen undoubtedly feared that such a situation could cause real harm not only to the general population, but also to the Church itself, a view supported by the Bishop of Bristol who stated: 'the Church entitles every person who is a member of the nation to the benefits of the Church.'[199] Owen feared that the general population would no longer have the confidence to ask for such pastoral care, thereby placing themselves in a vulnerable position, in what were often challenging personal situations. In respect of the Church's ministry undoubtedly the fear was that without the legal obligation to undertake these pastoral offices, there might be some clergy who would simply refrain from undertaking such work due to laziness or disinterest. Both situations would radically alter the pastoral relationship between the Church and its people, and ultimately weaken the Church's ability to minister effectively to those entrusted to its care.

V - The Electoral Accountability Argument

[198] J. Owen, *Mesur Dadgysylltiad i Gymru, beth ydyw* (Carmarthen, 1912), p.2.
[199] S.H. Gem (ed.) *The Proposed Robbery of the Churchpeople of Wales* (Oxford, 1912), p.30.

> It was a solid fact that the claim of the Welsh members to have their own way with the Church, whether right or wrong, was not discussed at all outside Wales at the last General Election, and discussed but very slightly in Wales itself.[200]

Electoral accountability was an issue on which Owen felt passionately. He argued consistently throughout the campaign, right up until 1914, that the electorate had in no way mandated the government to undertake the disestablishment of the Church. In 1910, he appealed to those who supported the Church to back the Unionist position which offered a clear choice on the issue:

> I appeal to Churchmen to vote for the Unionist proposal for a referendum on all matters of great gravity … the question whether in the light of the report of the Welsh Church Commission, and of the evidence taken before it, it would be right to dismember the Church of England without the consent of Churchmen and to secularise the endowments of its four poorest dioceses.[201]

He went further than that in 1913 and argued that in any forthcoming general election, the issue of Welsh disestablishment should be forefront on the minds of those casting ballots: 'the Welsh Bill may overthrow the Government, but whether it does so or not the duty of all who believe that the Bill is wrong in principle and would be injurious in practice is clear.'[202] Owen was determined to use any powers of political persuasion to encourage the electorate to punish the Liberal Party over this issue. Throughout the campaign Owen relied on the support of Unionist parties for his cause, and due to their dominance within the House of Lords, for much of the time of the disestablishment campaign, Owen did not believe that the measure would ever be enacted on the statute book. It was the 'last bulwark' of the Church, and yet the political turmoil which occurred in the early 1910s resulted in a dramatic change in its composition, enabling the measure ultimately to pass. As early as 1907 Lloyd George had recognised that it was the House of Lords which was the stumbling block to legislative enactment on the issue:

> There is one further word of appeal I would add. The friends of religious equality throughout the kingdom should be prepared to redouble their effort. The

[200] J. Owen, *Welsh Nationality and the Welsh Church Bill* (Carmarthen, 1914), p.4.
[201] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection-Box 7 Bundle 5.
[202] J. Owen, *The Financial Position of a Welsh Diocese and the Welsh Bill* (Carmarthen, 1913), p.11.

> schools of the land are not yet free. The Lords are blocking the advance. We cannot leave this momentous question in the unsatisfactory condition in which it now stands. We must secure complete religious equality in all the relations of the state. But it is clear that victory means not merely the overthrow of clerical domination, but as an essential preliminary the curtailment of the mischievous privileges of the House of Peers.[203]

Owen publicly denounced Lloyd George in 1909 for what he viewed as being his determination to diminish the power of the House of Lords to support his own political agenda:

> This enterprising Minister gave himself credit at a meeting of his constituents at Caernarvon last week for having kept steadily before his mind as the object of all his tactics during the last ten years the abolition of the legislative veto of the House of Lords, in order that he might carry Welsh disestablishment.[204]

Owen maintained that, politically, the removal of the veto of the House of Lords was a dangerous and in principle, a wrong measure which would ultimately harm democracy. He argued that the enabling of only one chamber to retain such political control permitted public opinion to be ignored at the will of the governing party. Although Owen recognised that the measure would pass and therefore the support and influence of the House of Lords would be politically diminished, it did not dissuade him from arguing against the electoral mandate which he believed the government did not possess over this issue:

> Should the Government avail itself of the option given it in the Parliament Act to submit for the Royal Assent a Bill raising constitutional issues of great gravity before it had been submitted to the people at the polls for their assent, such action would be contrary to the central principle of democracy.[205]

As Owen reflected in the speech at Aberdare in 1914, it was the lack of this democratic endorsement which reflected so poorly on the political leadership of the nation. Owen argued on many occasions that the government did not, at the 1906 or 1910 elections, place the issue of the disestablishment of the Welsh Church clearly before the electorate:

---

[203] *South Wales Daily News,* 2 May 1907.
[204] J. Owen, *The Prime Minister and Welsh Disestablishment* (Carmarthen, 1909), p.3.
[205] J. Owen, *Welsh Nationality and the Welsh Church Bill* (Carmarthen, 1914), p.3.

> Members of the present Government who used to be eloquent about the doctrine of mandates, when they were out of office, have no scruples now about pressing forward an irrevocable measure which they took care not to put before the country at the last election.[206]

Owen clearly believed that the government was behaving in a deceptive manner, and that they did not wish to discuss the issue of disestablishment at a national level for fear of losing public support. He notes that only twelve candidates referred directly to the question during the general election campaign of 1910, eight of whom were Welsh.[207] Although in another speech in 1911 he stated that twenty Liberal candidates referred to the matter in a 'vague' manner,[208] this paucity of evidence showed how difficult it was for Owen or any of the Church's defenders to ascertain an accurate figure on the level of discussion which took place. The lack of large scale public discussion on what he regarded as being such a key issue was something to which Owen repeatedly referred. He conveyed his disgust at the tactics the Welsh MPs, who had allied themselves with the Irish Nationalists to secure the passage of their bill: 'but it should be emphasized, once again, that the fate of the Welsh Church appeared indissolubly linked up with that of the Irish Home Rule Bill.'[209] This opinion was proved by the final vote to disestablish the Welsh Church taken in 1914 when those in favour numbered 328, those opposed numbered 251. Of those who were in favour seventy-seven were Irish Nationalists, without their support the bill would simply have failed to pass its electoral hurdle. Owen considered this alliance between Welsh and Irish MPs to be underhand and serving purely political needs, rather than reflecting the true social good. As he remarked: 'there are deep religious differences between these allies, but help is welcome from any quarter in an attack upon the Church.'[210] The fact that the government relied upon Irish support to ensure the passage of the bill was testimony in Owen's opinion, that the measure lacked political credibility or was the true will of the electorate.

---

[206] J. Owen, *The Principles of the Welsh Disestablishment Bill* (Cardiff, 1909), p. 3.
[207] J. Owen, *Mesur Dadgysylltiad i Gymru, beth ydyw* (Carmarthen, 1912), p.1.
[208] J. Owen, *The Duty and Encouragement of Welsh Churchmen* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.2.
[209] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p. 202.
[210] J. Owen, *The Principles of the Welsh Disestablishment Bill* (Cardiff, 1909), p.17.

The point which Owen is seeking to emphasise in this instance is the cowardly and underhand behaviour of Welsh MPs, which is indicative, in his opinion, of men who operate on the basis of 'dubious morality'.[211] He maintained that the constitution of the country, by precedent of the Irish Disestablishment settlement, had clearly shown that no national institution should be overthrown 'without a clear, deliberate and decisive warrant from the people.'[212] Owen here is pressing for a political referendum. He wishes an election to be based upon the ideology of disestablishment:

> This essential principle of the Bill, which nobody could defend, has not been explained to the people at all by anybody at the last General Election, and they were entitled to demand that such an act of tyranny, for which no precedent could be found, should not be done until the electorate in the light of the discussions of the last two years, either at a General Election, or by means of a Referendum, had a fair and square opportunity of passing judgment upon it at the polls.[213]

Such an appeal however did display an element of political naivety. He seeks to argue that a precedent was set at the general election of 1868 when Gladstone's Irish disestablishment plans lost the support of the country; however, by 1913 the political situation had changed dramatically. The movement for disestablishment argued that it possessed a political mandate by the return, in the 1885 general election, of thirty Liberal MPs from Wales, only one of whom did not back disestablishment. By 1886 the matter had become a central platform for political life within Wales and, to a certain extent, within the Westminster government as well. The rise in its political prominence was undoubtedly due to the split of the Liberal Party in 1886, which was caused by Gladstone's Irish policy, which gave Welsh MPs a much greater amount influence within the party, especially when they allied their political ambitions with those of the Irish Nationalists. The loss of the Liberal majority in England through the General Election of 1886, caused Gladstone to rely far more heavily upon their political strength in Scotland and in Wales, and thereby caused the political leadership of the party to be far more responsive to their demands. Indeed, together with their English nonconformist counterparts, the Welsh MPs were described as 'the backbone

---

[211] J. Owen, *Welsh Nationality and the Welsh Church Bill* (Carmarthen, 1914), p. 4.
[212] J. Owen, *The Prime Minister and Welsh Disestablishment* (Carmarthen, 1909), p.2.
[213] J. Owen, *The Dismemberment of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1913).

of his party.'[214] By 1892, the political situation had intensified as thirty-one out of the thirty-four MPs within Wales were returned as Liberals, and Gladstone's majority was only forty:

> The Welsh party, of whom all save nine were Nonconformists, thus found themselves with the balance of power in their hands, and the fortunes of Welsh political nationalism depended on how they used their opportunity.'[215]

Nelmes illustrates this point even further by stating that: 'Welsh politics in the 1880s moved out of a period of stagnation into which it had settled in the preceding decade.'[216] This movement from stagnation to activity was clearly a result of the increased influence of the group, and the reliance of the national party upon their votes. However, such influence would not have been possible had it not been for the work of Stuart Rendel, an Englishman, who came to have such prominence in Welsh politics during the period 1885-95. Rendel served as the MP for Montgomeryshire from 1880 to 1894 and led the Welsh Liberals in Parliament between 1886 and 1894. Prior to Rendel's leadership, this group, unlike its Irish counterpart, had no whips and no agreed strategy.[217] Even when such discipline was put in place, many of the MPs followed Rendel's leadership not through the power of the whips but through their personal loyalty to Rendel's policies. Younger members, however, put such loyalty under severe pressure during the latter part of Rendel's tenure. Despite his increasing inability to control disputes within the party, it would be fair to state that during the 1880s and the early 1890s he moved the Welsh MPs from being a 'scattered band (with) no common force'[218] into a more cohesive and politically powerful group.

Unfortunately for the Liberals the political disputes between northern and southern Welsh MPs caused the second disestablishment bill of 1895 to fail. Had they remained united this would not have occurred and the bill would have been passed in the Commons,

---

[214] K.O. Morgan, 'Gladstone and Wales', *Welsh History Review* 1/1(1960), p. 71.
[215] K.O. Morgan, 'Gladstone and Wales', *Welsh History Review* 1/1 (1960), p.75.
[216] G.V. Nelmes, 'Stuart Rendel and Welsh Liberal Political Organisations in the late Nineteenth Century', *Welsh History Review* 9 (1979), p. 468.
[217] G.V. Nelmes, 'Stuart Rendel and Welsh Liberal Political Organisations in the late Nineteenth Century', *Welsh History Review* 9 (1979), p.469.
[218] G.V. Nelmes, 'Stuart Rendel and Welsh Liberal Political Organisations in the late Nineteenth Century', *Welsh History Review* 9 (1979), p.480.

if not in the Lords.[219] This split was caused by Lloyd George and his associates failing to formally amalgamate the North and South Wales Liberal Federations with the *Cymru Fydd* Leagues. But even within the 1895 bill the second reading was only carried by a majority of forty-four, sixty-two of whom were Irish Nationalists, representing the dependency of the Liberals upon Irish votes for the secure passage of this measure. Both Owen and Edwards believed that the electorate had never been presented clearly with the issue of disestablishment. It was after the failure of the disestablishment bill that the Liberal government, following the general election of 1895, forfeited power to Lord Salisbury's Conservatives. As Edwards wrote:

> Only on two occasions can it be fairly said that Welsh Disestablishment had been more or less directly put before the country as a main issue for the electors to decide. The elections of 1895 and 1918 gave no evidence of unqualified approval of Welsh disestablishment and disendowment even in Wales.[220]

There were a number of commentators who felt that the ascendancy of the Liberal Party did put the Church at considerable jeopardy as they knew so little of its workings and valued little of its identity: 'Pulled down, dismembered and disinherited, the Church will be at the mercy of those who have shown the least sympathy with its aims and who have the least desire to see its catholicity preserved.'[221] The Liberal Party's actions were viewed therefore not only as a threat to the status and position of the Church but also its inherent Catholic, Christian identity.

The difficulty with much of Owen's writings on this matter is that he fails to recognise the substantial link between the 'New Wales' being forged in the 1880s and the ascendancy of the Liberal Party, which was far more pronounced in Wales than in any other part of the British Isles. The Liberal Party's domination of Welsh political life was affirmed in every general election from the 1880s onwards, and only in the anglicized fringe was there any effective opposition presented by the Conservative Party, as Morgan states: 'In the Welsh heartland, Conservatives, uniquely identified with Englishness and with the "unholy

---

[219] F. Knight in G.Williams, W. Jacob, N. Yates & F. Knight, *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment 1603-1920* (Cardiff, 2007), p.319.
[220] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p.284.
[221] R. Williams, *The Attack on the Church in Wales* (London, 1912), p.20.

Trinity" of the bishop, the brewer, and the squire, stood little chance.'[222] Those in Wales opposed to the disestablishment of the Church would therefore have to recognise that an electoral mandate had been provided consistently to the Liberal Party on this matter. Within the ranks of the Welsh Liberal MPs there were several leading Welsh Churchmen such as Thomas Phillips Price, Osborne Morgan and Watkin Williams, who was the author of the first disestablishment bill in 1894. For these men and their counterparts at the turn of the twentieth century: 'The supreme test for the vitality of Liberalism in the Edwardian era would come with the success or failure of the cause of Church disestablishment.'[223] It is interesting to note that in many of Owen's speeches he reflects little upon the political changes which affected Wales in the very late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Significantly he often refers to the 1880s or previous decades in order to support his arguments regarding electoral validity, whilst failing to acknowledge that other matters now pressed far more heavily on the government's agenda.

As the Liberal government of the 1910s pressed forward with a programme of social reform, the issue of Welsh disestablishment continued to diminish in political prominence. The sweeping return of the Liberal Party to power in 1906 caused the 'virtual extinction of the Welsh party as a significant factor in politics.'[224] Unlike the 1880s and 1890s, the Welsh MPs were no longer in a position of power. For many English Liberals the move to disestablish the Church in Wales was largely pointless and they were uncomfortable with the level of financial penalty being placed upon the Church through disendowment. According to K. O. Morgan: 'Lloyd George now regarded the Welsh disestablishment issue as a tedious legacy from the past which should be rapidly eliminated.'[225] To Lloyd George and other leading members of the Liberal government, the issue of the Welsh Church was no longer a pressing concern. This was even clearer in the light of perceived nonconformist decline, the Baptists, Wesleyans and Independents all having reported a drop in numbers.[226] Owen himself argued that the cause of such decline was due to the diversion of so much

[222] K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation, 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981), p.29.
[223] K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation, 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981), p.141.
[224] K.O. Morgan, 'Gladstone and Wales', *Welsh History Review* 1/1 (1960), p.80.
[225] K.O. Morgan, *Freedom or Sacrilege, A History of the Campaign for Welsh Disestablishment* (Penarth, 1966) p. 24.
[226] F. Knight in G. Williams, W. Jacob, N. Yates & F. Knight, *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment 1603-1920* (Cardiff, 2007), p.319.

energy by the nonconformists to the issue of disestablishment, at the expense of the pastoral needs and concerns of their own people.[227]

Lloyd George also saw that social reform was a matter which required far greater political attention and would ultimately be the basis on which electoral judgements would be made. Disestablishment was an issue which many felt should have been resolved in the 1890s, and the government was pledged to fulfil its commitment, but to do so swiftly: 'After 1900, most English observers regarded it with indifference.'[228] This may also have been related to the Liberal Party's shift in perspective from a more radical approach to policy, to a practical implementation of Liberal ideas. Morgan remarks that if Lloyd George, himself elected to parliament in 1890 for the constituency of Caernarfon, had previously been 'obsessed with the social ascendancy of the clergy and the squirearchy,'[229] by the time of his premiership such an obsession had largely evaporated. Even by the mid-1900s, Lloyd George wanted to put disestablishment behind him and focus on economic and social reconstruction, for as Davies comments: '(he) had far bigger fish to fry than the relatively insignificant matter of Welsh ecclesiastical politics.'[230] The pressing need for economic and social reconstruction was an issue which would be heightened in urgency following the cessation of armed combat in 1918. As Morgan remarks:

> The election of 1906 introduced (an era) in which the rise of the Labour Party indicated the political advances of the industrial proletariat, a period in which economic and industrial questions would gradually displace narrower political issues such as the Lords veto or Welsh disestablishment.[231]

Political and social factors therefore played an important part in the way the Liberal party viewed the issue of disestablishment. During the forty years in which disestablishment was a matter of political interest, the approach of the Liberal Party towards it did change, and this was undoubtedly due to the personnel involved, as Bell states: 'The change from

---

[227] J. Owen, *Welsh Disestablishment and Political Tactics* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.3.
[228] K. O. Morgan, *Freedom or Sacrilege, A History of the Campaign for Welsh Disestablishment* (Penarth, 1966) p. 31.
[229] K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation, 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981), p.3.
[230] E.T. Davies, *Disestablishment and Disendowment* (Penarth, 1970), p.7.
[231] K.O. Morgan, 'Liberals, Nationalists and Mr Gladstone', *The Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1960), p.50.

Gladstone to Asquith was that from a man deeply concerned with the issues to a lawyer handling a brief.'[232] In his speeches and publications on the matter, Owen failed to recognise this substantial shift in political focus. As late as 1911, he still continued to state that the matter was of the highest importance to the government:

> it is strange statesmanship for the Government to regard the Dismemberment of the Church of England and the drastic Disendowment of its poorest Dioceses as a matter of greater urgency for national welfare than a continuous effort to solve the questions of social reform.[233]

This remark, testifies that Owen failed to recognise that the Liberal Party was merely confirming a policy decision taken over twenty years previously, rather than a party whose sole political aim was to disestablish, dismember and to disendow the established Church. It is surprising that for an individual who possessed considerable political awareness, Owen did not seek to downplay the relevance of disestablishment rather than continue to highlight the matter, and place the Liberal Party under further pressure to fulfil a commitment it held little political allegiance to following its electoral success on the national stage.

There were those, however, within the Church's campaign who maintained that the wealthy leaders of the Liberal Party sought to retain focus upon the issue of disestablishment in order to prevent the working classes from moving their attention to issues of economic grievance.[234] E.T. Davies stated: 'I am convinced that it (disestablishment) is not a popular agitation, but a manufactured one; in other words, it did not originate with the people, but is thrust upon them.'[235] Owen maintained that the government's policy was to shift the debate away from the fact that the most economically deprived within society did not possess a deep desire to see such a measure inflicted upon the established Church:

---

[232] P.M.H. Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales* (London, 1969), p. 243.
[233] J. Owen, *Welsh Disestablishment and Political Tactics* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.2.
[234] W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore, *Welsh Disestablishment and Disendowment* (London, 1912), p.16.
[235] E.T. Davies, *Disestablishment of the Church* (Towyn, 1986), p.1.

> The Government cannot have formed the intention of turning aside from the policy of social reform to attack the Church with any great enthusiasm. There is no burning desire among the masses of working men, either in Wales, or outside it, to cripple the Church for its spiritual work as Mr Asquith's drastic Bill does.[236]

What Owen did recognise nevertheless was that Welsh disestablishment was an issue which enabled the Liberal Party to retain a certain element of discipline over its Welsh MPs, viewing the matter as being an inheritance of their political past which had to be concluded:

> I observed with special interest that the main appeal of the leaders who advocate Disendowment, from the Chancellor of the Exchequer downwards, during this recent panic has been to what I may call the traditionalism of Welshmen. The appeal is that, because under very different circumstances, Welsh Nonconformist leaders of 40 years ago advocated disestablishment and disendowment, this generation is bound in honour to adhere to these traditions, though the circumstances of Wales today differ profoundly and widely from the circumstances of 40 years ago.[237]

Despite everything, there was still a recognition that any move away from supporting such a measure, which had been an ideological benchmark of the Party for decades, was nothing less than 'treachery to the cause.'[238]

Throughout the early part of the twentieth century Owen was resolved to retain the focus of the electorate on the principle of whether the disestablishment measure had democratic validity. During 1911 he met clergy and laity in twelve centres to impress upon them the continued gravity of the situation and encouraged them in their efforts on behalf of the status quo. Both he and Edwards sought to go on a political preaching campaign, not only in Wales, but also in England, in order that they might seek to encourage Conservatives and Unionists to stand firm in the face of Liberal political power. Owen garnered support from his fellow bishops and, following the publication of the intention to bring a bill before parliament he wrote to every diocesan bishop asking them to make the Welsh Church an issue at their diocesan conference. Consequently, he was invited to speak at eight English

[236] J. Owen, *The Duty and Encouragement of Welsh Churchmen* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.2.
[237] J. Owen, *Welsh Disestablishment and Political Tactics* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.8.
[238] J. Owen, *Welsh Disestablishment and Political Tactics* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.9.

diocesan conferences.[239] Owen sought to use every possible platform to argue against the Liberal Party and to dissuade its natural supporters be they in Wales or in England of the validity and electoral support for the act of disestablishment. Even as late as 1913 he appealed for their support:

> The future of the Church in Wales is not after all at the mercy of a temporary majority in the House of Commons. We shall resist the wrong and injury of this Bill all the more hopefully and effectively if we never forget that the Church in Wales is in the hands not of politicians, but of God.[240]

In 1911 when commenting on the Royal Commission, his plea for support was even more animated:

> All the power acquired by the Government is not sufficient to pass such a Bill as this, if the great body of Churchmen, of all schools of thought in England and Wales, make up their minds that this iniquity shall not be done. I am firmly convinced that the heart of the Church of England is sound and that, inspired by a sense of duty and by faith in the Divine Power which worketh righteousness, Churchmen will put Church and Country before party,[241]

Owen's appeal was made to all to place themselves at the service of the Church rather than at the service of their own political adherence, in order that the greatest injustice, as he viewed it, which could be inflicted on the Church be prevented at all costs. Public opinion was the only bulwark preventing the passing of the disestablishment legislation:

> When all is said and done, the power of public opinion remains after all the supreme form of human power in our land. The exercise of that power may or may not be rendered more difficult, more inconvenient, more momentous than it is at the present time, but be that as it may, the force of public opinion cannot but remain in our time the ultimate fact of our national life.[242]

---

[239] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p. 149.
[240] J. Owen, *The Financial Position of a Welsh Diocese and the Welsh Bill* (Carmarthen, 1913), p.12.
[241] J. Owen, *The Church in Wales Royal Commission-An Address* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.6.
[242] J. Owen, *The Present Position of the Church in Wales* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.3.

Unfortunately for Owen such a public appeal drew little support as the political arguments had moved on so considerably and most of the population no longer considered disestablishment to be a matter which worthily called upon them to alter political allegiance. Owen based his assumptions that the population would oppose the measure, upon a sense of duty and the principles of fairness, as he stated in 1911:

> in a great controversy of this kind, what tells upon public opinion is the power of moral principles, and the side on which moral convictions are strongest is bound to win. The situation therefore calls for no despondency if we do our duty and do it in time. We shall do our duty much more effectively if we have courage based upon cool calculation of the moral forces on either side.[243]

Owen maintained a resolute determination to ensure that those members of the general population who were opposed to the measure voiced their disquiet in a clear manner. This is testified by the Petition from Wales against the bill which was organised in 1911, which saw 41% of the adult population of the diocese sign their opposition to the measure. Within two of the six counties within the diocese over 50% of the population signed the petition, whilst this dropped to a figure of 35.3% within the Glamorganshire area of the diocese.[244] It is testimony to Owen's determination that as late as 1911, when many of the obstacles previously facing the measure had been overcome he was still willing to organize mass scale opposition to the measure. In addition to this, Owen argued that the numbers signing the petition were equivalent to those voting at recent by-election for candidates who were themselves opposed to disestablishment. He cited that in a recent by-election held within the Carmarthen Boroughs, some 37.7% signed the Petition whilst 39% voted for the candidate who was opposed to disestablishment. Similar figures were also available for the by-election held within the East Carmarthenshire constituency. Owen maintained that both the petition and the by-election results displayed the rising opposition which existed to the measure and he hoped that such opposition had the potential to cause disruption in any forthcoming General election. Sadly, Owen failed to recognise that the continued lack of reference to the issue of disestablishment during any of the general election campaigns of the twentieth century, together with the general political narrative of the time, was because

[243] J. Owen, *The Duty and Encouragement of Welsh Churchmen* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.3.
[244] J. Owen, *The Welsh Disestablishment Bill, Facts and Principles* (Cardiff, 1912), p.3.

politicians of all hues recognised that it was no longer a matter which roused the hearts of the majority. However, unconscious he had become of the change in social mood, Owen remained resolute in his opinion that: 'what is wrong in principle does not become right merely because 31 Welsh members of Parliament desire it.'[245]

vi-The 'Dismemberment' of the Welsh Church

> The unity of the four Welsh Dioceses with the other thirty-three Diocese of the Church of England dates back on the other hand to a period before the existence of Parliament, and was not created by the State.[246]

An issue upon which Owen felt passionately was the dismemberment of the Church. To dismember the Church would be to forcefully remove certain dioceses from their overarching structure, namely the province. This action would leave the aforesaid dioceses without full membership of the Church worldwide, because dioceses must be part of a province. These dioceses would be left without a legislative body, a metropolitan, or any sense of communion with the wider Church. Parliament, according to Owen, did have the legal right to disestablish the Church, yet it did not have the moral right to inflict dismemberment, which would be the direct result of such action. The government's policy of dismemberment was not based upon any historical foundation; Owen described it as an 'audacious proposal', which lacked any precedent in a civilized country.[247] The Dioceses of Bangor, Llandaff, St Asaph, and St David's were the oldest within the province of Canterbury, and within the whole of the Church of England, indeed the four Welsh dioceses represented the four historic Welsh principalities. Wales was the birthplace of Christianity in Britain, and yet the government was seeking to dismember the Church, so creating abject disunity. As an anonymous source stated in S.H. Gem's work on Welsh Church disestablishment: 'The proposal to sever the four oldest dioceses of the Church of England is an adaptation of the Chinese method of punishment by a thousand strokes.'[248] Lady Cavendish, a great supporter of Gladstone on most issues but not disestablishment, further remarked: 'In Wales, the proposed measure, inasmuch as it deals with four dioceses of a

[245] J. Owen, *The Welsh Disestablishment Bill, What it means* (London, 1911), p.18.
[246] J. Owen, *The Prime Minister and Welsh Disestablishment* (Carmarthen, 1909), p.2.
[247] J. Owen, *The Financial Position of a Welsh Diocese and the Welsh Bill* (Carmarthen, 1913), p. 9.
[248] S. H. Gem (ed.), *The Proposed Robbery of the Churchpeople of Wales* (Oxford, 1912), p. 27.

Church which has been to all intents and purposes, one body for at least one thousand years, would inevitably rend and disintegrate the Church of England.'[249] Parliament's dismemberment of the Church against the wishes of its members was in Owen's view entirely wrong and unjust, the Church was to become the 'victim of party politics and the subject of sectional bargains'.[250] He was supported in this viewpoint by a number of politicians including Viscount Peel, a onetime Liberal MP who defected to the Conservatives before obtaining his father's peerage, who summed up the wishes of the Church by stating:

> We do not want to be pushed out; we want to have the right to go out if we want to do so. We do not think that the State has the right to say to us on a point of this kind that we shall go out.[251]

Owen maintained that the dioceses of England and Wales had merged together, through the uniting force of Christianity, unlike the Irish Church which had been joined with the English Church by the Act of Union of 1800 and continued to maintain its own jurisdiction and did not sent representatives to the Convocations of the English Church.[252] As Owen stated in 1906: 'the fusion of the Welsh and English dioceses enforces our right to protest against the opportunist policy of the dismemberment of the Church by the State, contrary to the will of both Welsh and English Churchmen.'[253] Owen was supported in this opinion by several commentators of period, as Emery states:

> As well might one suggest that the amputation of a limb was a matter only affecting the limb and not any concern of the rest of the body … Would Mr Asquith be prepared at the like request, to grant the county councils of Wales the right for their own benefit to levy export duties on Welsh coal? Would not this also be a purely Welsh matter, worth far more to Wales than the petty plunder of the Church?[254]

Clayton also remarked:

---

[249] Lady Frederick Cavendish, *The Church in Wales* (London, 1895), p.4.
[250] J. Owen, *The Principles of the Welsh Disestablishment Bill* (Cardiff, 1909), p.11.
[251] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xxxvi, p.972.
[252] J. Owen, *The Prime Minister and Welsh Disestablishment* (London, 1909), p. 2.
[253] J. Owen, *Church Work and Church Defence* (Cardiff, 1910), p. 7.
[254] G.F. Emery, *The Peoples' Guide to the Welsh Church Disestablishment Bill* (London, 1909), p.32.

> The fusion was not a single act, but a gradual process extending over five centuries and lasting from the eighth century to the thirteenth century, a fusion in which the unifying force of Christianity was seen at work.[255]

Owen emphasised that the Churches of Wales and England were united upon a spiritual basis, in order to further the unity of the Catholic Church universal. The unity of the Church was a matter upon which Owen felt incredibly strongly, and he also recognised the need to balance local independence with central authority:

> There is truth in the principle of local independence, and there is truth in the principle of central authority …. The order of the Church of England is to combine both these sides of truth, and to guard parochial independence against losing its value by setting to balance it with diocesan unity.[256]

Further to that the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, in a pastoral letter of 1894, which was supported by thirty-one diocesan bishops, had stated that the Welsh dioceses benefited from retaining their own cultural identities and practices whilst participating in the discussions and considerations of the wider Church. The religious, social and political challenges which presented themselves to the Welsh Church, were the same for the Church in England and therefore an ability to participate in a wider discussion was of considerable value.[257] For Owen the danger was that the dismemberment of the Church could cause individual dioceses and parishes no longer to see themselves as part of a larger whole, that their understanding of the nature of the Catholicity of the Church would be diminished by the disunity being forced upon them. The concept of unity differed tremendously, in Owen's opinion, between the Church and the various nonconformist denominations. The corporate unity of the Church was a first principle issue for Churchmen, as it is an expression of the Church's very nature, however nonconformists took a very different view to this, seeing themselves as separate Christian communities which would ally together when necessary rather than seek a religious unity.[258] Owen repeatedly referenced the fact that no Act of Parliament had ever been entered upon the statute book to ensure their unity. Their

[255] H.J. Clayton, *The Indictment and Defence of the Church in Wales* (London, 1911), p.3.
[256] J. Owen, *Church Work and Church Defence* (Cardiff, 1910), p.4.
[257] J. Owen, *Mesur Dadgysylltiad i Gymru, beth ydyw* (Carmarthen, 1912), p.5.
[258] J. Owen, *The Call of the Church to Service and the Unity of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1909), p.12.

removal from such a unity could not, nor should not be undertaken by members of parliament, but rather should be the wish and desire of Church members:

> It is within the moral rights of Parliament to sever the existing relations between the Church and State, but it is not within the moral rights of Parliament to sever the existing unity of working organizations complete, in all respects, between the Welsh and English diocese of the Church without the consent of Churchmen.[259]

Reginald McKenna who served as Home Secretary under Asquith, argued that such unity had not occurred organically, but rather, as in the view of Gerald of Wales, was a measure enacted by the power of the English Crown. Owen however did not illicit total support from Churchmen in respect of the argument for the natural fusion of the Welsh and English Churches, for there were those, such as Stephen Gladstone, the Anglo-Catholic Rector of Hawarden, son of W.E. Gladstone, the sometime Prime Minister who maintained that although disestablishment would affect the privileges of the Church it would not affect her faith.[260] His argument, shared with others was that the separation of the Church would not affect her doctrine, teaching or beliefs, but merely the rights and honours which were afforded to the Church through her established status. The dismemberment of the Church would not place the Welsh Church out of communion with its English counterpart nor would it radically alter the basic understanding of the Christian faith as held by its parishioners. It is important to note that many leading figures within the campaign to prevent the disestablishment of the Welsh Church maintained that the activities of their opponents within Wales were only a 'bridge-head' for subsequently attacking the Church of England.[261] For as Selborne maintained:

> is England to be taken district by district, diocese by diocese, county by county, parish by parish? Is it to be determined by counting heads in every separate place, whether the Church of England is still to be established and endowed there or not …? The Church of Wales is part of the Church, as Wales itself is of

[259] J. Owen, *The Duty and Encouragement of Welsh Churchmen* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.8.
[260] R. L Brown, 'Traitors & Compromisers: The Shadow Side of the Church's Fight against Disestablishment' *Journal of Welsh Religious History* 3 (1995), p.38.
[261] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p.120.

> the realm, of England: What would be true of an operation of this kind anywhere else in England is true of it also in Wales …[262]

Undoubtedly Edwards and Owen sought to use this argument to heighten the sense of fear within the membership of the Church of England, that the fate likely to befall the Welsh Church could quickly become reality for them as well. For Owen, this was an issue of principle rather than personal or practical relevance. He was supported in this viewpoint by Bishop Creighton, who served as Bishop of Peterborough and Bishop of London during the late nineteenth century who stated:

> A Disestablishment Bill for Wales means a Suspensory Bill for England. About that there can be no possible doubt. It can only mean that it is found more advantageous to deal with the Church of England piecemeal … It is obvious that the Disestablishment of the Church in Wales must carry with it the whole question of the existence of a National Church.[263]

Owen's viewpoint that this was a piecemeal attack upon the Church was not a solitary voice within the public debate, but rather he gained significant support from others outside of the Church in Wales who too feared that this was an issue of principle which could potentially have a substantial impact upon the life of the Church throughout the land. The matter of dismemberment also raised significant practical issues as the twenty-four parishes within the borders of Wales were under the jurisdiction of English sees: Lichfield held one, Chester held three and Hereford held twenty. The possibility of dismemberment could therefore render Welsh citizens and communities remaining within the established Church, whilst their counterparts in other areas would have been forcibly removed from the Church of England.

For many members of the Church, the act of dismemberment was believed to be an unforgiveable mutilation, this action was contrary to their religious convictions. This was a matter to be dealt with by convocation, Owen argued, as it was a decision which affected both English and Welsh Churchmen. Owen went further than this and argued that if it concerned both Welsh and English Churchmen, then as such, it required both the support of

[262] R. Selborne, *A Defence of the Church of England against Disestablishment* (London, 1887), p.346.
[263] J. Owen, *The Present Position of the Church in Wales* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.4

English and Welsh MPs within the House of Commons, and yet in the presentation of the 1912 bill there was never a majority from both England and Wales taken together, in support of the principles contained within the bill.

The notion that this was a measure which affected England as much as Wales was wholeheartedly supported by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson. Davidson was born in 1848 and educated at Oxford. He had served for a period as the Chaplain to Archbishop Tait and his successor Archbishop Benson before being elevated to the Deanery of Windsor at a young age. He was a favourite of Queen Victoria and this resulted in him being appointed to the sees of Rochester and Winchester before being appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1903. Davidson viewed any attack upon any portion of the Church over which he ruled to be an attack on the body of the Church as a whole. As his biographer notes: 'He was a profound and convinced believer in the whole principle of establishment. The national recognition of religion was to him of inestimable importance.'[264] Davidson's support for the plight of the Welsh Church went further than sentiment. On 25 June 1914, he was responsible for the appointment of a select committee of the House of Lords to read the disestablishment bill once again. The purpose of the select committee was to firstly inquire whether the constitution of the convocations of the Church of England had ever been altered by Act of Parliament without the assent of the convocations and despite their protestations. Its secondary purpose was to consider whether the memorial attributed to Welsh nonconformists against disendowment represented a real and increasing objection to it among them. Unfortunately, the commencement of the First World War resulted in the committee being unable to report, however the establishment of such a body is a testimony to the depth of support which the Welsh bishops received from the leadership of the Church of England. Davidson was certainly convinced not only of the support of the English bishops, but also of the correct nature of their view that such dismemberment was without precedent, for as he argued in 1919:

> That reference led to the calling of a considerable amount of expert evidence before the Select Committee as to the constitutional bearing of this matter, and

[264] G.K.A. Bell, *Randall Davidson* (Oxford, 1952), p. 641.

> if any of your Lordships will be at the trouble to look at the evidence there given, there will be, I think, no doubt whatever in your minds that had that Committee been able to make a Report it must have stated quite specifically that there was no precedent whatever for the action which Parliament had at that moment provisionally taken.[265]

Davidson went further by arguing that such dismemberment would leave the Church of England the poorer also and that he, together with others, objected to this statutory interference:

> We have learnt to value the presence of our four Welsh brethren so highly that the loss to us would be very great if or when they leave our Convocation House, and I am certain that the same feeling is entertained in the Lower House.[266]

Davidson's predecessor, Archbishop Frederick Temple had also spoken passionately in favour of defending the rights of the Welsh in 1892, when he stated:

> We do not treat it as if this was a special attack on Wales, and Wales alone. We treat it as an attack on ourselves, and so treating it, we shall be as determined in the defence of that part of the Church as should be in defence of the Church established here …[267]

Archbishop Benson had also spoken in stoic defence of the Welsh Church at the Rhyl Congress in 1891 when he stated:

> But you, who are our eldest selves, fountain of our episcopacy, the very designers of our sanctuaries, the primeval British dioceses, from whom our very realm derives its only title to be called by its proudest name of Great Britain, I come from the steps of the chair of Augustine, your younger ally, to tell you that, by the Benediction of God, we will not quietly see you disinherited.[268]

Interestingly however there were leading proponents of disestablishment within the life of the English Church. Bishops Gore of Oxford and Edward Lee-Hick of Lincoln were both

---

[265] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xxxvi, p. 966.
[266] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xxxvi, p. 968.
[267] J. Owen, *An address on the Present Position of the Church in Wales* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.8.
[268] J. Owen, *Principles of Welsh Church Defence* (Carmarthen, 1906), p.2.

in favour of disestablishment and spoke accordingly in the debates of 1912 and 1913. Gore like many Anglo-Catholics of his era believed that the connection of the Church to the state inhibited the Anglican Church from ministering to the poor and the needy in the same way as had been achieved by the Roman Catholic Church and the Salvation Army.[269] For many Anglo-Catholics the notion of disestablishment was appealing because it would, in their opinion, enable them to be free of state interference, 'unfettered by any legal or doctrinal restraint.'[270] It was their devotion to apostolic authority which led them to challenge the notion that the Church should be subjected to the possible heretical decisions of any political government. For it is worth recalling that whatever religious affiliation the prime minister of the day possessed, within their hands lay a substantial amount of patronage, particularly in relation to episcopal appointments. Anglo-Catholics did not accept that the state had been involved in the establishment or endowment of the Church, but rather that it was the pious intention of individuals combined with the visionary work of bishops which had established the parochial system. Anglo-Catholic clergy within the Diocese of Llandaff, such as F. J. Beck of the Parish of Roath (where Justice Sankey was a parishioner) and J.W. Ward of St Mary's Cardiff both spoke in 1885 of disestablishment being the vehicle towards the full freedom of the Church.[271] Ironically there were those within the Church who believed that disestablishment would actually rid the Anglican Church of ritualists. One prominent campaigner in this respect was Revd John Griffith, who served as Vicar of Aberdare between 1846 and 1859, and Rector of Merthyr Tydfil from 1859 until his death in 1885. Griffith was vociferous in later years regarding the need for disestablishment, stating in 1883 that: 'I have been for years convinced that nothing but Disestablishment, the separation of the Church from the State, can ever reform the Church in Wales.'[272] For those who shared Griffith's view, the work that Owen was doing in seeking to defend the Church's position only enabled those whom he theologically disagreed with to flourish. There were also others such as the Revd Arthur Wade-Evans who maintained that disestablishment would not be an unmitigated disaster but rather could possibly be a distinct blessing for the

[269] K. O. Morgan, *Freedom or Sacrilege, A History of the Campaign for Welsh Disestablishment* (Penarth, 1966) p. 27.
[270] R. L. Brown, 'Traitors & Compromisers: The Shadow Side of the Church's Fight against Disestablishment' *Journal of Welsh Religious History* 3 (1995), p. 38.
[271] R. L. Brown, 'Traitors & Compromisers: The Shadow Side of the Church's Fight against Disestablishment' *Journal of Welsh Religious History* 3 (1995), p.38.
[272] W.W. Price, 'John Griffith', *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, (London, 1959).

Church.[273] Liberationists within the nonconformist tradition also saw disestablishment as an opportunity to redefine Protestant values within the life of the nation:

> Even if the Church were the very formation of orthodoxy, and all its clergy faithful preachers of the pure Gospel of Christ, and administrators of New Testament ordinances, we should plead for this (disestablishment) …. In our large towns and in country villages we have practically the millinery and candles and altars of the Popish Church; and thousands have passed the 'half-way-house' to Rome. Like full blown Papists, they teach Apostolical succession and baptismal regeneration; they practice auricular confession, the worship of the Virgin, the invocation of saints, the setting up of images, the veneration of relics, prayers for the dead and extreme unction.[274]

Interestingly it was from the Roman Catholic Church that Owen and other campaigners gained some of their most vocal support. Cardinal Manning, who himself had been an Anglican Archdeacon during his life, believed that although the Anglican Church did have her faults it was of value as a teaching body, which maintained Christian truth throughout the land. Furthermore, he stated:

> If the Established Churches of this country be regarded in no other light than as elementary catechetical schools-and they are, indeed, a great deal more-which have sustained and are sustaining a large measure, though sadly mutilated of our Christian traditions, nevertheless, even as catechetical schools, together with the large system of Christian education maintained by them, they ought not be hindered in their action by revolutionary measurers, much less ought they to be destroyed.[275]

Owen therefore did have some unlikely allies in his campaign, however for many nonconformists and Churchmen alike, disestablishment was an opportunity to reform the Church. The leading episcopal proponent was John Percival of Hereford. During his time as headmaster of Rugby School he had written several times in leading papers regarding the need to disestablish the Church, and so appalled was Queen Victoria by his remarks that she tried to block his episcopal appointment by Prime Minister Rosebery: 'It was a bitter

[273] A. Wade-Evans, *Papers for Thinking Welshmen* (London, 1907), pp.59-63.
[274] W. Edwards, *Four Centuries of Nonconformist Disabilities 1500-1912* (London, 1915), pp.136-40.
[275] F.E. Gillant Smith, 'Some Notes on Disestablishment', *Catholic World* LXI (1895), p.340.

moment for a queen who believed that disestablishment was a violation of her coronation oath.'[276]

Owen was consistent in presenting the view that the state had no right to interfere in the organizational structures of the Church. He was challenged on this by the Earl Beauchamp who maintained in his speech in the House of Lords in 1913 that the issue of whether the state could disestablish and dismember a Church had already been settled by the Irish precedent.[277] Owen argued that Welsh chapters and clergy had been sending proctors to the Convocation of Canterbury for at least two and a half centuries before there were any Welsh representatives sitting in Westminster.[278] Wales had been represented at a national religious level for a much more considerable length of time than any form of political representation had existed. The Irish precedent was entirely different, and could not be used to support the argument in favour of dismembering the Church. The Welsh and English Church had merged naturally he maintained, and this was beneficial for Christianity within the British Isles. Beauchamp's argument in relation to the Irish precedent, is certainly questionable, as it would be impossible to overlook that Irish nationalism, and thereby the campaign to disestablish the Anglican Church within that nation, was undoubtedly linked to the long-term political goal of separation and home rule. By comparison in Wales the issue of disestablishment, although undoubtedly linked to the rise of Welsh nationalism from the 1880s onwards, had little or no connection with a pursuant goal of seeking separation. Disestablishment within Wales would not lead to any major change in the political fabric of the United Kingdom.[279]

Owen also stated that the nonconformists were given institutional freedom, a right which the Church had been denied. At a meeting in Llandrindod Wells in 1909, the nonconformists decided that it would not be beneficial to constitute a separate National Free Church Council for Wales to 'suit the political views of the Welsh Nationalist party'.[280] The nonconformists had a free choice in the direction, constitution and structure of their

[276] F. Knight in G.Williams, W. Jacob, N. Yates & F. Knight, *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment 1603-1920* (Cardiff, 2007), p.325.
[277] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xiii, 1014.
[278] J. Owen, *Church Work and Church Defence* (Cardiff, 1910), p. 6.
[279] K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation, 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981), p.40.
[280] J. Owen, *Welsh Disestablishment and Political Tactics* (Carmarthen, 1911), p. 5.

body, a choice, Owen maintained, which was denied to the Church. Liberal MPs were to decide upon the future of the Church in Wales, and he argued that this violated the principles of religious equality and liberty to which the Liberals stated that they were committed.[281] Religious liberty was, Owen maintained, not served by the breaking up of a religious body into two parts by an act of parliament, and that such a measure was nothing less than an act of 'tyranny'.[282] He argued passionately that religious liberty was being destroyed by this act:

> it is nothing less than a flagrant violation of the principle of religious liberty. What religious liberty means is that the persons directly concerned, whether individuals or societies, are to be free to decide for themselves what is for their religious welfare, instead of anybody else deciding it for them.[283]

The decision to dismember the Church was, in Owen's opinion, an act of religious interference which displayed nothing of libertarian principles. He believed that the Liberal Party were seeking both to defend and to advance the libertarian principle within wider society, but as he stated in 1906: 'There is no religious body which would not cry out against its own forcible dismemberment by the State as an outrage upon religious liberty.'[284] He attacked the government for its unfair treatment of the Church, and attempted to display that Welsh Liberal MPs were not interested in any sense of justice, but rather a desire to fulfil an ideological commitment, which had no political precedent. In his address to the St Davids Diocesan Conference in September 1910 he stated: 'The Bill singled out one and only one of the religious communions at work in Wales for forcible isolation within the geographical border line which divides Wales from England.'[285] To do this, Owen maintained, at a time when the Church faced such challenging issues, caused not by any matter peculiar only to Wales, but due to the substantial social changes impacting upon the nation, was to rob the Church in Wales of the support, resources and wider vision which its membership of the Church of England allowed. In 1911 Owen challenged the government's ideological viewpoint on the proposition of religious equality:

---

[281] J. Owen, *The Dismemberment of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1913), p. 1.
[282] J. Owen, *The Dismemberment of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1913), p. 1.
[283] J. Owen, *The Duty and Encouragement of Welsh Churchmen* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.7.
[284] J. Owen, *Principles of Welsh Church Defence* (Carmarthen, 1906), p.6.
[285] J. Owen, 'Presidential Address at the St Davids Diocesan Conference at Aberystwyth', 21 September 1910.

> We challenge that idea as an idea wrong at the roots, as a caricature of 'religious equality', and we say that Parliament ought to give the oldest and the largest religious body in the land the same fair play and the same consideration as it gives to all the rest.[286]

Owen's arguments regarding the unjust and unequal treatment of the Church by the Government was supported by Lord Dynevor who stated that:

> No Nonconformist in Wales is forbidden to attend the National Free Church Council of England and Wales, but the Church in Wales is forbidden to send her representatives to her National Council—the Convocation of Canterbury.[287]

In a speech given in 1911, Owen noted that nonconformity lacked consistency when it came to the issue of dismemberment. He highlighted that the Free Church Council had refused to pass a measure which would have enabled the creation of a separate Free Church Council for Wales, the defeat of the measure being largely due to the general secretary questioning how such a move would strengthen the organization and that Wales did not require a separate entity for every organization.[288] Owen described their arguments as being hypocritical and lacking political principles, their support for dismemberment was opportunistic rather than ideological:

> It is probable that religious historians of the future will find that the Free Church Council has done more harm than good to religion among Welsh Nonconformists by its unreasonable efforts to dismember the Church and to secularise religious endowments.[289]

In 1909 at the Church Congress Owen sought to highlight that nonconformists in favour of the measure displayed little sympathy with their opponents, and thereby those whom they were called to serve. Sympathy for the plight of the Church in this respect was not in Owen's opinion to be defined as agreeing or affecting to agree with opinions which

---

[286] J. Owen, *Welsh Disestablishment and Political Tactics* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.3.
[287] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xxxvi, p. 898.
[288] J. Owen, *The Duty and Encouragement of Welsh Churchmen* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.8.
[289] J. Owen, *The Duty and Encouragement of Welsh Churchmen* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.8.

one believed to be wrong, but rather an appreciation of a situation that is different from one's own and a real desire for the welfare of those with whom one disagrees. He stated that the Church's own failure had been when it neglected to express such sympathy: 'Church history contains many instances of the spiritual loss which the Church suffered whenever it courted popularity at the cost of principles committed to its trust.'[290] In making these remarks Owen was undoubtedly calling upon his opponents to consider the wider perspective of the debate and the desire for fairness when dealing with a body whose organizational structure was vastly different to that of its nonconformist counterparts.

Owen and his supporters also sought to emphasise that the measures contained within the disestablishment bill: the abolition of Church patronage, the abolition of Church corporations, the abolition of Church courts and Church law, together with dismemberment, were matters which solely concerned Churchmen and therefore should not be interfered with by parliamentary measure. In 1914, he invited those proposing the measure to illustrate how any of the measures contained within the bill could be justified on the plea of Welsh nationality or equality.[291] He emphasised that such a notion brought about both ecclesiastical, social and political disunity. Owen also argued that no Welsh Liberal MPs were campaigning for Welsh Home Rule with the same vociferousness as they were seeking the dismemberment of the Church, and yet why was religious separation of greater importance than political separation?

In 1909 Owen sought to use his address at the Church Congress held in Swansea to maintain that those in favour of dismemberment were acting in such a manner because they failed to recognise that there could be unity within variety. He argued that nonconformists throughout their history had failed to conserve a significant element of distinctiveness of the traditional nonconformist doctrines and had placed greater emphasis on aspects of social and political life which were significantly less important. He maintained that such actions were demonstrated by their whole-hearted support for the Welsh national movement to the exclusion of the changing social and cultural life of the nation. The goal of

[290] J. Owen, *The Call of the Church to Service and the Unity of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1909), p.8.
[291] J. Owen, *Welsh Nationality and the Welsh Church Bill, Mr Asquith's Tactics and Pledges* (Carmarthen, 1914), p.6.

national unity for nonconformists seemed to be viewed as more sacred than any ecclesiastical or religious unity.[292] In his pamphlet written on the subject in 1911 he maintained that 'the assumption of the permanence of this sense of antagonism (between Church and Chapel) which underlies the present proposal to reconstruct Welsh National Life on a secular basis is unsound.'[293] In this statement, we can see Owen's own background coming to the fore, with a deep desire to recognise that the divisions within Christianity were not as great as the factors which bound Christians together in a common faith. Owen was ever the optimist, that denominations would recognise their common cause above those issues which divided them, and that disestablishment and disendowment would merely sow further seeds of division and place the life of the nation, which they were all called to serve, at risk.

Owen also realised that to combat the arguments in favour of disestablishment he would have to prove that the Church had reformed itself and was progressing. He was determined to change the Church's image which was based upon assumptions taken from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He believed that through publicizing the statistical growth within his own diocese, he would display the Church's commitment to serving the people of Wales, and its progression in doing so. He noted that between 1871 and 1901 the population of his diocese had increased by 13.31%, whilst the increase in communicants was 139.6%, confirmations had risen by 82.7%, and Sunday school scholars had risen by 91%.[294] The Church had progressed in the opinion of Owen, and yet those advocating its disestablishment had failed to recognise this. The total number of parishes and Church buildings within Wales had increased from 1,040 in 1831 to 1,867 in 1906; the number of resident clergy had also increased from 727 in 1831 to 1,537 in 1906.[295] The total percentage of the population who made their Easter communion within the Diocese of St David's was 8.68%, compared with 6.28% in England, confirmations were also higher by 2.13% in the St David's Diocese, compared with 2.06% in England.[296] Further to this he noted that his own diocese where 301 out of a total of 371 incumbencies were rural, and

[292] J. Owen, *The Call of the Church to Service and the Unity of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1909), p.13.
[293] J. Owen, *The Welsh Disestablishment Bill, What it means* (London, 1911), p.6.
[294] J. Owen, *The Church in Wales Royal Commission-An Address* (Carmarthen, 1911), p. 5.
[295] *Notes on the Report of the Royal Commission on the Church of England and other Religious bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire* (London, 1911), p. 16.
[296] J. Owen, *The Church in Wales Royal Commission: An Address* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.4.

where the population of this rural area decreased by 31,540 between 1881 and 1901, the number of communicants actually rose between 1880 and 1905/6 by 10,781.[297] In his submission to the Royal Commission, Owen had shown that the Church's growth was not confined to one division of the nation, whether industrial, rural or urban, but rather that the Church was growing as a whole in each of these significant areas. Through his speeches, articles, and essays Owen attempted to display that the Church was not a stagnant institution which was unwilling to develop or reform, and which was negligent in serving the people of Wales, but rather that it was progressing towards a better future. It was a Church, which as Gladstone commented in 1891, was 'an advancing Church, a living Church, and a rising Church.'[298] Owen testifies to this in his address to the Church Congress in Swansea in October 1909 and his heavy emphasis on the continual need for Church renewal and the need to tackle the myriad social issues of the day:

> The complexity of modern life and modern thought makes this call upon the Church today as difficult as it is urgent. From the very first the Church of Christ has been called upon from age to age to face perplexing problems which baffled human wisdom, and the history of the Church shews that the measure of its success or failure to surmount difficulties has been in exact proportion of its faith in the Divine power which always is the other side of the Divine call.[299]

Owen's determination in proving the active nature of the Church had been affirmed by his predecessor, Basil Jones, who remarked in his charge to the clergy of 1877 that the Church at the parish level, at least now presented 'an appearance of life and reality' which had been substantially absent for most of the early and mid-nineteenth century.[300] In 1889 Dean Edwards went as far as to say that the Church in Wales had become 'all things to all men that she might by all means save some.'[301] The Church at the beginning of the twentieth century was therefore better equipped for the task of mission than she had been for several centuries before. Owen recorded the substantial changes which had occurred in one town alone in the fortunes of the Church when delivering his Swansea address in 1909. In it he noted that within the town of Swansea the number of parishes had increased from

---

[297] J. Owen, *The Church in Wales Royal Commission: An Address* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.5.
[298] K.O. Morgan, 'Gladstone and Wales', *Welsh History Review* 1/1 (1960), p.75.
[299] J. Owen, *The Call of the Church to Service and the Unity of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1909), p.4.
[300] B. Jones, *Primary Charge to the Clergy of St Davids* (London, 1877), p.16.
[301] H.T. Edwards, *Wales and the Welsh Church,* (London, 1889), p.290.

seven to thirteen, the number of churches from fourteen to thirty-one, the number of clergy from twenty to forty-four and the number of communicants had increased by 350% during the twenty years between 1881 and 1901.[302] This within the context of a community which had also witnessed a substantial increase in the ministry and provision of nonconformity during the same period.

The need to continually publicise the development, growth and change of the Church was due in part to the context in which Owen and his supporters found themselves. On regular occasions misinformation was fed to the public and to the press regarding the state of the Church. In May 1912 for example McKenna, the Home Secretary made several inaccurate statements about the situation of the Church in Cardiff during the second reading of the bill. He first claimed that there were only thirteen Anglican Churches within the city of Cardiff, a claim which he was forced to retract, following a flurry of correspondence with the Bishop of St Asaph on the pages of *The Times*. He then maintained that there were only a small number of mission centres in Cardiff, when there were in fact twenty-six. Such was the level of misleading information, that McKenna was forced to make a statement to the House of Commons apologising for his inaccuracies.[303] Owen used this example to identify that not only were Liberal MPs seeking to mislead the public, but the reliability of the information which they presented questioned the trustworthy nature of the content of their arguments relating to other matters concerning the disestablishment campaign.

[302] J. Owen, *The Call of the Church to Service and the Unity of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1909), p.9.
[303] J. Owen. *Three addresses on the Disestablishment Bill* (Carmarthen, 1912), p.2.

Chapter 3 - The Campaign against Disendowment

'Disestablishment is only a euphemism for plundering and robbing'.[1]

Owen did not merely focus his campaign upon disestablishment; he also fought against the measures to disendow the Church. Disendowment, as defined in all four of the Welsh Church bills proposed that the Church should lose all the endowments it had received before 1703, although this date was later placed back to 1662.[2] The Church's income was predominantly derived from two sources: voluntary contributions, and endowments. Most of the Church's endowments had been received during the medieval and early modern era and therefore disendowment would result in the Church losing a very substantial percentage of its income. E.T. Davies states that the annual value of Welsh Church property to be secularized by the 1909 bill amounted to over £158,000.[3] Within Owen's own diocese it was estimated that this action would cause the Church to lose £87,500 of her £94,000 endowment, thereby rendering her with only £6,500 remaining.[4]

Owen believed that it was his duty to fight disendowment because such a measure would cripple the mission and ministry of the Church. He argued that the Church needed a stable financial foundation for it to function effectively:

> *Nid yw swm ei gwaddoliadau ond bychan, ond pe traswfeddiannid hwy er mwyn eu defnyddio i amcanion eraill y canlyniad fyddai parlysu Gwaith yr Egwlys am o leiaf un genhedlaeth ac ni gallai Ymneilltuwyr nac Eglwyswyr edrych yn ôl ar hynny yn y dyfodol a theimlo'n dawel*.[5]

Owen and his contemporaries would have recognised that the income which the Church received in the form of grants from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners was heavily subsidised by the English Church. The Welsh Church's disendowment and dismemberment would

---

[1] S.H. Gem (ed.) *The Proposed Robbery of the Churchpeople of Wales* (Oxford, 1912), p. 18.
[2] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p. 134.
[3] E.T. Davies, *Disestablishment and Disendowment* (Penarth, 1970), p. 8.
[4] J. Owen, 'Presidential Address at the St Davids Diocesan Conference at Aberystwyth', 21 September 1910.
[5] 'The sum of our endowments is only small, but were they directed to other uses the result would be to paralyze the work of the Church for at least a generation and in the future neither Nonconformists nor Churchmen could look back at that and feel at ease', J. Owen, *Mesur Dadgysylltiad i Gymru, beth ydyw* (Carmarthen, 1912), p.2

therefore raise significant financial issues for its future and effective ministry. It was estimated that the difference between property income and grants awarded at the turn of the twentieth century was somewhere in the region of £25,000.[6]

The issue was very contentious, because disendowment was seen by Liberal MPs as being essential to the disestablishment campaign, the corollary to disestablishment was disendowment, and in the eyes of the Liberal campaigners, both measures would benefit the Church. Although the MP Edward Miall, a Congregationalist minister, had declared as early as 1873 that there was nothing easier than to separate the issue of disestablishment from the principle of disendowment, even though he was himself in favour of such a combined measure. In 1895 Griffith Boscawen had moved to divide the first bill into two sections; disestablishment and disendowment, but Asquith blocked the effort.[7]

According to its opponents the Church's privileged position within society was based not only upon its status as an established Church, but also upon its superior financial position in comparison with the nonconformist denominations. Leading proponents of the argument to disestablish the Church maintained that the faith of the laity would be strengthened by forcing the membership of the Anglican Church to provide for itself rather than seeking support from historic endowments. This is a somewhat surprising argument as it would be quite unprecedented for voluntary gifts, at a time of developing economic and social pressure, to balance the loss of confiscated endowments, which ran into the millions and not the hundreds. For those in favour of such a measure the Church was accused of benefiting from endowments which were not meant solely for the use of the Church, but rather for the good of the whole nation. Therefore, in the eyes of the proponents of the bills, disendowment was a non-negotiable element of the proposals:

> When Mr Churchill maintained that a majority of Welsh members of Parliament had a right to demand a measure of 'religious equality' he does not seem to have known that according to the view of these honourable gentlemen, disestablishment without disendowment is an 'academical and infinitesimal

[6] P.M.H. Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales* (London, 1969), p.235
[7] J. Owen, *The Principles of the Welsh Disestablishment Bill* (Cardiff, 1909), p.22.

> reform' which is not 'worth asking for, much less fighting for,' and that 'the only sort of programme worth having' is a 'programme with money at the back of it.[8]

Political and financial goals were inextricably linked, as had been the case during the latter part of the nineteenth century when considering the similar battle fought over the proper application and nature of the tithe. Owen did not view disendowment as being an inextricably linked issue, stating for example in 1909 that: 'it seems to be a principle with its promoters that disendowment is a reasonable consequence of disestablishment. I cannot see it.'[9] Brown notes, however, that for those pursuing the disestablishment of the Anglican Church, disendowment had to be a complementary item.[10] For in the eyes of the opponents of the Church, disestablishment and disendowment combined offered an opportunity for the Welsh people to be free in every conceivable way from the established influence of the Church. There were some who had suggested to Owen that he should consider desisting from fighting against disestablishment to prevent disendowment, however he recognised that: 'since the avowed object of the Welsh promoters of the Bill is Disendowment even more than Disestablishment.'[11]

Owen was vociferous in his belief that disendowment was neither an essential, nor necessary part of the disestablishment campaign. He was not alone in the view that disestablishment did not, nor should not, mean disendowment. The Bangor Scheme of 1895 argued that the two issues should be dealt with separately.[12] This scheme was proposed by the barrister Arthur Pryce, the Warden of Bangor Divinity School, Revd R. E. Jones, Revd Thomas Edwin Jones, Revd D.G. Davies and Revd Edmund Osborne Jones who were incumbents of Bangor, Welshpool and Llanidloes respectively. This group had also sought to involve Hartwell Jones in their work, but this failed. The scheme consisted of six major points of reform, which the authors felt were necessary for the future success of the Church. Included in these reforms was a desire to see the tithe split into three parts- educational work, the relief of the poor rate, and income for the individual dioceses. In the

---

[8] J. Owen, *The Financial Position of a Welsh Diocese and the Welsh Bill* (Carmarthen, 1913), p.10,
[9] J. Owen, *The Principles of the Welsh Disestablishment Bill* (Cardiff, 1909), p. 21.
[10] R. Brown, 'The Shadow Side of the Church's Fight against Disestablishment, *Journal of Welsh Religious History*, 3, (1995), p.35.
[11] J. Owen, *The Welsh Disestablishment Bill, Facts and Principles* (Cardiff, 1912), p.5.
[12] R. A Renowden, *Genial, Kind Divine, Watkin Hebert Williams 1845-1944* (Denbigh, 1988), p. 146.

eyes of those proposing the Bangor Scheme, disendowment was not a necessary component for any discussion regarding the validity of disestablishment. This call to separate the two issues, had gone unaddressed even by Churchmen as far back as the latter part of the nineteenth century. Owen accepted that there were those who wished to see the Church disestablished, but he could not believe that Christians were willing to see religious endowments secularised. He trusted the nonconformists to have the moral integrity to oppose such a notion. That the idea that his Calvinistic Methodist upbringing led him to believe that Liberal MPs would not seek to gain maximum capital benefit out of the measure does seem to display an element of political naivety.

Owen was vociferous in his belief that the public were being deceived regarding the nature of the disestablishment bill. He insisted on highlighting that the 1909 bill,[13] contained thirty-four clauses, of which, twenty-six dealt solely with disendowment. Over 75% of the bill was concerned solely with material issues and on the floor of the House of Commons less than 25% of the time allocated to the 1912 bill related to disestablishment, with the rest focusing on the issue of disendowment. To educate the populace Owen encouraged Frank Morgan to create a 'Syllabus of Instruction on Disendowment' in order that Churchmen might 'dispel the ignorance of the people about Mr Asquith's Bill.'[14] He was supported in this by many within the Church, including the Bishop of London who stated in House of Lords in 1913 that:

> Then there is the idea that there is something altogether radically wrong in endowment. Then why should the Nonconformist bodies-small blame to them- spend so much time and trouble now in building up sustenation funds, which are practically endowments?[15]

Owen sought to show that the campaign to disestablish the Church was not based upon a principle of religious equality, but rather a desire to plunder the Church, and that nonconformist bodies could endow themselves without risking any form of government intervention. Historical perspective provides an opportunity to recognise that after several

[13] J. Owen, *The Principles of the Welsh Disestablishment Bill* (Cardiff, 1909), p. 5.
[14] J. Owen, 'Presidential Address at the St Davids Diocesan Conference at Aberystwyth', 21 September 1910
[15] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xiii, 1090.

decades of seeking disestablishment, in many cases the political arguments were so spent that the financial gain to be derived from disestablishment was by far the greater prize now on offer to leaders of both religious and political nonconformity. Nevertheless, Owen's talents in political campaigning in respect of disendowment cannot be underestimated, as Bell states:

> Owen was an effective pamphleteer, with a gift for the striking simplification of an issue-as when he hammered away at the slogan that the 1909 Bill would leave only 1s.4d. in the pound of the endowments in his own diocese.[16]

Owen's gifts in both statistics and political campaigning stood him in good stead to make an effective and far-reaching contribution to the nature of the debate surrounding disendowment.

The main argument placed forward by those in favour of disendowment was that the Church did not have the right of possession to its endowments. Their ideology was based upon the concept that all pre-1662 endowments had been entrusted to the Church for the good of the nation and that as the Church no longer ministered to more than 25% of the population of Wales, why should its members alone benefit from such endowments? Lloyd George described the 1909 bill as 'A Bill to restore our National Endowments to National purposes.'[17] The monies received since 1662 were not to be touched, because it was felt that no pressure had been placed upon individuals to adhere to the established Church since the Toleration Act of 1689, which had permitted relative freedom of worship, and therefore from that period onwards, contributions were voluntary.

Nonconformists believed they had made a concession in this matter by moving the date of the secularization of Church property from 1703, as it stood in the 1894 bill, to 1662, for all the subsequent bills. Owen, along with most Churchmen considered this to be a pathetic offer, which in the case of his diocese amounted to only an increase in income of £25p.a.[18] He argued that the Church did not have enough of an endowment to provide for

[16] P.M.H. Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales* (London, 1969), p. 263.
[17] J. Owen, *Welsh Disestablishment and Political Tactics* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.11.
[18] J. Owen, *Mesur Dadgysylltiad i Gymru, beth ydyw* (Carmarthen, 1912), p. 7.

the service it was presently offering. As he stated during the final year of the campaign in 1913:

> The Bill was unpopular in the country, because it was felt to be a mean thing for the wealthiest state in the world wantonly to confiscate the meagre endowment of the four poorest dioceses of the Church.[19]

Owen was indignant at the fact that several Welsh MPs had annual incomes which were larger than the total income of the Church in Wales,[20] an issue that was highlighted not only by himself but also by the Bishop of St Asaph and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Another critic of the move to disendow the Church was Lord Selborne. Selborne was a Conservative politician who later became a Liberal, serving twice as Lord Chancellor. He broke away from the Liberal Party in 1885 over Irish Home Rule and came to the defence of the Church in his work which was published in 1887.[21] In this work he argued fiercely against the principle which the Liberals sought to advance, namely financial equality between denominations. Throughout the body of text, he demonstrates the unfair treatment of the Church, and that religious equality would require the Church to be left with her endowments in their entirety. For as Selborne argues:

> Nobody that I am aware of, proposes to apply any such principle to Nonconformist chapels of endowments; to inquire whether Wesleyans have more than Baptists, or Baptists than Independents; or to take all that any of them may have into the hands of the State, with a view to let out their chapels and distribute their funds equally among all denominations, or for the general purposes of the nation. Nor am I aware that any one expects that sort of equality to be a result of Disestablishment and Disendowment.[22]

The notion of financial equality between denominations was therefore hotly contested by both political and religious leaders alike. Owen, like Selborne, maintained that such a position could never be fully achieved without a radical overhaul of each denomination,

---

[19] J. Owen, *The Dismemberment of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1913), p. 2.
[20] J. Owen, *An Address on the Present Position of the Church in Wales* (Carmarthen, 1911), p. 7.
[21] R. Selborne, *A Defence of the Church of England against Disestablishment* (London, 1887).
[22] R. Selborne, *A Defence of the Church of England against Disestablishment* (London, 1887). p. 316

with each denomination retaining the same financial position for the foreseeable future, otherwise inequality might arise again, as Selborne stated:

> Are the possessions of A to be taken and given to B who has less? Are the endowments of the Welseyans to be taken because they happen to have more than the Baptists or the Baptists' to be taken because they have more than the Independents? If the Church of England should be reendowed by her present faithful laity, will there come a time when she must be disendowed a second time on the pretence again of 'equality'? If not, why is she to be disendowed on that pretence now, because in past ages of her history, this has been already done for her?[23]

Owen himself echoed these sentiments in a speech given in 1906 when he stated:

> It cannot be alleged that the excess of Church endowments justifies the State in singling out the Church for special treatment, since the insufficiency of its ancient endowments for its growing work at the present time, is patent to all. Nor do eulogies of the voluntary principle constitute any valid reason for Disendowment, since its endowments do not prevent the Church from raising a large an growing amount in annual voluntary contributions, whilst at the same time other religious bodies find it more and more necessary to supplement their annual voluntary contributions by a reserve fund of endowments.[24]

The argument was clear, that the income which the Church received from parochial endowment could never truly be utilised for the benefit of all, and that, as such, each denomination should be entitled to retain its current position. The defenders of the Church maintained that its possessions were corporate property and no more applicable for the use of the entire Christian nation that the holdings of any other national institution:

> This argument assumes that Church endowments are funds at present belonging, in point of right and title, to the public treasury, and their appropriation to Church purposes to be the same thing in substance as if they were monies voted by Parliament. Both assumptions are legally, historically, practically, absolutely and in every sense untrue.[25]

---

[23] R. Selborne, *A Defence of the Church of England against Disestablishment* (London, 1887). p.315.
[24] J. Owen, *Principles of Welsh Church Defence* (Carmarthen, 1906), p.8.
[25] R. Selborne, *A Defence of the Church of England against Disestablishment* (London, 1887). p.179.

As the nature of the holding of such endowment was variable, between diocesan and provincial bodies, it was also difficult to ascertain what could be national property, for Owen maintained that the origin of Church endowments was in principle the same in Wales as it was in England. In May 1912 however, Lloyd George caused controversy by accusing aristocratic defenders of the Welsh Church of being beneficiaries of the plunder of Henry VIII, he went as far as to state that their hands were 'dripping with the fat of sacrilege.'[26] Evans in his work on disestablishment maintained that only financial equality could ensure that not one denomination was benefitting from the state:

> So long as the Anglican clergy in Wales are supported to the extent of a quarter of a million a year from national endowments, all other Churches are heavily handicapped. The state should be neutral in matters of religion, for all citizens have equal rights …. When the state has a favourite it must also have a victim.[27]

For the proponents of this measure, financial equality was as important a principle as that of religious equality. However, there were those contemporaries of Owen, such as Clayton, who maintained that nonconformists had forfeited their rights to a share in the Church's endowments by their voluntary separation from the establishment.[28] Such a view was not popular with many, who thought of it as being at best insincere and at worst prejudicial.

The income which the Church derived from parochial endowment in 1911 stood at £243,987. Within this income, £35,936 came from land; £110,737 was derived from tithe rent charge, and £97,314 was derived from other sources. In addition to this £29,760 of private benefactions were held by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners on behalf of the Church in Wales. Each diocese also had a Cathedral and an episcopal palace and across Wales there were 1,527 parish churches and chapels-of-ease, 811 parsonage houses together with countless parish houses, mission rooms, schools and other property. The total amount of Church endowment to be deprived by the state is disputed within the sources. In his 1911 address to the diocesan conference, Owen stated that the Church would be left with

[26] K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation, 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981), p.142.
[27] H. Evans, *The Case for Disestablishment* (Carmarthen, 1907), p.9.
[28] H.J. Clayton, *The Indictment and Defence of the Church in Wales* (London, 1911), p.22.

£20,584 of its total endowment.[29] This would have resulted in over 50% of Welsh incumbencies being left without a single penny of endowment, and a further 132 left with less than £10p.a. K.O. Morgan states that disendowment would result in the Church retaining 6s 8d. in the pound, whilst at the time leading opponents of the measure stated that it was 1s 5½d. in the pound.[30] Owen argued that to deprive the Church of such a large proportion of its income would immobilise it and that it would prevent it from ministering to the people, a great many of whom required the institution to play a substantial role in their social welfare.

In addition to endowments, the proponents of disendowment also wished to see the removal of the income which the Church derived from glebe land. These gifts of land were attached to parsonages and often consisted of gardens and fields. These had originally been provided in order that in the medieval period the priest, if resident within the parish, would, through the office of his household, be able to provide for his own needs. Many bishops were unprepared to consecrate a church unless the manse (the term used for the combined parsonage and glebe) was provided. This income was valued at £35,845 in 1906.[31]

Not only would the Church have been deprived of income given to it, but also the Church benefited from income which was taken from English sources. The Church in Wales was the beneficiary of £18,626 from Queen Anne's Bounty. The Queen Anne's Bounty was a source of income established in 1704 to assist with the incomes of the poorest incumbents within the established Church. A further £61,917 was given from English sources through the hands of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.[32] Therefore the total sum the Welsh Church could face the possibility of losing from English sources was £80,543 which was a considerable sum of money. To advocate the disendowment, Owen argued, would merely be placing money in the hands of the English people, when the Welsh needed it more. Here we see Owen playing upon the issue of national pride and self-worth. Owen consistently argued that the measures being presented by the proponents of disendowment would

[29] J. Owen, *Welsh Disestablishment and Political Tactics* (Carmarthen, 1911), p. 6.
[30] K. O. Morgan, *Freedom or Sacrilege, A History of the Campaign for Welsh Disestablishment* (Penarth, 1966) p. 26.
[31] C. A. H. Green 'Welsh Disestablishment' *Nineteenth Century*, LXXV, No.414 (1914), p.900.
[32] J. Owen, *Mesur Dadgysylltiad i Gymru, beth ydyw* (Carmarthen, 1912), p. 7.

merely weaken the religious life of the people of Wales as a whole. Such was his fervency and effectiveness that by December 1912, through his negotiations with the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, Owen had gained concessions worth £15,000p.a. for the Church.[33] This shows that he was committed not only to opposing the measure, but also actively seeking to reduce the effect it would have upon the Church if it was implemented.

The ideology regarding the confiscation of Church property was fiercely disputed during the campaign. Two arguments were used in favour of such action. The first was that a majority of Welsh parliamentary representatives wished it to occur, and the second was the concept that all Church property was national property.[34] Certainly it would be impossible to deny that the mandate in favour of the disestablishment of the Church was given over a successive period by the election of a majority of the Welsh Liberal MPs. The declining ministry of the Church, in the eyes of nonconformists, was Anglicanism's failure to retain the loyalty of the bulk of the people resulted in the need to reclaim that which they believed to be national property. The main basis upon which the nonconformists made their argument surrounding this issue was that the state had provided endowment for the Church at a time when the two institutions were co-extensive. One of the great difficulties surrounding the debate was that the Royal Commission, which was charged with examining the religious situation in Wales, failed to discover the origin of Church property, while its chairman refused to investigate the matter. This conclusion left opponents of disendowment in a very difficult situation as no judgment had been reached. To strengthen his argument, Owen invoked the opinions of the eminent nineteenth century Liberal historian, Professor E.A. Freeman, who stated categorically: 'Church property is not national property except in the same sense in which all property is national property.'[35] The concept of national property was therefore viewed as being entirely hypothetical and without any substantial evidential basis, and as Williams commented: 'Church property is, in fact, no more national than any other form of property. It was not given by the nation, to the nation, or for the nation.'[36]

[33] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p. 187.
[34] J. Owen, *The Welsh Disestablishment Bill, Facts and Principles* (Cardiff, 1912), p. 4.
[35] J. Owen, *The Welsh Disestablishment Bill, Facts and Principles* (Cardiff, 1912), p. 5.
[36] R. Williams, *The Attack on the Church in Wales* (London, 1912), p.58.

It is worth recalling the social context into which this argument was based. The Anglican Church was viewed, however inaccurately, as being the religious institution, which served the landed gentry and the wealthiest members of society. The nonconformist churches placed themselves socially as among the common people or '*Y Werin*' and therefore the arguments surrounding national property also related to an ongoing social battle between the privileged few and the deprived majority. The religious divides of the period provided a battlefield for this argument to be fought out. Although it is interesting to note that the disendowment of the Church would not cause a reduction in tithe payments, even to the slightest degree, a payment which had been fiercely contested by nonconformists for several generations. The 1912 bill provided for the continued collection of the tithe by the county councils, thus those who already paid tithe would continue to do so, but to another body. Indeed as W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore remarks in his work, the only difference in the position for the working classes would be that the proportion originally belonging to the Church would now be used for secular purposes.[37] Within Wales £38,968 per annum was collected in tithe by lay impropriators and that their privileged status would remain whilst the £110,737 of tithe income generated by the Church would no longer be at its disposal for reasons of religious equity and consideration for the needs of the most deprived within society. Owen viewed this argument as being totally flawed and undeniably unfair to the life and work of the Church.

Owen derided the Home Secretary in his speeches at Welshpool, Machynlleth, and Pwllheli, for the concept which he proposed, that tithe in Wales was national property, based upon his own 'freak theory' of origin.[38] McKenna was attempting to argue that tithe had been given to the Church during the twelfth century, but that it was not an intentional gift, and therefore that disendowment was merely a matter of financial justice. The Royal Commission declared this concept to be 'wrapped in obscurity'.[39] Viscount Halifax made a scathing attack upon the Liberal government in his speech in the House of Lords in 1913, claiming:

[37] W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore, *Welsh Disestablishment and Disendowment* (London, 1912), p. 85.
[38] J. Owen, *Three Addresses on the Welsh Disestablishment Bill* (Carmarthen, 1912), p. 4.
[39] J. Owen, *Three Addresses on the Welsh Disestablishment Bill* (Carmarthen, 1912), p. 2.

> that to suppose medieval persons would have ever dreamt of leaving a penny towards education except in so far as it was religious, or to the poor except in so far as the poor might be relieved through the Church, is a supposition which can only result from the most boundless ignorance, or the most unblushing audacity.[40]

But the argument in favour of disendowment continued to be strengthened by the notion that as the Church no longer ministered to the whole of Wales, neither should its endowments only be of benefit to a small percentage of the population:

> The term 'National Church' indicates that it is the Church of the entire people- the nation, and if so its property belongs to the whole nation … The legislature has invariably exercised the right of ownership over such possessions. It has devoted some to lay purposes, with the same assumption of right, as with property of the Civil Service … When the Church ceases to be co-extensive with the nation, as is the case in the Principality, the nation has the right to alter the ancient endowments, which were meant for the benefit of the whole community.[41]

Jones continues in his work to argue that as it was tribes which often had provided the Welsh Church with its endowments, and the aggregate of these tribes made up the nation, the endowments had to be viewed as truly national.[42] Those in favour of disendowment also sought to recall the historical situations in which these gifts were made. The beginning of Christian endowment within the British Isles had begun when St Augustine of Canterbury landed with his monks at Ebbsfleet and King Ethelbert of Kent provided them with a residence and a church in Canterbury. As the centuries went on, benefactions were often elicited when a leading noble was facing excommunication, or were given in lieu of an act of penance. Indeed as H. Evans stated:

> it is in the highest degree absurd to attribute a sort of sacro-sanctity to the donations of criminals, who alienated lands from their heirs or their tribes simply in the hope of escaping the due reward of their deeds in the world to come.[43]

---

[40] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xiii. 1220.
[41] G. Jones, *New Work on the Welsh Church Bill Controversy* (London, 1913), p.13.
[42] G. Jones, *New Work on the Welsh Church Bill Controversy* (London, 1913), pp.25-6.
[43] H. Evans, *The Case for Disestablishment* (Carmarthen, 1907), p.25.

Clearly there was also a precedent for the secularization of Church endowments, through the behaviour of the state during the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Most monastic institutions were dissolved during the 1530s and 1540s and the proceeds from the sales were given either to the Crown or to other institutions. If such action could have been undertaken by Act of Parliament in the sixteenth century, why not in the twentieth century? The contrary argument to this is clearly exhibited not only in Owen's writings but also in the arguments placed forth by Selborne, and by Edwards who was the author of a lengthy article in *Yr Haul* from 1907.[44] The argument placed forth by these and indeed other critics of disendowment, was that the origin of the endowments was not in dispute, that they were the gifts of individuals and not of the state. The gifts were made to a particular Church, diocese or other ecclesiastical institution, and that they were given for the use of strictly religious purposes. This notion was supported by a resolution passed at the Thirteenth Annual Meeting of the General Committee of the Central Church Committee for Defence and Instruction which stated that:

> The members of the Central Church Committee solemnly protests against any attempt to sever the organic connection of the four Welsh Diocese with the rest of the National Church or to alienate, or devote to secular uses, endowments given for the maintenance of the religious services, ministrations and teaching of the Church in the Welsh parishes and which have, from their origin and for centuries, been used for these purposes alone.[45]

Edwards in an article in *Yr Haul* highlights the fact that the very individuality of both parishes and their endowments is reflective of the individualistic nature of these benefactions.[46] Indeed had the state been involved in such a process then it would undoubtedly have been undertaken in a more systematic and clear manner. This is testified by the fact that some parishes possessed a considerable amount of endowment, often from successive generations of benefactors from the same family, whilst other parishes were in relative poverty. Of the Church in Wales's 983 incumbencies, the 1909 bill would have deprived 511 of them or their entire endowments, whilst 132 others would be left with less than £10 per

[44] A. G. Edwards, 'Dadgysylltiad a Dadwaddoliad yr Eglwys yng Nghymru', *Yr Haul* (1907), 150-68.
[45] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection-Box 7, Bundle 7.
[46] 'Dadgysylltiad a Dadwaddoliad yr Eglwys yng Nghymru', *Yr Haul* (1907), p.156.

annum.[47] The effects of the bill would therefore be immensely damaging to the vast majority of parishes, regardless of geographical or social circumstance.

Owen was not merely content in disproving the theories of his opponents, and exposing the government's treatment of the Church, he also sought to prove that the Church had progressed, and that it did not possess sufficient finances to further its ministry, or even to fully provide for the ministry it was already offering. In the Diocesan Conference held at Llandrindod Wells in 1907 the *South Wales Daily News* reported that there was a 'strong quietness' in the face of adversity, and that this strength was derived from the deepening of the Church's spirituality and the increasing effectiveness of its mission. He used the findings of the Royal Commission to illustrate that the endowments of the Church were 'very inadequate' for its growing work, and that the Church in Wales was attempting to discharge 'the sacred trust attached to its endowments'[48] as well as its English counterpart. The Royal Commission clearly depicted the situation in Wales and in England to be very similar. There was no greater failure on the part of the Welsh Church, indeed the Church and its leadership were fulfilling their obligations to the best of their ability. The geographical nature of Wales also made it much more challenging to provide the necessary clergymen to minister within certain areas. The lack of parishioners in some of the most remote areas meant that financial support from central funds was necessary to maintain a resident clergyman. The work of the Church would not be able to proceed, be furthered, or expanded, if the means necessary for such work were not provided. The loss of such a substantial amount of funds would undoubtedly punish the ministry of the Church, especially in poor or less populous areas. As a mountainous and sparsely populated country, Wales lacked the parishioners to produce the financial benefactions which were necessary to maintain a resident clergyman in every parish without historic endowments. Without the voluntary offerings of the faithful, the Church's work would have been considerably diminished from the latter part of the nineteenth century onwards. In the year 1905-06 for example the total net income of the four Welsh dioceses was £260,036 yet the amount of voluntary income raised by the four dioceses was higher, the total being £296,412.[49] This

[47] J. Owen, *The Church in Wales Royal Commission-An Address* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.6
[48] J. Owen, *The Welsh Disestablishment Bill, Facts and Principles* (Cardiff, 1912), p. 4.
[49] H.J. Clayton, *The Indictment and Defence of the Church in Wales* (London, 1911), p.7.

testifies to the fact that the Church had already moved significantly away from dependency upon endowment alone. In 1910 Owen noted that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners had augmented the stipend of every benefice with a population of over 500 to £200 per annum, and although substantial work had been done in securing further enhancements, there were still fifty-four incumbencies within the St Davids Diocese with an endowed income of less than £150 per annum, and fourteen with less than £100 per annum.[50]

> The Church by its very mission was bound to assist the whole of the community, especially those in poverty and the consequences of disendowment, as Lord Balfour of Burleigh stated in the House of Lords in 1913 were grave: 'you are proposing to cripple the greatest power that you have for good in the your land by taking away endowments which are the patrimony of the poor.'[51]

The opponents of the bill maintained that the Church was playing its social role; it was undertaking the duties entrusted to it, and the destruction of its endowments would cripple the welfare provision offered to the people of Wales: 'No serious attempt has been made to shew that, whether it be consistent with equity or not, it would at any rate be conducive to national welfare to secularize endowments given for the purposes of religion.'[52]

Owen's political adroitness can be seen in his claim that the government, which prided itself on its reform of the welfare system, would through its actions, be reducing the welfare provision offered to the people of Wales. The 'People's Budget' of 1909 introduced an old age pension, a higher rate of income tax, it sought to re-distribute wealth, and yet in its ecclesiastical policy the government was attempting to reduce the welfare provision within Wales. Here we see Owen's political cunning in attempting to shame the government into a reversal of its policy. He was also keen to emphasise that the Church's work in no way disparaged the role of the nonconformists, and he stated this clearly in an essay in 1912, that: 'the present position and endowments of the Church in Wales (do not) injure, or hinder, in any way the great and good work done by the Nonconformists in Wales.'[53] Here, as in other contexts, he was attempting to unite the forces of Christianity within Wales. He

[50] J. Owen, *Principles of Welsh Church Defence* (Carmarthen, 1906), p.7.
[51] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xiii. 1129.
[52] J. Owen, *Principles of Welsh Church Defence* (Carmarthen, 1906), p.7.
[53] J. Owen, *The Welsh Disestablishment Bill, Facts and Principles* (Cardiff, 1912), p. 4.

displayed himself as a patriot who was seeking to reconcile the people, and to save the nation from making a grave error. His argument is clear: secularization of Church property will not benefit either Church or Chapel. The plundering of the wealth of the Church for the benefit of local authorities and the University of Wales would merely diminish the role of religion within Wales: '*Mae'n amddifadu crefydd o waddoliadau roddwyd at achos crefydd yn wirfoddol, ac yn defnyddio'r arian at amcanion eraill.*'[54] It would be Christianity itself and not the Church, that would be damaged by such a measure. Owen played out clearly the effect of such a decision: that the nation would be impoverished on a religious, social and cultural level.

Sadly, for Owen the non-religious projects for which the endowment income was to be used for, had substantial popular appeal within Wales. Certain commentators have identified that this programme of investment helped to secure the electoral success of the Liberal Party within Wales during this period. Liberals maintained that since the endowments were national in origin and intended for community use, they should be deployed for 'works of benevolence and usefulness which will be for the benefit of the people at large.'[55] This proposal strengthened their argument that the bequests originally intended for public benefit would now be returned to proper usage. The funds arising from disendowment would there be administered by county councils and used for such things as: educational projects, old-age pensions, hospitals, convalescent homes, labourers' dwellings, libraries, museums and other projects.[56] Although it is interesting to note that the national government already provided considerable support to the three Welsh University Colleges, the National Library of Wales and the National Museum of Wales, and large grants were also made to County Council for the educational objects of public utility. Support for these and other projects proved popular and for Owen and his supporters it proved difficult to argue against the necessity for such social projects, despite the Church's own contribution to the social development of the nation. Ultimately the University of Wales alone benefited by just under £1,000,000 from the disendowment of the Church.

---

[54] 'It deprives religion of the endowments which were given voluntarily for religion's use, and uses money for means other than it was meant', J. Owen, *Mesur Dadgysylltiad i Gymru, beth ydyw* (Carmarthen, 1912), p. 9.
[55] H. Evans, *The Case for Disestablishment* (Carmarthen, 1907), p.26.
[56] H. Evans, *The Case for Disestablishment* (Carmarthen, 1907), p.28.

Owen did display some element of political cunning when in 1911 he alerted the audience at his Diocesan Conference to that fact that of the £253,163 per annum which the Welsh Church would lose as a result of disendowment, £51,124 of this would no longer be used within Wales but would rather be subsumed into the British Exchequer in order to assist with solely English matters.[57] Here Owen sought to emphasise that the Liberal Party was pursuing an ideology for purely political purposes, despite the fact that such action could financially harm the well-being of the nation. Further to this he maintained in his address given at Machynlleth in 1912 that what the disestablishment bill did in reality was to alienate the religious inheritance of the people, turned trust property into private profit, for the confiscation of such trust property would merely relieve the taxes of those paying into the Exchequer.[58] He argued that there was a moral character to such property: 'trust property on the other hand, is property with its duties as clearly defined as its rights.'[59] Owen maintained that McKenna, as Home Secretary, had no intention of ensuring any scheme which enabled the spoils of the Church be used solely for the relief of rates in Wales. He further argued that the spoils of the Church for half of the population of Wales would only be equivalent to two pence per person, per year. The effect of the measure was therefore not to promote or enhance Welsh public life, and in reality it would be the rural, less populous areas, who would benefit to the greatest degree, rather than the industrial counties of Glamorgan and Monmouth which would receive but a 'nominal pittance.'[60] Owen argued that the bill was futile and lacked the ability to make a significant difference to the lives of the people of Wales, but was distinctively beneficial to those living outside Wales at the time.

Owen argued against disendowment on many levels; however, the treatment of curates was of prime concern. The bill of 1912 proposed that all incumbents and bishops were to retain their present income whilst they held office. In his pamphlet Owen argued that this measure would in effect immobilise the Church.[61] Few incumbents would be willing to move from their present position because they would lose all the financial benefits

[57] J. Owen, *Welsh Disestablishment and Political Tactics* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.11.
[58] J. Owen. *Three addresses on the Disestablishment Bill* (Carmarthen, 1912), p.6.
[59] J. Owen, *The Principles of the Welsh Disestablishment Bill* (Cardiff, 1909), p.24.
[60] J. Owen. *Three addresses on the Disestablishment Bill* (Carmarthen, 1912), p.8.
[61] J. Owen, *Mesur Dadgysylltiad i Gymru, beth ydyw* (Carmarthen, 1912), *passim.*

attaining to that benefice, and would receive no compensation if they were to take up a new position. Parishes would retain the same incumbents until death, because priests were unlikely to be willing to see a reduction in their income, even if it was to take up a position with higher prestige or status. Owen recognised that such potential immobility on the part of his clergy would have a detrimental effect upon Church life. With incumbents unwilling to move potentially until they passed away, it would be unlikely that the Anglican Church would grow and that a new vitality would characterize its witness. He stated that his diocese alone would lose around £51,000 p.a. from the bill at the expiration of vested interests.[62] Owen continued to argue that not only would this measure immobilise the Church but that 561 curates who benefited from a total of £17,069 in grants would be left without a single penny of compensation. He maintained that the alleged failure of the Church in previous generations to effectively minister to the needs of the people of Wales was a result of the Church's poverty and the pluralism which stemmed from poor incumbencies, thereby leaving curates at times to maintain the services of the Church across a wide geographical area. If the confiscation of the endowments occurred then it would undoubtedly result in a return to the high levels of pluralism which was prevalent during the eighteenth century. The bill, he argued was unjust and immoral: '*Mae'r Bil yn llawer mwy creulawn na'r Bil Gwyddelig yn hyn o beth.*'[63] Although clergy poverty was an issue which also plagued nonconformity, as around one third of Welsh Congregationalist ministers received less than £80 per annum,[64] a figure which, within the Church's context, would have been utterly unacceptable to Owen and his fellow bishops.

Certainly within the context of the disendowment debate it was Owen who was seeking to make a comparison with the Irish situation. Although he had adamantly refused to accept that the two situations were similar, he was willing to accept this notion if it would help him to construct an argument that the government was treating the Welsh Church in an unfair manner. A.G. Edwards also placed heavy emphasis on a comparison with the financial settlement given to the Irish Church and in his work of 1912 he stated that: 'The Church in Wales is a poor Church, its total endowments are less by three millions than the

[62] J. Owen, *The Financial Position of a Welsh Diocese and the Welsh Bill* (Carmarthen, 1913), p. 7.
[63] 'This Bill is much more cruel than the Irish Bill in this extent', J. Owen, *Mesur Dadgysylltiad i Gymru, beth ydyw* (Carmarthen, 1912), p. 8.
[64] H.J. Clayton, *The Indictment and Defence of the Church in Wales* (London, 1911), p. 11.

endowments left to the Irish Church after disestablishment.'[65] Within the Irish measure there had been an option for incumbents to receive a single payment in respect of their vested interest rather than relying upon a yearly income payable only if they retained the same position. Such a financial package was not included within the Welsh disestablishment bill.

Owen sought to educate the people about the financial plight of the Welsh Church. He also attempted to identify the great improvements which the Church had made during the past century, and he maintained that much of the Church's failure to minster adequately in the past was not a matter of policy but rather the result of the Church's own poverty. He argued that the Church had been actively trying to address a number of its financial problems. One of the greatest and most embarrassing problems had been the income incumbents received from their benefices. Owen, and his predecessor Bishop Basil Jones, had sought to tackle this by organising a fund to raise the permanent augmentation of benefices under £200 p.a. Owen asked every parish whose incumbent faced such a low level of pay to raise £100, the Diocesan Fund would then match this amount and then Owen would intervene with the Ecclesiastical Commissioners to seek to double the amount raised by the parish and the diocese.[66] From the inauguration of the fund until Owen's death in 1926, the sum of £57,820 had been voluntarily raised.[67] He realised that the Church could only succeed in its mission if it was both spiritually and financially healthy, and he took an active interest in the plight and poverty of his clergy. An assessment of Owen's career would identify the fact that he spent a considerable amount of time seeking to improve the standard of his clergy, especially when it came to their educational abilities. Incumbents had to be paid a decent stipend for them to efficiently carry out the work of the Church within their area of responsibility. It is clear that he was playing a key part not only in attacking the weaknesses of the arguments proposed in favour of disendowment, but within his own diocese he was also trying to address financial problems. Through his leadership he displayed that the Church was not merely content to live on the inheritance of the past, but

[65] A.G. Edwards, *Landmarks in the History of the Welsh Church* (London, 1912) p. 260.
[66] J.T. Davies 'Bishop Owen D.D.' (1954), p. 8.
[67] J. Owen, *Church Work and Church Defence* (Cardiff, 1910), p. 9.

rather, the Church was attempting to renew itself and its mission to the people of Wales. As Bell identifies:

> The argument that the Church was fulfilling the trust on which the endowments had been given, doing its work effectively and without abuse of its funds, was the most significant point against disendowment.[68]

Owen's commitment to the visible transformation of the Church in terms of its effective use of resources and deployment of said resources in the missionary field enabled him to counter the argument raised by his opponents of misuse of historic endowments. As he stated in 1911: 'the Report of the Welsh Church Commission has proved up to the hilt that in Wales no less than in England the Church is faithfully endeavouring to discharge the sacred trust attached to its endowments.'[69] Owen was consistent in his campaign that Church funds were being deployed as effectively as was possible, this is testified by the fact that the first act which Owen undertook upon obtaining the office of Bishop of St Davids was to re-organize the diocesan Fund in order to meet the potential threat of disendowment. By 1910 his appeal to endow the fund to meet the demands of building quinquennials had raised £209,840, thereby enabling the diocese to receive an investment income of over £6,295 which would serve to revitalise the work of local churches.[70] Owen was also supported in the need to tackle issues of clergy and benefice poverty, for he recognised that this was often the cause of pluralism of livings in the nineteenth century and that considerable strides had been taken to rectify that situation however:

> The difficulty has to a large extent been overcome, and now you want to plunge the Church back into the state of poverty in which it existed and to plunge it back into all those evils which come with poverty.[71]

It should also be noted that the Welsh bishoprics, which were themselves some of the oldest foundations within the Anglican Church, were incredibly impoverished. It was only

[68] P.M.H. Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales* (London, 1969), p.286.
[69] J. Owen, *The Present Position of the Church in Wales* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.8.
[70] J. Owen, *Church Work and Church Defence* (Cardiff, 1910), p.6.
[71] Balfour, A.J. & Bridgeman, W.C. & Smith F.E. *Speeches on the Disestablishment Bill* (London, 1909), p.6.

the equalization of revenues which was undertaken by the Ecclesiastical Commission of 1836 which saw their income increase to a manageable level:

> The Bill was unpopular in the country, because it was felt to be a mean thing for the wealthiest state in the world wantonly to confiscate the meagre endowments of the four poorest dioceses of the Church.[72]

Owen was further disgusted that such confiscation would not only support other government initiatives, but when assessed within the government's total expenditure was so minute, that to alienate the endowments of the Church in Wales would only succeed in funding half the cost of a torpedo boat destroyer.[73]

Owen continued to press throughout the campaign that such an act was mean-spirited and did a disservice to the nation: 'The oldest part of the Church is picked out for forcible isolation, and the poorest part of the Church is chosen for drastic impoverishment.'[74] Further to that he maintained that the reason for the harsh treatment of the Church within Wales was in order that it became the precedent for the future treatment of the English Church when disestablishment and disendowment became a pressing matter for the Liberal Party. However, such a notion fails to recognise the substantial shift that there had been within the leadership of the party towards the whole question of disestablishment during the early part of the twentieth century.

It would be easy to criticise the amount of time that Owen spent upon this matter, and that this obsession with the financial rights of the Church did not sit comfortably with a gospel which commanded its followers to leave everything and follow Christ. However, Owen was not interested in his own wellbeing, indeed upon his death his estate was valued at £11, 114 17s 7d,[75] a modest amount for a bishop of the Church. Owen believed that he, alongside all the bishops and the clergy, were trustees for the future, as he said in Carmarthen in 1911:

---

[72] J. Owen, *The Dismemberment of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1913), p.2.
[73] J. Owen, *The Financial Position of a Welsh Diocese and the Welsh Bill* (Carmarthen, 1913), p. 9.
[74] J. Owen, *The Present Position of the Church in Wales* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.7.
[75] D.T.W. Price, 'John Owen', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

> Now that we know what the Government means to do to the Church next year, if it can, it becomes our clear and bounden duty, as trustees for the future of the great inheritance handed down to us from the past, to prepare at once for an effective appeal to public opinion.[76]

He believed the inheritance entrusted to him was more than financial, in fact he placed the highest value upon the spiritual and moral inheritance of the Church. Owen was a realist, he recognised that the Church could only be effective within the community in which it served by having the necessary financial foundation. Money was important to better society, to assist in a programme of social reform, to carry out the functions commanded by Christ. Owen argued not for the Church to retain its wealth in order to live off the inheritance of the past, but rather for the Church to use the inheritance of the past for the betterment of the future. Like other Church defenders, Owen charged their opponents with robbery based on morality and that by their actions they would further advance the cause of secularism. With the vastly increasing population of the two major South Wales counties, namely Glamorgan and Monmouthsire, Owen was keen to highlight that the removal of the Church's endowments would weaken any possibility of enabling the Gospel to have a powerful influence upon the lives of the general population:

> It is in these two counties a grave question whether the large number of persons, who now attend no place of worship, may not be increased in the near future, and whether social movements here in the future are to be dominated by Christian influence or by materialism.[77]

The refusal by the Liberal politicians to remove the endowments of the nonconformist denominations was also seen to be indicative of the persecution of the established Church, and that concepts of religious equality and national property were merely ideological statements used to advance the plunder of the Church's historic endowments. For Owen, if religious equality, was to be achieved then it was only necessary to cause the disestablishment of the Church and not its disendowment. There were even those amongst the dissenters themselves who felt that a greater compromise should be achieved. Sir Henry Lunn, himself an ex- chapel minister and still a nonconformist,

[76] J. Owen, *The Present Position of the Church in Wales* (Carmarthen, 1911), p. 3.
[77] J. Owen, *The Call of the Church to Service and the Unity of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1909), p.10.

presented a petition, signed by over one thousand ministers and official laymen of the various denominations, to the government to seek a more generous treatment of the Welsh Church.[78] Such a gesture is indicative of the changing attitudes at work within nonconformity in comparison with what would have occurred during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Further support for such generous treatment was to be seen by Henry Radcliffe, a Cardiff ship owner and a Methodist, stating on 31 October 1912 that if there were a referendum over 90% of the religious people of Wales would vote against the transferal of funds from religious to worldly purposes. F.E. Smith, the shadow Home Secretary, asked in the House of Commons in May 1912 whether the South Wales miners were really 'pulpitating with the desire' to transfer £170,000 from curates to museums?[79] When Lloyd George gave a speech on disendowment in which he quoted the Bible passage: 'he who gives to the poor, lends to the Lord' he was widely criticised by nonconformists. The nonconformist minister, J. Fovargue Bradley viewed him as being opportunistic when he stated:

> Mr Lloyd George did not attempt to prove from the same divine authority that to take money from a poor Church to provide museums or like institutions, is either giving to the poor or lending to the Lord … But if the revenues of one Church are to be given to the poor, why not of all? If the Lord accepts the properties of the Church in Wales as a loan to the poor, why should it be thought that He would refuse those of the Baptist Church? … The plea for the poor is sentimental unreality; the plea for the 'whole nation' is a mercenary excuse.[80]

Bradley went on to maintain that few honest nonconformists could view disendowment as being a 'blessing in disguise' for the established Church. During a speech in 1914 Owen stated that there was 'a large and growing number of reasonable Welsh Nonconformists' who laboured under a misapprehension regarding the nature of the bill, and were unaware that such action could secularise religious endowments. Owen also argued that the nonconformists were increasingly expressing unease but on an individual rather than a corporate basis:

---

[78] H. Lunn, 'An Archbishop's Memories and Lessons from Welsh Disestablishment', *Review of the English Churches* 5 (1928), p.206.
[79] P.M.H. Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales* (London, 1969), p.268
[80] J.F. Bradley, *Nonconformists and the Welsh Church Bill* (London, 1912), pp.75-77

> The truth of the matter is that a considerable and growing number of reasonable Welsh Nonconformists have definitely told their Church friends that they are opposed to the secularisation of religious endowments, but they have not yet, as a rule, had the courage to make their convictions known to the local assailants of the Church…… The time however has now come for them to cultivate another Welsh quality, courage, and to tell the aggressive band of men who manage Welsh denominational assemblies what they have already told their Church friends.[81]

Critics also sought to highlight that if the Anglican Church was being viewed as corrupt and needing to be set upon an equal footing with its nonconformist counterparts, then such a measure of enforced monetary equality needed also to be implemented within the various chapel denominations. Nonconformists themselves had benefited from the support of the state by the virtue of having paid no taxes on any of their own properties, and there was little appetite to produce legislation to resolve this anomaly. Within the context of these debates, Owen was also determined to highlight that the ratio of voluntary contributions of communicant Anglicans in Wales exceeded the corresponding ratio among the Welsh nonconformists. Clearly there were many from across the religious and political spectrums who felt that the approach to the Church on the issue of finance was little more than political and financial opportunism. As Lord Halifax stated: 'how generous we can be to ourselves, how mean to our neighbours!'[82] Although a generous financial package was not incorporated into the final bill, it was an issue which was to be addressed by Owen during the period 1914-20.

[81] J. Owen, *The Financial Position of a Welsh Diocese and the Welsh Bill* (Carmarthen, 1913), p.11.
[82] S.H. Gem (ed.) *The Proposed Robbery of the Churchpeople of Wales* (Oxford, 1912), p.15.

Chapter 4: Death and Resurrection: The Fate of the Church in Wales [1]

The 1912 bill passed its second reading in the House of Commons on 16 May by 348 votes to 267 and passed its third reading in February 1913. Although it was rejected by the House of Lords by 252 votes to fifty-one the following week, it eventually became law on 19 September 1914 and with it the failure of the campaign that Owen had so significantly led. The bill reached the statute book some fifty years since the proposal was first discussed in the Commons. When passed, Welsh MPs sang *Hen Wlad fy Nhadau* in the lobby of the House. The Liberal Party and its supporters had succeeded in disestablishing the Welsh Church, although this measure was not enacted until 1920 due to the longevity of the Great War.

Some might have expected Owen to withdraw from campaigning for Owen had never fully believed that the measure would become law, indeed as he commented in 1910, he believed in the 'religious instincts, fair play and common sense of the Welsh people.'[2] Such was the sense of outrage that 'A few leaders, including the Bishop of Bangor, at first felt that the Church ought to do nothing to anticipate disestablishment. Let there be chaos!'[3] But for Owen this attitude was not worthy of episcopal leadership; the Church and its members needed to be prepared for the future. This is not to claim that Owen found his position clear, or that he knew what the future might entail: 'It is difficult for the wisest to look ahead and see clearly. We cannot walk by sight. We have now, through Divine Providence, to learn the lesson of walking by faith.'[4] Further to that he also highlighted at the Diocesan Conference in 1915 that he felt that the passing of the Act in conjunction with the outbreak of war was detrimental for the whole of society:

> We cannot but feel very strongly that the legislation of last year has placed new and unnecessary difficulties in the way of Church work at a time when that work was more necessary for the country than ever.[5]

---

[1] W.E. Gladstone commented to John Owen, when he was Dean of St Asaph that the result of disestablishment would be death, but after death, resurrection! E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p. 426.
[2] J. Owen, 'Presidential Address at the St Davids Diocesan Conference at Aberystwyth', 21 September 1910.
[3] D.T.W. Price, *A History of the Church in Wales in the Twentieth Century* (Penarth, 1990), p.8.
[4] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.243.
[5] J. Owen, 'Presidential Address at the St Davids Diocesan Conference at Carmarthen', 5 October 1915.

Owen responded to the 1914 Act in a vigorous manner. He accepted that the Church was to be disestablished but he was not content to accept either the financial settlement or for the Church not to prepare itself for disestablishment:

> 'It is our clear duty on the contrary, though it complicates our course of action, to do all that in us lies, as soon as we can do so without prejudice to the welfare of our country and the world, to press for an equitable reconsideration of the Welsh Church Act.'[6]

This is a surprising response on the part of a bishop who had contributed such a vast amount of time and energy to the campaign against disestablishment. Owen did not betray his principles, he still firmly believed in an established Church within Wales, yet he recognised the reality of the situation, and that the Church and its leaders had to move on. This is testified in the article he wrote in the Western Mail on 26 September 1917: 'The mission of the Church to the nation, remember, was given it by its Divine Head. Parliament neither gave this mission nor can take it away in the least degree.'[7] One of the motivating principles behind this change in attitude was his belief that Churchmen should refrain from controversy during the war for the sake of national unity.[8] He also felt that it was his episcopal duty to provide strong leadership at a time of crisis, as he wrote to Arthur Boscawen in October 1915: 'It is my duty as a Bishop to defend the Church against all injury.'[9] He was also aware that if the necessary structures were not in place then the Welsh Church Commissioners would continue to hold all of the newly disestablished Church's assets. This realization had come about through correspondence with Frank Morgan in the latter part of 1914. Morgan, together with Archdeacon Green of Monmouth and Dean Roberts of Bangor, had compiled a memorandum which reflected on the situation. This document listed the eleven consequences of the Act and perhaps more importantly, noted the seventeen things which would occur on the first anniversary of the bill. The most important of the latter actions was the ability of the Welsh Church Commissioners to seize all Church property, and these would only be restored once the Representative Body was

---

[6] J. Owen, *An Essay on The Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917), p.5.
[7] P.M.H. Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales* (London, 1969), p. 304.
[8] J. Owen, *The Acceptance of the Welsh Church Temporalities Act, 1919* (London, 1919), p. 6.
[9] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection-Box 8, Bundle 2, Letter to Arthur Boscawen 30/10/1915.

formed. Undoubtedly one of the motivating factors in Owen acting quickly was the common held belief that the Great War would be concluded within a matter of months, thereby hastening the enactment of the disestablishment of the Church.

Owen's contribution during the war years is significant to the historical narrative of the Church in Wales, indeed as Edwards remarked: 'My brother of St Davids is the backbone of everything.'[10] He played an important part in organising the Cardiff Convention held between 2-5 October 1917, which gathered Churchmen from across Wales together to discuss the creation of a constitution for the new Church, the establishment of a governing body to legislate on behalf of the Church, the establishment of a Representative Body to be responsible for the monetary affairs of the Church, and to decide upon a title for the new Church. In organizing the Convention, Owen was undoubtedly indebted to John Sankey. Sankey was born in Gloucestershire in 1866 and was educated at Lancing College and Owen's own alma mater, Jesus College, Oxford. Unlike Owen he was a devoted disciple of the Oxford Movement and had served as both a governor of Keble College and of Pusey House. He was called to the bar in 1892 and took silk 1909, establishing himself in Dean's Yard, Westminster. By the time of disestablishment, he was serving the province as Chancellor of the Diocese of Llandaff. In his professional career, he was later to become Lord Chancellor under both the Labour Government of 1929 and the National Government of 1931.

The plans for the undertaking of the Cardiff Convention had been laid as early as 1914. A meeting had been held in Shrewsbury in the December of that year, where a joint committee was established with eighty elected members, together with the four bishops and sixteen co-opted members. This group met in in Westminster in January 1915, and then it was decided to establish a committee to plan for the creation of a Representative Body. Sub-committees were established to begin detailed preparations. Sankey wrote: 'About 9.15 that night the Bishop of St Davids came to my house at Dean's Yard, Westminster, to ask me to prepare a scheme for a Representative Body. I agreed to do so and started the next

[10] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.245.

day.'[11] The considerable contribution of Sankey to this work led to the project being nicknamed the 'Sankey scheme.'[12]

The continuation of the Great War assisted these leading Churchmen in their preparations as on 9 March 1915 a postponement bill was presented before Parliament. This received a hostile reception from leading nonconformists who believed that their efforts were being thwarted at the last hurdle, however even Lloyd George, at that time Chancellor of the Exchequer, called for generosity in the debate, reminding the leading Welsh Liberal MPs that this was merely a recognition of the situation the nation found itself in. Such support from Lloyd George elicited a generous response from Bishop Owen who wrote on 17 March:

> As I have been obliged to differ from you over so many years, on questions affecting the Church in Wales, I may be pardoned for venturing to thank you sincerely for your courageous and statesmanlike speech last Monday. I read it yesterday, as a Welshman, with feelings of pride and respect.[13]

The success of the postponement bill was hastened by the formation of a coalition government, which included Unionist MPs enabling the bill to be passed on 14 September, only four days prior to the formal date for disestablishment as proposed in the previous bill. Although Owen remained anxious about the measure for he felt that: 'to fix the end of the war as the date of disestablishment was particularly inconsiderate as it made it impossible for us to foresee what time would be available for preparation.'[14] One of the reasons for his disquiet was the absence of so many leading laymen from the life of the Church due to their service in the forces. Owen recognised privately that any means of delaying the Act, particularly if this was in respect of the conditions which the war placed upon the life of the nation, then this would ultimately be beneficial to the Church and enable it to be better prepared for its future.

---

[11] D. Childs, 'A Goodly Heritage-John Sankey', *Friends of St Davids Cathedral Report* (1984), p.4.
[12] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.261.
[13] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.273
[14] J. Owen, *An Essay on The Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917), p.6.

Throughout this period Owen would form political alliances with those who were prepared to support the disestablishment process. He gathered around him a substantial number of experts, not only Justice Sankey, but also Lord Atkin, Sir John Eldon Bankes, Canon Gilbert Joyce and a future Archbishop, the Venerable Charles Green. He reminded Church members in 1917 that 'our country has had to learn these last three years at great cost the consequence of unpreparedness.'[15] He was also responsible for the creation, and legislative success of the Amending Act of 1919, which reassessed the financial settlement implicit in the 1914 Act, a move that would benefit the Church enormously. Unlike the Bishop of Bangor, Watkin Williams, who believed that the war would merely enhance the case for repeal,[16] Owen behaved in a realistic manner fighting for the best possible administrative and financial settlement he could achieve. Owen's efforts during this period are testified by a humorous poem published in the *South Wales Daily News* in July 1918:

> The Bishop of St Asaph, Defender of the right,
> To overcome the evil Bill, said, 'Brethren, let us fight.'
> His Lordship from St Davids, With strategic gleam,
> Preliminary to all force, said, 'Brethren, let us scheme.'
> Then Llandaff's noble bishop, Stood up to have his say,
> 'Before we start to fight or scheme, My brethren let us pray.'
> The three gazed towards Bangor. The genial kind, divine.
> He chose his words with wisdom great, 'My brethren, let us dine!'

This poem is also a fitting reminder of the lack of support which Owen received during this period. Not only did Edwards himself consider visiting his regiment in Serbia during 1915, but Owen's own suffragan, the Bishop of Swansea, also embarked with his regiment in 1916, thereby leaving Owen not only to head the campaign, but also to bear the administrative, sacramental and pastoral responsibility for the whole of his geographically large diocese. Throughout the war, Edwards lamented the cruel intentions of the Liberals, whom he believed would stop at nothing to pursue their goal despite the savageries of conflict. He was vociferous in his denunciation of the Liberals and the nonconformists, noting that more

[15] J. Owen, *An Essay on the Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917), p.3.
[16] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p. 309.

than 70% of the men who had joined the army were Churchmen.[17] This figure seems highly unlikely considering that Anglicans represented less than 25% of the whole population. Lord Dynevor supported Edwards in his view, stating that the government had betrayed the efforts of those Churchmen who had served in the forces and generally supported the war effort:

> Is this the final word of thanks by the Government to those thousands of young Welsh Churchmen who, at the beginning of the war, sprang forward and offered their services to their country? Many of them have made the supreme sacrifice and have their names on the Roll of Honour.[18]

Like its Irish counterpart of 1870, the Cardiff Convention held in the Cory Hall in October 1917, laid the foundation for the creation of a disestablished Church. Detailed plans were laid out for the formation of a Governing Body and a Representative Body. The convention provided an opportunity to discuss the Church's situation, and the logistical reforms that were needed to create what would become the Church in Wales. The meeting at Cardiff also provided a sense of closure for all involved.

The issue of forming both the Representative and the Governing Bodies had weighed heavily on Owen's mind for a considerable period. He argued in his pamphlet of 1917 that any attempt to form a financial body without a body dealing with policy and legislation was foolhardy and could prove detrimental to the future of the Church:

> The necessary connection which there must be between policy and finance in any well-ordered business makes it necessary for financial reasons that the two schemes should be considered together as one whole, and that the two Bodies should be brought into existence at one and the same time.[19]

Owen argued consistently for the importance of preparation, for on the day that the Church was disestablished, a new and unprecedented situation will have been born. The consequences of the legislative success of the 1914 Act had to be accepted, the Welsh Church was going to be disestablished, and Owen, along with many others argued that any

[17] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p. 272.
[18] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xxxvi, p.897.
[19] J. Owen, *An Essay on The Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917), p.10.

further attempt at mitigation would merely weaken the spirit of Churchmen, and hamper the future potential of the Church. The convention consisted of one hundred representatives from each diocese, the bishop, thirty-three clergy and sixty-six laity. Many were apprehensive, some fearing that disestablishment would occur while the war was still raging, others that undue delay had already occurred. Owen continued to emphasise that the Convention was not a political but a religious assembly, gathered in order to reflect upon the 'sense of solemn responsibility for the welfare of the Church'[20] which each of its members should possess. Much preparatory reading had been sent to the delegates, including the constitutions of other provinces within the Anglican Communion which would serve as a model for the creation of the new entity.

The question of the creation of a Welsh province laid heavily upon the minds of the Convention members. To remove themselves from the province of Canterbury was the final acceptance of defeat, and displayed a willingness to take part in a process of dismemberment which they had strongly opposed. Owen believed the formation of a new province to be of grave importance. The Church could not be disestablished in Wales, have lost its endowments, its status, and yet remain bound to the decisions of the English Church undertaken at convocations in the province of Canterbury to which Welsh representatives would not belong. The Church in Wales had to strive for freedom, and indeed this argument connected with his desire for the Church to be viewed as inherently Welsh, to have its own national identity, and not be bound with an institution many Welsh people felt to be alien. Such a notion was supported in April 1919, when a memorial was presented to David Lloyd George advocating that the Welsh Church be organised distinctly from the English Church. The leaders of this presentation included: Lord Robert Cecil, Sir Hugh Cecil, Sir Samuel Hoare and the Honourable Edward Wood, who was later to become Lord Halifax. However, both Owen and Edwards were relieved that their intervention, and what they regarded to some degree as being interference in the matters of a Church which had accepted a forced separation, came to naught. Undoubtedly the leadership of the Church was relieved that following years of preparatory work, modelled on the English system of ecclesiastical

[20] J. Owen, *An Essay on The Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917), p.13.

governance to a certain extent, the government had no intention of interfering, despite the protestations of the leaders of the April 1919 presentation.

Owen argued that the welfare of the Church required the formation of a new ecclesiastical province.[21] He was substantially supported in this viewpoint by Archdeacon Green. The Church had to display its independence and strength to the people of Wales after disestablishment; it had to display that it was willing to move on, to carry out its mission within a new environment. That is not to say that Owen was free of doubt. He certainly feared 'a Welsh Synod messing about with the big, complex and far reaching questions which so perplex all the combined wisdom of the Church of England.'[22] He worried that the Church would become narrow-minded and lacking a true perspective. This opinion was outweighed, however, by his sincere conviction that the Church was called to serve a specific area: Wales, and Wales alone. Nevertheless, he did not receive the full support of his fellow bishops in his attempts to establish the synodical government which the Governing Body would create. The Bishop of Bangor remained consistently hostile to the proposal, even in 1917 he still refused to believe that the measure would be enacted,[23] whilst Bishop Edwards also proved non-committal in his support for the proposals. So hostile was Watkin Williams to the notion of the Cardiff Convention that at one point it seemed that he would refuse to sanction the dispatch of delegates to take part. Fortunately, due to the persuasion of Owen and Sankey, this did not occur.[24] It is interesting to note that the Bishop of Bangor's biographer maintains that he was wholly supportive of the efforts of Owen and Edwards in private and yet his public appearances do not appear to display this: 'Bishop Williams was a man of personal charism, and a man of peace who was hurt by religious conflict and controversy.'[25] Undoubtedly it was Owen's personal relationship with Williams that enabled him to accept the situation. These discussions culminated in accepting the need to create an independent province and on the 31 March 1920 the province of Wales was established. According to the Bishop of St Asaph: 'In the long history

[21] J. Owen, *An Essay on The Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917), p. 8.
[22] E.T. Davies, *Disestablishment and Disendowment* (Penarth, 1970), p. 13.
[23] R. A Renowden, *Genial, Kind Divine, Watkin Hebert Williams 1845-1944* (Denbigh, 1988), p. 154.
[24] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.341.
[25] R. A Renowden, *Genial, Kind Divine, Watkin Hebert Williams 1845-1944* (Denbigh, 1988), p. 149 .

of the Church in Wales, nothing quite parallel to and certainly nothing more momentous than this Convention has occurred.'[26]

One of Owen's greatest contributions to the formation of the Church in Wales was to advocate the use of the title given to it in the Welsh Church Act of 1914. There was a great deal of discussion at the Cardiff Convention surrounding the title of this new Church. Options were varied, but the popular choice was between the 'Welsh Church' and the 'Church in Wales'. The report of the proceedings of the convention indicate that it was Owen who was credited as having advocated the use of the title, Church in Wales;[27] his arguments are to be seen in his essay of 1917.[28] Owen argued that the title of the Church was of grave importance to its future mission. A bad choice could result in further dispute with the nonconformists, or even possible alienation from the people of Wales. He believed that to adopt the title 'Welsh Church', would constitute a desire on behalf of Welsh Churchmen to single themselves out, to regard themselves as a separate entity from the rest of the Church; in Owen's opinion this would be disastrous. He had fought against disestablishment for over a decade on the basis that the Church was something greater than the state, that it had a universal element. The dismemberment of the four Welsh dioceses from the province of Canterbury was, he insisted, an unjust and immoral act, however the Church in Wales remained part of the Catholic Church universal and there was nothing which the Liberal government could do to prevent that. In his essay of 1917, he argued that the title 'The Church in Wales' reflected not only nationality but also: 'suggests our true relation to Wales, to the Church of England, and especially to "The Holy Church Universal."'[29] He was supported in this view by Justice Sankey, who stated:

> As a National Church you are the oldest Christian Church in these islands. Long before Canterbury was heard of we were here. The saints of the Church in Wales are the sons of the race. They sleep in Welsh soil, hard by the shrines they had

[26] *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Convention of the Church in Wales held at Cardiff* (Cardiff, 1917), p.7.
[27] *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Convention of the Church in Wales held at Cardiff* (Cardiff, 1917), pp. 125-35.
[28] J. Owen, *An Essay on The Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917), pp. 16-19.
[29] J. Owen, *An Essay on The Church in Wales and its Convention (*Lampeter, 1917), p. 17.

> loved and served so well. The self-same prayers which moved their lips move ours today. We are the heirs of their beliefs and traditions.[30]

Not everyone agreed with this. In an article in the *Western Mail* in October 1917, the Vicar of Aberpergwm criticised Owen for proposing the title 'the Church *in* Wales' as he felt that it should be 'the Church *of* Wales' the title recorded in the Magna Carta.[31] The Church, the Vicar of Aberpergwm maintained, should retain as many of its historic links as it could. Dr Maurice Jones, Principal of St David's College Lampeter, also argued that the loss of the name of 'the Church of Wales', meant:

> the loss of a golden opportunity to make a most effective appeal to the principle and sentiment of nationality and to make a clear and unmistakable declaration of the Church's coming attitude towards the Welsh people in its corporate national capacity.[32]

Maurice Jones's criticism was not restricted merely to the issue of the name but also to the fact that the Convention was predominantly a middle-class body and as such was not reflective of the nation it was expected to serve.

Owen dismissed these arguments as he insisted that the title reflected the Church in Wales's association with the universal Christian Church, and its willingness to move forward rather than rely upon the precedents of the past. Although the Liberal government had attempted to create disunity within the Church it would always fail, as long as the Church did not recant its Catholicity. There was a greater power, a greater sense of obedience to Christ, who had founded a 'divine international society with the authority of His commission to unite all nations in Himself.'[33] Owen believed that the more truly Catholic men were, the more patriotic they would also be. This advocacy of the Catholic nature of the Church, and the importance of adherence to such a belief had been argued by Owen as early as 1907

[30] D. Childs, 'A Goodly Heritage-John Sankey' *Friends of St Davids Cathedral Report* (1984), p.5.
[31] 'The Church of Wales,' *Western Mail*, 9 October 1917, p. 5.
[32] D.T.W. Price, *A History of the Church in Wales in the Twentieth Century* (Penarth, 1990), p.10.
[33] J. Owen, *An Essay on The Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917), p. 18.

when he stated that: 'a sectarian spirit is the exact opposite of Catholicity, of which one aspect is sincere loyalty to the common weal.'[34]

The title of 'The Church in Wales' offered an opportunity to reflect pride both in national heritage, but also in the heritage of the Church, in its identity as a universal body, which was united in Christ. Owen stated during the Convention:

> You must love the Welsh people. You must serve the Welsh people. But we need to be Catholic, and I have no doubt that we have not been Catholic enough. The more Catholic we are, the more national we are.[35]

This was an opinion which Owen had long expressed, as testified by his address at the Swansea Church Congress in 1909:

> The strength of the Church of England lies in realising its true place as a part of the Catholic Church of Christ, while discerning the special trust for service committed to it in its history by Divine Providence. It is called to be National because it is called first to be Catholic.[36]

There were also those who maintained that the title 'The Welsh Church' should be employed. Owen opposed this for, at the time, the decision to establish a separate province was still in the process of discussion and he felt that any abandonment of the title 'Church in Wales' would suggest a presumptive judgement on this matter. Owen's opinion on the selection of a new title was reported in the press, and the *Western Mail* praised him for his commitment to the mission of the Church, and for his desire to hold fast to the catholic principles with which parliament should not interfere.[37]

On the second day of the Convention Owen also argued for the need for women to be co-opted onto both the Governing Body and the Representative Body of the new Church.

---

[34] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection-Box 7, Bundle 2, Report of the Diocesan Conference at Llandrindod Wells, *South Wales Daily News*.
[35] *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Convention of the Church in Wales held at Cardiff* (Cardiff, 1917), p.135.
[36] J. Owen, *The Call of the Church to Service and the Unity of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1909), p.4.
[37] J. Owen, Letter to the *Western Mail*, 26 September 1917, p. 10.

This vote was later passed. This was a visionary idea, and provided the basis for the Church to display radical ideas far ahead of the political and ecclesiastical reform regarding the participation of women which was to follow in subsequent generations. Further to that, Owen was committed to the importance of the role of the laity in the governance of the Church, as he was insistent that the newly formed Diocesan Board of Finance comprised of a majority of lay people, with the executive containing only seven clerics out of a total of thirty.[38] Owen had also given considerable thought to the membership of both the Governing Body and the Representative Body. He had studied the actions of the Church of Ireland, and indeed the composition of the governance of the Church of England, and although both offered differing options, Owen felt that each diocese should have the exact same number of representatives on both bodies to ensure the principle of equality.[39] Owen was also insistent that the Church should be governed by a sense of political liberty and he advocated that for the passing of any bill, voting by orders should be required, to respect the wishes of all the baptised. Lovat Fraser, the barrister, had argued against this move, however Owen, together with Archdeacon Green, feared that any other form of voting would merely establish a Presbyterian or Congregationalist ecclesiastical system.[40] For Owen this method of legislating was necessary so that, were the Welsh Church to differ from its English counterpart, then it would be based upon the will of its membership rather than the will of the bench of bishops.

Although Owen undoubtedly triumphed at the Convention, Lovat Fraser felt that he was dictatorial in his manner:

> The Bishop of St Davids is not without fault. He is autocratic and resents opposition. One of the reasons why I ceased to be a Member of the Governing Body was resentment at episcopal dictation. At the first meeting of the Convention it was provided that everything that was done should be subject to the Bishops' veto. I moved a resolution to nullify this, and I shall never forget the way in which the Bishop, in opposing the resolution, glared at me through his spectacles and hissed out, 'do not let us be Presbyterians'.[41]

[38] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection-Bundle 1.
[39] J. Owen, *An Essay on The Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917), p.14.
[40] E.T. Davies, *Disestablishment and Disendowment* (Penarth, 1970), p.12.
[41] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p. 348.

Mr Lovat Fraser's motion only gained fourteen votes of support, but the above quotation is indicative that there were some within the fledgling body who felt that the control and power which Owen, and indeed his fellow bishops exercised was, and would prove too great. This view of Owen stands in stark contrast to the assumption made years later by Ewart Lewis: 'Owen was humble, and skilful in handling men, Edwards was autocratic and fond of having his own way.'[42] Perhaps Owen's unstinting loyalty to Edwards saw a development in his character, and particularly in his dealing with those who opposed the determination of the bishops to direct the future of the Welsh Church. It does seem, however, that Owen overall was far more malleable to the whims of individuals and their characters than Edwards ever was.

The conclusion of the Great War made Welsh disestablishment inevitable and the likelihood of repeal was remote. This is testified by the letter which Owen wrote to Frank Morgan in April 1917:

> We shall get Postponement a little later, but certainly not total Repeal. How much of our endowments we can save depends on Lloyd George's need of Unionist support towards the end of the war to keep him at the head of a Reconstruction Government. If so we ought, before the end of the war, to get a lump sum for Tithe.[43]

When the 1914 bill had been devised it was expected that Welsh Churchmen would contribute to restoring the Church's lost endowments, although as Owen anticipated in 1917, this was unlikely to be the case: 'In the first place the difficulty of replacing our ancient endowments would be enormously increased by the financial exhaustion of the country at the end of so prolonged and costly a war.'[44] This view was confirmed by Edwards who stated during the debate regarding the Amending Bill in 1919:

> The war has rendered it almost impossible for Churchmen to help the Church by voluntary contribution. I will venture to give the House one example. In my own diocese which is not the largest diocese nor one containing the richest people, gifts promised to the Welsh Church have been withdrawn. One promised gift

[42] E. Lewis, 'Review of *The Later Life of Bishop Owen'*, *Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales* 12 (1962), p.71.
[43] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.332.
[44] J. Owen, *An Essay on The Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917), p. 4.

> was for not less than £80,000, and that promise has had to be withdrawn owing to the heavy taxation for the war. Those from whom the Church could look for financial help are those who have suffered most heavily by the taxation for the war.[45]

Owen displayed considerable forethought to recognise that re-endowment through the generosity of its own members was unlikely to be possible for the Church, following the cessation of hostilities. What Owen sought was not re-endowment, or the repeal of the measure, but rather: 'an equitable reconsideration of the Welsh Church Act.'[46] This concept of reconsideration gained widespread support, even amongst nonconformists. Owen was mindful that any substantial mitigation would demoralize members of the Church in particular, and there was an increasing need to develop the confidence of the people in their love for the Church, which would not be assisted by a protracted debate once more about the financial settlement.[47] During the debate in the House of Lords on the Amending Bill the Archbishop of Canterbury noted that over 100,000 nonconformists had petitioned for a reconsideration of the policy following their realization of what the financial implications would be, he stated:

> It became clear that they had not realised practically what Disendowment would mean. They had listened to, and adopted for themselves, a cry, without taking in all that that policy would mean when put into effect. They had certainly not realised how many parishes would, from the day the Act became operative, be bereft of all the ancient property which was theirs, and how many others would be crippled as regards their efficiency.[48]

During the debate, this view was disputed by Lord Clwyd, a former Welsh Liberal MP, who maintained that very little had changed in the attitude of nonconformists towards the basic principles of the 1914 Act. The views of nonconformists were certainly not united during this period and ultimately the Church and its leadership were able to engage support from some former opponents, if not from all. However, the support for seeking financial redress rather than continuing to maintain the fight against disestablishment did cause opposition

[45] *Hansard,* Fifth Series, xxxvi, p.918.
[46] J. Owen, *An Essay on The Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917), p. 5.
[47] J. Owen, *An Essay on The Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917), p.19.
[48] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xxxvi, p.890.

from within the Anglican Church. Miss Douglas-Pennant of the Central Church Defence Committee was incredibly distressed at the actions of the episcopal leadership, considering them to have given up the fight in every respect.[49] This view is certainly confirmed by the contribution to the debate which the Marquess of Salisbury made. He argued that the 1914 bill would have completely broken down following the conclusion of hostilities in November 1918, because it would have been completely unworkable. His criticism of the Amending Bill went as far as to chastise the Welsh bishops for what he felt was incompetence:

> What a pity it was that they did not take English Churchmen thoroughly into their confidence and accept the guidance of some of us. I have the profoundest respect for both of them, for all of them, but surely they are somewhat too simpleminded for this wicked world.[50]

Salisbury's view was certainly patronising in tone, but he was not the only individual to view the action of the bishops with suspicion. In introducing the second bill, and as a supporter of the bishops, Viscount Peel was forced to admit that:

> there are some distinguished and possibly ecclesiastically-minded laymen who hold that the Welsh bishops have been rather simple in this matter, and that they have been deceived by the guile of ingeniously-minded politicians.[51]

The notion that the bishops were intellectually incapable of realising the challenge with which they were presented underestimates their abilities in recognising the reality of the situation, and their determination to obtain a better, if not ideal, resolution to that situation. Owen believed that the Church could obtain a better financial settlement than the one which had been provided in the 1914 Act. In fact, this resulted in the presentation of the Amending Bill of 1919. His position was supported by Bishop Edwards who stated in in the House of Lords in 1919, that: 'it seems to me that the policy of total repeal is right if not sensible, but that the policy of acceptance is sensible if not heroic.'[52] The Amending Bill redressed many of the financial grievances of the Church. The 1914 Act would have resulted

[49] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p. 356.
[50] *Hansard,* Fifth Series, xxxvi, p.915.
[51] *Hansard,* Fifth Series, xxxvi, p. 887.
[52] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xxxvi. 918.

in the Church in Wales losing around £157,000 p.a.[53] Owen's exertions prevented such large-scale disendowment from occurring. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners had refused to compensate the Church for lapsed vested interests, arguing that the 1914 Act offered compensation only to those incumbents who were still alive and held the same office as they did at the date of disestablishment. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners argued that disestablishment had effectively begun in September 1914, and that the enacting of the measure was merely a secondary matter. Owen disproved this theory, maintaining that the Church could only be disestablished after the war and therefore compensation for lapsed vested interests was non-negotiable. He was supported in this through the effective relationship which he developed with Mr Downing, the Secretary of the Commissioners, and the friendly relations he developed with the Chief Commissioner, Sir Lewis Dibdin. In a general letter sent in September 1915 Owen also encouraged his clergy not to assist the Commissioners in their assessment of the Church's endowments, prior to assurances being provided that this investigation would not place further strain on the Church's future financial situation.[54] The introduction of the Tithe Bill in 1918 was also to prove fortuitous in Owen's efforts to redress the Church's financial situation. Mr Protheroe, the Minister for Agriculture, sought to revalue the tithe through his bill of 1918. Although it aroused some opposition from Welsh Liberal MPs, the bill passed safely through parliament, thereby enabling Owen to enhance his negotiations with the ecclesiastical commissioners. The tithe was subsequently re-valued, and the commissioners were now to pay clergy 136% of the value of the tithe, in comparison with the previous settlement of 109%.[55]

The general election of 1918 further assisted Owen's endeavours to redress the financial package offered to the Church at disestablishment. The election of 388 Conservative MPs out of a total coalition of 485, placed Lloyd George and his Liberal allies in a precarious position. The loss of MPs Simon, Ellis Griffiths and McKenna also removed some of the Church's fiercest critics from the debating chamber. Following this election Edwards recovered some semblance of leadership and came to view himself as the chief ambassador of the Church during this period.[56] This undoubtedly was due to his confidence

[53] J. Owen, *Three Addresses on the Disestablishment Bill* (Carmarthen, 1912), p. 6.
[54] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection-Box 8, Bundle 2
[55] J. Owen *The Acceptance of the Welsh Church Temporalities Act* (London, 1919), p. 23.
[56] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p. 385.

in the strength of his personal relationship with Lloyd George, who remained Prime Minister in the coalition government. However, in continuation of the relationship pattern expressed between Edwards and Owen in the past, Owen remained the lieutenant in the field, briefing Edwards on all important matters. This he acknowledged by stating that Owen's: 'devotion and incessant energy and work on behalf of the Church in Wales are beyond all words'.[57] Owen had briefed the bishops on what he believed were the three issues which presented themselves to them at this time of discussion and possible positive change. Firstly, they had to consider whether there was any reasonable hope of a permanent reversal of the principle of disendowment considering the reality of national life? Secondly, they needed to consider whether re-opening the debate would merely cause greater pain to all sides and place even greater strain upon denominational relationships as well as the energy levels of those involved. Thirdly, consideration had to be given that if the debate was wholly re-opened what realistic level of benefit would be achieved.[58] This reflection displays Owen's recognition of the changed nature of both the political and religious scene following four years' bloody conflict in Europe. Owen recognised that the political situation had changed, and what the Church now needed was to obtain its share of that change in relation to its settlement; as he remarked: 'It is a new world after the War, and other great questions occupy the minds of the people.'[59]

A meeting was held in February of 1918 to debate the financial redress and in the subsequent months there was discussion regarding the propriety of what the government should offer. Edwards maintained that the Church needed a further £2,000,000 to ensure its financial stability, and he argued that the return of glebe land was paramount in the Church's concerns. Lloyd George, attuned as he was to the political manoeuvrings of the time, recognised that any measure which sought in any way to re-endow the Church would be unpalatable both to his party and to a larger proportion of the wider electorate. The Prime Minister was also considerate to the needs of the Church as he refused to allow McKenna, whom he referred to as 'a liquidator',[60] any involvement in matters surrounding the discussions which led to the Amending Bill of 1919. The desire for the Church to

[57] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xxxvi, p. 918.
[58] J. Owen *The Acceptance of the Welsh Church Temporalities Act* (London, 1919), p.13.
[59] J. Owen *The Acceptance of the Welsh Church Temporalities Act* (London, 1919), p.15.
[60] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p. 294.

reconcile with the government in relation to financial redress was felt across both the political and religious spectrums. This is testified by a letter to Edwards dated 31 July 1919 from the Archbishop of Canterbury which stated:

> Nothing, would, I think, be gained by delaying a final settlement and I am of the opinion that, in all the circumstances, the Church ought for the sake of peace to agree to the proposals now made.[61]

Davidson understood that the Welsh bishops found themselves in a very difficult and challenging position, however he felt that for the wellbeing of the people, combined with the political sensitivities of the period, it was necessary to agree to the bill. During the debate on the Amending Bill, Davidson stated:

> Meantime I am sure it is true to say that, out of the stress of our common sorrow and effort, a kindlier spirit has been evoked on both sides towards those who differ from them, and that people are more ready than they were five years ago to work together in coming to a satisfactory arrangement upon these matters.[62]

The climate of the debate had been altered dramatically, not only by the effects of the First World War, but also by the provision of the Tithe Act of 1918 and the change in political direction affected by the establishment of a coalition rather than a Liberal government, as was in office when the 1914 act was passed. Even Edwards acknowledged the need to reach a political consensus in order to move forward: 'This Bill concerns the principality of Wales mainly, and though it does not do all that we really hoped it might do, still it does give us what we have been yearning for, and that is a settlement.'[63] Owen also spoke in favour of compromise, for although he did not doubt the right of the Church to receive the totality of its property, by 'humbly' accepting the terms of the 1919 bill, the Church would not suffer too greatly and a fresh beginning would be possible:

> I came to the conclusion that for a Bishop the chief principle of all which should govern his decision in regard to anything affecting his divine mission was

[61] G.K.A. Bell, *Randall Davidson* (Oxford, 1952), p. 984.
[62] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xxxvi, p. 893.
[63] *Hansard,* Fifth Series, xxxvi, p.920.

> whether accepting this Bill, which in my humble judgment makes the position very difficult in regard to the Church of Wales but not absolutely impossible, would hurt or hinder the spiritual work of the Church in Wales.[64]

The idea of agreeing upon a settlement in view of changing circumstance was supported by Owen's opponents. Lord Clwyd, stated that to seek any further redress would either re-open the whole controversy or force the state to accept terms which they were financially unable to maintain. Owen realised that it was vital for the Church to be seen to have accepted the decision taken by government and that to continue fighting would merely hamper the potential work of the Church in the future. E.E Owen remarked that: 'It seemed to John Owen that the Church must be prepared to bear its witness to the principle of righteousness by suffering losses rather than by renewing controversy.'[65] This viewpoint was supported by Archbishop Davidson who wrote to Edwards on the 31 July 1919:

> I have no hesitation in saying that if the amended terms now proposed for the Church are such as to avert (or diminish in large degree) the catastrophe of impoverishment, such as we had dreaded, it would in present circumstances be most unwise were the Church to show itself unyielding.[66]

Oliver Jones also supported this view in a letter to Owen in February 1915 when he stated that it was no longer possible to rely upon Unionist parties to provide support to repeal the act, but the repeal or re-assessment of disendowment was a possible achievement.[67] Throughout the duration of the war, Owen argued that a significant period needed to be provided between the cessation of hostilities and the enacting of the bill. During an address to the Central Church Committee in 1915, Owen felt that at least a year would be required to ensure that Welsh Churchmen were given effective time to prepare themselves for what was to come.[68] However this opinion remained unpopular with nonconformists who felt it offered too great an opportunity for the government to renege on its promise to ensure the

[64] *Hansard,* Fifth Series, xxxvi, p.911.
[65] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p. 410.
[66] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p.306.
[67] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection-Box 8, Bundle 2.
[68] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection-Box 8, Bundle 2, Report of John Owen's Address to the Central Church Committee, *Western Mail*, 8 May 1915.

disestablishment measure was passed and implemented. Owen's desire for that element of preparatory time was secured through the passing of the Amending Bill in 1919.

The Amending Bill was not a governmental proposal, due to Edward Shortt, the Home Secretary being unwilling to draft a bill, therefore the Church was given the responsibility of laying the framework for this piece of legislation. Bonar Law had previously offered assurance that it would be government business, however this promise was never fulfilled. Along with Frank Morgan, Owen, drafted the bill. A draftsman involved at this time commented: 'although the Bishop of St Asaph obviously had a firm grasp of the policies which lay behind these proposals, the one who knew the most of the details was the Bishop of St Davids.'[69] The bill contained the demand for the Church to receive £1,000,000 in compensation for tithe, the price of which had already been negotiated, and for lapsed vested interest.[70] The vested interest amounted to around £450,000 owed to the Church from the rights of those clergy who had died or retired since the passing of the bill in 1914. This amount was eventually transferred to the Representative Body, enabling the Church to gain a further income of around £22,000 per annum. The bill also prolonged the life of the Welsh Church Commissioners, in order that its functions would not be wound up by the December of 1919, although the Commission had been subject to criticism, as two of the three commissioners were to be paid officials, and there was nothing within the 1912 bill which stipulated that they had to be Churchmen or even Christian.[71] The bill also laid down that the local authorities were not under any obligation to accept the responsibility of burial grounds should they not wish to do so. Many politicians had been critical of the move to remove the churchyards from the custody of the Welsh Church for both principled and pragmatic reasons, as Earl Selborne, who had served under both Asquith and Lloyd George in various capacities, commented:

> It is an extraordinarily strong step to take these Churchyards away from the Church and to put them in the hands of the local authority, a purely secular body, dependent on the ratepayers, without any religious obligation whatever, except the individual religious obligation of members composing the local

[69] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p. 402.
[70] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p. 405.
[71] R. Williams, *The Attack on the Church in Wales* (London, 1912), p.15.

> authority, and to take them away just at the moment when, by its action in Wales, the Church in Wales has shown with what wisdom and moderation it has composed its Representative Bodies.[72]

He was supported in this opposition to the secularisation of churchyards by the Marquess of Salisbury, a Conservative peer who stated:

> Here are these Churchyards, hallowed by every memory and every sacred feeling aroused when we walk across them. For centuries, they have been the loving care of the religious body to which we belong. Henceforward they are to be handed over to the parish councils. We do not know how they will treat them. We can fancy the Churchyards of the future right up to the door of the Church, probably neglected, overgrown, ignored; and here we are ready ourselves to look after them as we have always done, not only in the interests of the Church but in the interests of all people, to whatever denomination they belong.[73]

The issue was a very emotive one, which aroused considerable criticism from all parts of the House of Lords. It is unsurprising, therefore, that most of the most local authorities declined the invitation to take ownership. The matter was never fully settled until 1946 when the Ecclesiastical Commissioners transferred all burial grounds to the Representative Body. Owen also reminded his supporters that between 1840 and 1906, churchyards had received investment of over £82,000 from voluntary contributions and the presumption that they should be national property, and even secularized was unacceptable to all those who had contributed to their maintenance and improvement over numerous decades.[74] In addition to this the Amending Bill also enabled all alienated Church property by 1950 to be reconsidered in respect of ownership, which was also a significant gain for Churchmen in respect of their long-term future.

The government, in response to the pressing domestic concerns following the Treaty of Versailles, agreed to these concessions. This was clearly articulated by Sir Owen Phillips who stated: 'This Bill is an equitable attempt on the part of His Majesty's Government to

[72] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xxxvi, p.956.
[73] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xxxvi, p.958.
[74] J. Owen, *The Welsh Disestablishment Bill, What it means* (London, 1911), p.15.

adjust the financial difficulties due to the War having been so very prolonged.'[75] Owen had argued vociferously that due to the economic circumstances caused by the Great War, the Church would not be able to raise enough endowment to compensate for the loss of the tithe. This resulted in only £48,000 of the Church's annual income being deprived by the government.[76] This was a significant triumph for Owen, although not every part of the historic endowment had been recovered, the Church had recovered over two-thirds of what it was intended to have lost through the 1914 Act. Edwards confirmed Owen's abilities when he wrote:

> The Bishop of St Davids is a monument of intellectual curiosity in the way he has mastered all the details of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. I hope Welsh Churchmen will remember and they will find out from year to year-how much they owe in the provisions of the Temporalities Act, to Mr Morgan and the Bishop of St Davids.[77]

Although Owen did not view the Amending Act as being a triumph or a great ecclesiastical victory, he believed that it was beneficial to the Church as she would no longer suffer from the financial effects of the war.

Owen certainly did not fully recognise his own personal contribution during the war years, but there were many others who did. For as Archbishop Prosser stated at the memorial service held for Justice Sankey:

> The Constitution was certainly in advance of its period, and gave the Church in Wales synodical government, with due place accorded to the laity of the Church in its affairs, two generations before the Church of England achieved this.[78]

Owen and many of the supporters which he gathered during this period worked to create a Church which would be prepared for the logistical, administrative, and financial effects of a

[75] *Hansard,* Fifth Series, cxix, p.476.
[76] E.T. Davies, *Disestablishment and Disendowment* (Penarth, 1970), p. 9.
[77] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p. 391.
[78] D. Childs, 'A Goodly Heritage-John Sankey, Friends of St Davids Cathedral Report (1984), p.7.

disestablished institution, and as David Walker states: 'The delay of more than four years in implementing the Welsh Church Act worked to the ultimate advantage of the new province.'[79] Without the efforts of a small cohort of individuals this would never have been possible. It is important to recall the situation in which these advocates of the Welsh Church found themselves. Throughout the period 1914-18, much of the information required, needed to be gathered by laymen and clergy, who were not to be found at their desks but in the trenches, therefore the fortunes of the Church were reliant upon the commitment and diligence of Owen and his supporters.

Although the Amending Bill of 1919 did pass in the Houses of Parliament, there remained a small element of opposition. Three Welsh Liberal MPs voted against the measure, arguing that it was an *ailwaddoliad* or re-endowment of the Church by the British taxpayer.[80] The two brothers, Lords Hugh and Robert Cecil also attacked the measure, describing it as 'robbery of God'. Hugh Cecil, who was an MP, accused the Unionist members of the coalition government of betraying their promise: 'They are deeply pledged to the position that Disendowment is confiscation, and that it is an injury to religion.'[81] He further argued that: 'I think it is a pity that we should inaugurate the period of peace by cramping the preaching of the Gospel.'[82] The Cecils however were only a minor voice of dissent, and although Edwards was disappointed by their action, Owen believed that their unwillingness to compromise rendered it pointless to seek to address their grievances. The lack of opposition from various other expected quarters stemmed from the change in political atmosphere and sectarian bitterness which occurred following the cessation of conflict in 1918. The divisions of denomination were no longer viewed as being of such paramount importance when compared with the loss of life which both Church and chapels had experienced. Owen acknowledged this when he wrote:

---

[79] D. Walker, 'Disestablishment and Independence', in D. Walker (ed.), *A History of the Church in Wales* (Penarth, 1976), p. 167.
[80] K.O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation, 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981), p.185.
[81] *Hansard,* Fifth Series, *cxix,* p.468.
[82] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, *cxix,* p.472.

> the whole situation cannot but be deeply affected by the new light thrown on the principle of righteousness in national affairs by the great price paid by this country and its allies for the vindication of this sacred principle in international affairs.[83]

Owen maintained that the war, which had so greatly altered the social, political, and economic landscape of the nation, had also caused many opponents of the Church to reconsider their position, and to reduce their opposition to the Church and its potential future. He was mindful of those who were critical of accepting the terms of the Amending Bill, indeed many argued that the Church had simply surrendered to the will of the Liberal Party, but Owen continued to believe that such action, humiliating though it may have been considered by some, was necessary, and nothing less than righteous action:

> I accepted the settlement offered in the Bill, believing that by suffering loss rather than by a renewal of controversy the Church in Wales would best bear its witness to the principle of righteousness under the circumstances.[84]

His work continued after the success of the Amending Bill, and as shown in his essay on the acceptance of the bill, he had three priorities for the Church: firstly, to establish a minimum stipend sufficient for the maintenance of a clergyman; secondly, that the income of the clergyman should be in proportion to the work required of him and his capacity for undertaking such work; and finally that consideration must be given to the length of faithful service.[85] So passionate was Owen on the issue of clergy poverty that it was a motivating factor in him accepting the terms of the 1919 Amending Bill. For although he recognised that the Church remained the poorer for the measure, he also acknowledged that such a resolution would enable him and the Church in general terms, to address this issue:

> It is exceedingly difficult for us to raise the £1,000,000 necessary to replace the ancient endowments of the Church. Not only is it an exceedingly difficult thing to do, but it is absolutely urgent that we should so do, for ministers of religion are the worst paid class of people in the country; especially are they ill-paid in Wales.[86]

---

[83] J. Owen, *An Essay on The Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917), p. 4.
[84] J. Owen *The Acceptance of the Welsh Church Temporalities Act* (London, 1919), p.48.
[85] J. Owen *The Acceptance of the Welsh Church Temporalities Act* (London, 1919), p. 39.
[86] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xxxvi, p.910.

Despite Owen's efforts, when the Representative Body was formed in 1920 it still possessed only one-eighth of the Church's former endowments.[87] Owen displayed imagination and vision during this period: he attempted to provide a secure foundation for the future mission and ministry of the Church, which he succeeded in doing through his work in the Cardiff Convention and through the Amending Act. Edwards, however, maintained that: 'Unfortunately on one hand, and compulsorily on the other, I was constrained to conduct all the negotiations relating to this Bill single-handed.'[88] This incredible and churlish statement merely re-enforces the notion that Edwards lacked the self-awareness to recognise and value the contribution of others within the leadership of the Church.

The Church in Wales had to be prepared for its future and if Edwards remained unthankful, Davidson for one wholly appreciated Owen's role. 'The Welsh Church', he stated, 'has shown itself in these days in a marked degree to be keen and capable.'[89] Owen's attitude and actions during this period display an heroic level of service to the Church, for he was fighting to ensure its future, not for his sake, but rather for the sake of the country:

> The real guarantee for the future of the Church in Wales is the supreme devotion of the Welsh Churchmen in every Diocese; clergy and laity alike, to the common welfare of the Church in Wales as a whole, for the service of the Welsh nation.[90]

Owen consistently based his work upon the national recognition of religion and national righteousness in all questions of property. Interestingly much of the work undertaken during between 1914 and 1920 was similar to the Bangor Scheme of the 1890s.This work, pioneered by J. Arthur Price was introduced in the wake of the outcry to the 1894 Disestablishment bill. Price had argued with both Owen and Edwards that disestablishment was only a matter of time and that the Church should be pro-active in seeking to organize its

---

[87] J.W. James, *A Church History of Wales* (Ilfracombe, 1945), pp.118-89.
[88] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p.314.
[89] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xxxvi, p.897.
[90] *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Convention of the Church in Wales held at Cardiff* (Cardiff, 1917), p.145.

own future.[91] The scheme of 1895 proposed the abolition of lay patronage, a greater share in the management of the Church by the laity, the reform of the cathedral system, and the creation of a separate province with its own archbishop. Ironically, much of these reforms were eventually introduced by Owen who was, at the time, so opposed to anything of the sort. His opposition to this scheme was little in comparison to the vociferous condemnation which came from Edwards. As it would transpire, Price would be among the drafters of the Church's new constitution, and, despite his eighty years, would in 1940 be appointed Diocesan Chancellor at Bangor.

Owen's willingness to use these ideas later shows both his political adroitness but also a naivety when considering the prospective fate of the Church during the campaign. If Owen and Edwards had recognised the likelihood of disestablishment then it may have been possible for much of the groundwork which was achieved under substantial pressure during the war years, to have been laid far in advance, for as Edwards commented:

> The Amending Act did something to mitigate and to readjust, but it left the Church an impoverished Church by the loss of her ancient endowments and bereft of her rightful share in the increasing resources of the Ecclesiastical Commission and of the aid of the Bounty Office.[92]

Owen was also ambitious prior to the establishment of the Church in Wales, to refocus the life, witness and energy of the Church upon its primary calling, namely its spiritual mission to the nation. Throughout the long and agonizing period of debate Owen had consistently argued that the Church should not forget its primary purpose, and he actively sought to prove the renewed and invigorated life of the Church throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Owen maintained that his concern in relation to the disestablishment proposal was much more to do with the 'welfare of the country rather than the welfare of the Church.'[93] Owen recognised in the pamphlet which he wrote in 1917 that for too long the Church in Wales had refrained from engagement in national movements, and that one of the Church's primary concerns after

[91] F. Knight in G. Williams, W. Jacob, N. Yates & F. Knight, *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment 1603-1920* (Cardiff, 2007), p.324.
[92] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p. 317.
[93] J. Owen, *An Essay on The Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917), p.20.

disestablishment was how it could properly influence Welsh national life for the benefit of all people. Owen remained opposed to the Church engaging in a programme of national reconstruction following the cessation of hostilities, this rather, was a matter for the state. However he did believe it was incumbent upon the Church to 'create a wholesome spiritual and moral atmosphere'[94] in order that its members could contribute to the well-being of the nation in a productive manner. Owen believed that the Church and its members were duty bound to strengthen a conviction of righteousness within the life of the nation, which would not only honour those who had sacrificed their lives in the War, but would also revolutionize the political parties, and seek to lead them away from mere political tactics in favour of national interest. Owen was also concerned that the Church should seek to convince Welsh citizens, despite disestablishment, which he viewed as a precursor to the secularization of public life, to consider the importance of spiritual verities, that morality should not be downplayed in the future development of the country. Christian virtues would be an important part of the 'New Wales' which Owen hoped the Church would serve. For he recognised that the long battles between the denominations had weakened Christian witness and caused a loss of respect for churches of all denominations:

> What has happened in our age is that masses of men have come to suspect that Churches of all denominations were 'broken cisterns' that can hold no water. For this grievous misunderstanding Churches of all denominations have much need of repentance.[95]

[94] J. Owen, *An Essay on The Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917), p.22.
[95] J. Owen, *An Essay on The Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917), p.24

Chapter 5: The Church in Wales, 1920 onwards

> 'When disestablishment eventually came, it too turned out to be nothing that had needed to be feared. In final analysis, disestablishment was the lion that failed to roar.'[1]

After decades of controversy and campaigning, the ultimate disestablishment of the Anglican Church within Wales and the formation of the Church in Wales on 31 March 1920 generated little public or political interest. In religious terms Owen recognised that 'our rich inheritance in the spiritual treasures of the Church is left entirely unchanged by the Act',[2] and as Davies has noted:

> The Welsh Church was not deprived of its catholicity as that term has been and still is interpreted in Anglicanism. The historic ministry of bishops, priests and deacons was retained without a break, together with the ancient creeds of Christendom and the sacraments.[3]

There were however a substantial number of issues for the emerging Church to grapple with. One of the most significant of these was the need to establish a separate province for the Church in Wales. The Bishop of Bangor retained his opposition to severing the historical link with Canterbury and when the ballot was taken at a Governing Body meeting, he and one other layman were only ones to vote against the establishment of the new province. The bishop had been consistent in his view throughout the debates, his main concern being that self-determination would make the Church parochial and inward-looking. These concerns were shared to a degree by Justice Sankey, who following the completion of the Constitution in April 1922 said:

> The Church in Wales is a Catholic and National Church. As a Catholic Church you are not at liberty to consult your own desire or to do as you like. You are a branch of the great Catholic and Apostolic Church, with explicit creeds and

[1] F. Knight in G. Williams, W. Jacob, N. Yates & F. Knight, *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment 1603-1920* (Cardiff, 2007), p.384.
[2] J. Owen, *An Essay on The Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917), p.27.
[3] E.T. Davies, *Disestablishment and Disendowment* (Penarth, 1970), p.12.

> determined traditions. See to it, that you do not allow practices and that you discount innovations, which may imperil your communion with others.[4]

On the other hand, the necessity for creating a separate province was felt keenly by many. Lord Phillimore considered the notion of a separate province to be a 'very desirable thing',[5] whilst Archbishop Davidson stated: 'I cannot help fearing that unless this be done there is some danger of confusion and even chaos in the arrangement for the future.'[6] Davidson had indicated this idea as early as May 1919 in a letter to Edwards:

> We shall hope in every possible way to retain the close fellowship in thought and action which has subsisted between the Bishops in the English and the Welsh Dioceses: but constitutionally the formation of a new Province will, as I believe, be essential to due orderliness and smoothness of working.[7]

The fear which many held was that a failure to establish a working province would make the Welsh Church still answerable for its actions to the Church of England, though now bereft of a voice in the convocation of Canterbury. As Williams, who served as a lecturer in history at St David's College Lampeter and then Archdeacon of Carmarthen, remarked: 'To exchange these equal rights for legislation without representation is thoroughly retrograde in principle and in practice.'[8]

In the eyes of Owen, the smooth working of the Church in Wales could only be achieved by the creation of a separate province with its own archbishop. In 1920, at the age of sixty-five, John Owen was the youngest bishop on the bench and upon the assembly of the bishops in Llandrindod Wells in April 1920, many thought that it was he who would be elected the first primate. This did not occur. Owen made this abundantly clear at a speech which he gave to the Governing Body in January 1920. Perhaps out of loyalty to Edwards or a lack of personal ambition on his own part, Owen proposed in the Electoral College that the Bishop of St Asaph become Archbishop.[9] This proposal was accepted unanimously by his

---

[4] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.466.
[5] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xxxvi, p.962.
[6] G.K.A. Bell, *Randall Davidson* (Oxford, 1952), p.988.
[7] *Hansard*, Fifth Series, xxxvi, p.968.
[8] R. Williams, *The Attack on the Church in Wales* (London, 1912), p.46.
[9] D.T.W. Price, *A History of the Church in Wales in the Twentieth Century* (Penarth, 1990).

fellow Welsh bishops and was confirmed by the Governing Body the following day. In his speech of acceptance Archbishop Edwards noted that it was Wales rather than the Church that would suffer most on the account of disestablishment and disendowment. In a letter written to *The Times* on 29 March he had stated:

> It is probable that March 31st 1920, will occupy a larger place in English history than it does today in public interest and attention. The principle involved in the Welsh Disestablishment and Disendowment Act of 1914 have no precedent in the history of England, and without criticising their merit, I ask your permission to emphasise their importance.[10]

On 1 June 1920 Bishop Edwards was enthroned as Archbishop of Wales in St Asaph Cathedral in a service which was reminiscent of the investiture of Edward, Prince of Wales in 1911, and it was estimated that between 6,000 to 7,000 gathered for the occasion. Both archbishops of the Church of England were in attendance and Prime Minister David Lloyd George was also present. On the morning of the enthronement Lloyd George, a Baptist, presented himself at the altar rail to receive communion, which caused scandal to the Churchmen assembled. News of this caused great controversy in the press however both Edwards and Owen knew that, despite being lauded as a nonconformist icon, he had in fact been confirmed as an Anglican. This, alas, had been a well-kept secret.[11] Be that as it may, it was clear that 'neither of them (Edwards and Owen) was in the same class as Lloyd George which it came to political manoeuvring.'[12] Lloyd George knew the effect his presence at such a service would cause and it was clear that he was there not for reasons of piety but politics. He was, however, viewed with admiration by his ecclesiastical counterparts, as Edwards wrote: 'Mr Lloyd George was distinguished from his Welsh colleagues not only by his commanding ability but by a certain chivalry and generosity.'[13]

One of the great issues which faced the Church in Wales during its emergence was that of the Welsh language. During the 1920s there was an active hostility towards the

---

[10] *The Times*, 29 March 1920.
[11] National Library of Wales Archive, John Owen Collection-Bundle 1, Letter from A. Pierce Jones to Eluned Owen, 9 November 1963.
[12] D. Walker, 'Disestablishment and Independence', in D. Walker (ed.), *A History of the Church in Wales* (Penarth, 1976), p.174.
[13] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p. 317.

language, and the general view was that Archbishop Edwards did little to alter this situation.[14] Edwards was so uninterested in the role of language in the life of the Church that he delayed the publication of its new official Welsh hymn book. This was only eventually authorized and published following his retirement. This apparent antipathy to the Welsh language was reminiscent of his tenure at Llandovery College. Owen also had made little progress in integrating the Welsh language into the life of St David's College, Lampeter when he served as Principal, and even in his previous post as Professor of Welsh. Brown makes the point that 'for one appointed for the needs of a Welsh speaking diocese, Owen was never known to have spoken to his clergy in Welsh.'[15] Owen was certainly not immune from criticism regarding the development and use of the Welsh language in the years preceding the disestablishment of the Church in Wales or the years that followed.

The Church continued to face challenges to its structures, and Archbishop Edwards, having served as a bishop for over thirty years, had little appetite for change: 'Historians have speculated that things might have been very different if the younger Bishop Owen of St Davids had been elected Archbishop.'[16] The discussion regarding the need to re-organize the province centred on the possible partition of certain dioceses. Within the industrial south it was considered necessary that Monmouthshire be removed from the Diocese of Llandaff and become an autonomous diocese, although the location of the cathedral church would remain a matter of debate until 1949. Within the Diocese of St Davids the situation was far more complex. It was certainly recognised that the diocese was too large, and without the provision of a suffragan bishop it would not have been possible to meet the needs of the people. Since 1891 Wilfrid Seymour de Winton, a descendant from successful merchants with the East India Company whose family founded the Wilkins Bank,[17] had begun considering the division of dioceses within a future province of Wales. He endowed a fund, which by 1906 had grown to £6,000. His plans, as published in the *Western Mail*, anticipated the creation of two new dioceses from the Diocese of St Davids. The first encompassing the counties of Brecon and Radnor, with a cathedral church being founded in

[14] D.T.W. Price, *A History of the Church in Wales in the Twentieth Century* (Penarth, 1990), p.16.
[15] R. L. Brown, *In Pursuit of a Welsh Episcopate: Appointments to Welsh Sees 1840-1905* (Cardiff, 2005), p.256.
[16] D.T.W. Price, *A History of the Church in Wales in the Twentieth Century* (Penarth, 1990), p.16.
[17] S. Brook (ed.) *Where we Belong II, Life in the Brecon Beacons* (Llanfrynach 2011), p.28.

Brecon, and possibly taking in some of the northern deaneries of the Diocese of Llandaff. The second centring around Swansea, together with the Gower, Neath town and the Vale of Neath. These plans were firmly rejected by Bishop Owen in 1920 as he felt that it was the need to pay the clergy a living wage which was the priority and not the administrative re-organization of the province. This issue created dissension between Owen and Frank Morgan. Morgan argued that opposing such a development was mere procrastination and offered little vision for the future existence of the Church.[18] The matter was worsened when the deanery of East Gower voted against separating from the St Davids Diocese. Indeed, the rural dean urged Bishop Owen to move to the proposed Swansea Diocese, should it be created, although Owen was firmly opposed to such a move.

To try and placate his critics and create a viable proposal for the future, Owen established a Division of the Diocese Committee. This body assessed the various proposals presented at the time and in 1922 proposed that a new Diocese of Swansea and Brecon be formed, merging the archdeaconry of Brecon with the rural deaneries of East and West Gower. This proposal fulfilled Wilfred de Winton's greatest desire to see the Priory Church of St John in Brecon become a cathedral. This building had been a beneficiary of financial generosity of the de Winton family for two generations.[19] The necessary sums were raised for the endowment of a bishopric and Lord Tredegar gave Ely Tower as the episcopal residence. The formal separation of the diocese occurred on 24 June 1923.

The creation of the new diocese however presented further difficulties for Owen, not least in relation to his relationship with his mentor, friend and colleague Archbishop Edwards. The establishment of the new diocese implied the need for a new diocesan bishop, and many had concluded that it would be fitting if Edward Bevan, who had served as suffragan bishop of Swansea for eight years, should be elected to the post. The Archbishop did not agree. Bevan was obviously a very strong candidate for the episcopacy; his father had been Archdeacon of Brecon and served as Vicar of Hay for over fifty years. Edward was educated at Hertford College, Oxford, and had served as Vicar of Brecon from 1897 to 1921. He succeeded his father as Archdeacon of Brecon and since 1915 had held that position

[18] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.484.
[19] S. Brook (ed.) *Where we Belong II, Life in the Brecon Beacons* (Llanfrynach 2011), p.28.

concurrently with the role of Bishop of Swansea.[20] His one disadvantage was an inability to speak Welsh. Throughout the discussions, Archbishop Edwards had made his position clear. At a speech day in Llandovery College at which Owen was present, Edwards indicated that any betrayal of the Welsh language by the bishops would be disastrous. In the light of his own record of antipathy to the use of Welsh, this was ironic if not downright perverse. He argued passionately on that occasion that the fortunes of the Church in Wales had improved tremendously since the appointment of a fluent Welsh speaker to the see of St Asaph in 1870. Owen clearly found himself in a difficult position as many of his own clergy, including the Revd D.W. Thomas of Llandybie, were insistent that no bishop should be appointed who was not articulate in Welsh.[21] Nevertheless Owen felt strongly that Bevan was the right man for the position even though this placed him at clear odds with Edwards, whose political skills were once again deployed to ensure the election of his preferred candidate. Prior to the meeting of the electoral college, Edwards circulated a document which indicated that according to the 1921 census 33% of the population of the proposed diocese spoke Welsh. Owen, whose analytical skills remained acute, sought to disprove this fact by displaying the fact that only 8,521 of the population of the new diocese were monoglot Welsh, which represented only 3.25% in total. Throughout this period Owen felt that Edwards placed general policy above the wellbeing of the new diocese and its clergy. Owen even sought legal advice when it was thought that Edwards was seeking to pass a resolution that anyone not fluent in Welsh could not be considered an episcopal candidate. Such a resolution would have rendered 40% of the clergy ineligible and damaging to bishop-clergy relations. In order to support Bevan's candidacy, Owen offered to assist in the administration of the sacraments in Welsh in the new diocese, should he be requested so to do. Owen's political and pastoral sensitivity triumphed and on 31 July 1921 Bevan was elected. However, this did not prevent Edwards from making a further objection. In a speech at the Synod of Confirmation in August, he indicated that he would abstain from the confirmation as the appointee could not speak Welsh. This was the first episcopal appointment to have been made to a monoglot English speaker since 1870. Reflecting on the matter Owen wrote: 'I am clear we did what was right. The case against Bevan was strong but the case for him was

[20] O. Jones, 'The Archdeaconry of Brecon', *Brycheiniog*, 22 (1987), pp. 19-20.
[21] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.490.

greater.'[22] The disunity among the bishops was of considerable concern to Owen. His desire to maintain the unity of the new province was set out in the sermon which he delivered at the enthronement of the new Bishop of Swansea and Brecon in 1923:

> So the corporate life of each parish will be measured by its loyalty to its Diocese, of each Diocese by its loyalty to its Province, by each Province by its loyalty to the Church as a whole and by the Church as a whole in all its parts, by its loyalty to Christ its Head. The Church in Wales has now a great opportunity which may never recur of serving the whole cause of Religion in Wales. Let us pray God it may not miss it.[23]

Owen's personal relationship with Edwards was undoubtedly harmed by this encounter, but it proved the visionary ability of Owen to see past issues of culture or language, and reconcile the importance of the propagation of the Gospel with a pastorally appropriate implementation. Such was Owen's influence over the emerging diocese that de Winton said of him: 'He taught his daughter Diocese to stand alone.'[24] Bevan's own commitment to his new diocese should also be noted as within two months of his appointment he raised £8,660 to endow the new bishopric.[25]

The financial concerns facing the emerging Welsh Church were substantial. Disendowment had caused the loss of £48,000 per annum in revenue and therefore it was felt necessary to launch an appeal to seek to redress this situation. The 'Million Pound Appeal' was launched in 1920 but it quickly failed to gain the support which had been hoped for. Although both the Archbishops of York and Canterbury sought that collections should be made for this appeal throughout their provinces, on Palm Sunday, the Sunday prior to disestablishment, this resulted on average in only a few pounds being received per parish. There were exceptions to this situation. The Diocese of Winchester gave £131, the Bishop of Norwich gave £50, but it was calculated in 1923 that of every pound received by the Appeal, 19/20 had been given by Welshmen themselves.[26] Owen was tremendously disappointed by the poor response of English Churchmen to the plight of the Welsh Church. Clearly, he felt

---

[22] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.495.
[23] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.498.
[24] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.499.
[25] D.T.W. Price, *A History of the Church in Wales in the Twentieth Century* (Penarth, 1990), p.20.
[26] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.449.

hurt that those who had stood with him on platforms for the defence of the Church now cared little for its long-term future: 'My Church Defence experience has taught me to think that nothing I can say is effective really.'[27] Edwards was much more realistic for he recognised: 'Naturally their own claims would come first.'[28] Although Owen may have been disheartened by the response, by 1923 the fund had reached £676,000 and by the closure of the appeal in 1936 £722,552 had been given. Individual benefactors included Henry Gladstone, chairman of the appeal, together with Sir Owen Phillips who between them donated £30,000. Owen's disheartenment was an unfair reflection on the support rendered by his own diocese. By September 1921 £178,958 had been raised, with deprived urban parishes such as St Paul's Llanelli contributing in excess of £900. Owen had motivated his own flock with the words: 'Give as if you were contributing towards a new Church.'[29] Undoubtedly these words elicited substantial generosity when consideration is given that other parishes such as Ystradgynlais and Tenby both raised more than £2,000.

In addition to the financial pressures which the Church faced, dioceses too had significant concerns, particularly in relation to clergy stipends. In 1920, it was estimated that £45,000 was needed from the four dioceses to enable the province to function effectively and Owen's diocese was asked to bare a third of this cost. In addition to this a further £15,000 had to be raised to meet the needs of the St Davids Diocesan Board of Finance, a body which had been formed during the 1910s in order to support the disestablishment campaign. The quota, the cost of paying clergy stipends and diocesan costs, was calculated in committees within the four archdeaconries of the diocese, although Owen had some significant reservations about it: 'The quota will make or mar the life of the Church'.[30] Owen was however sympathetic to the plight of his clergy for at that time 160 incumbents in Wales received less than £275 per annum and a further 404 received less than £300 per annum. Much of this poverty was due to the removal of glebe income following disendowment combined with the escalating living costs after the First World War. In 1920 the Church in Wales offered to pay its incumbents a minimum of £280 per parish, which Owen felt was insufficient and by 1922 the St Davids Diocese had raised this threshold to

[27] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.448.
[28] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p. 325.
[29] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.450.
[30] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.451.

£310. Owen was certainly determined to support his clergy, especially those who found themselves isolated in rural areas, with little transport provision or ability to supplement their income. The poverty of clergy was a matter of great concern to him throughout his episcopate as he recognised that materially ill-equipped clergy would result in spiritually ill-equipped parishes. Testament to this concern was the fact that within Owen's own diocese even in 1913, £108,824 had been raised during the past fifteen years in voluntary contributions for the improvement of the income of poor benefices.[31] The length of this campaign parallels the tenure of Owen's episcopacy and emphasises that his concern for those greatest in need within his own diocese remained high on his agenda throughout his time in office. Arguably it was due to Owen's highlighting of the plight of the poor clergy that by 1926 the amount assigned for the stipend of an incumbent within the Province of Wales had risen to £335 per annum.

Undoubtedly the substantial financial increase witnessed by clergy during this period was partially due to the restructuring of the finances of dioceses and parishes. Prior to the twentieth century the Welsh dioceses operated on a basis of maintaining a diocesan fund for general purposes with parishes retaining financial independence for their own maintenance and enhancement. The introduction of a Diocesan Board of Finance, certainly within the see of St Davids was due to Owen's determination to see the diocese taking a corporate responsibility: 'for the efficiency of Church work in all its parishes, and that strong parishes should help the weak.'[32] Owen saw the diocesan scheme as a means of encouraging and aiding the financial position of parishes, and providing the necessary support to enable the various aspects of Church life, perhaps overlooked at times by parochial concerns, to be maintained and developed. To some extent the creation of a Diocesan Board of Finance transferred support from already existing ecclesiastical societies and charities to a more central structure, managed by the bishop and his advisors. However, Owen did not intend to replace parochial isolation with diocesan isolation. He recognised that the effects of disestablishment could be far reaching upon societies, whose main operations base was in England. The change in the established nature of the Church in Wales was a cause for concern and therefore Owen sought to secure and enhance the

[31] J. Owen, *The Financial Position of a Welsh Diocese and the Welsh Bill* (Carmarthen, 1913), p.5.
[32] J. Owen, *The Financial Position of a Welsh Diocese and the Welsh Bill* (Carmarthen, 1913), p.5.

financial stability of his own diocese. Financial stability for Owen was always matched with a sense of hope and vision. As early as 1913, he had identified that a further £1,500 was needed in voluntary contributions towards the Diocesan Board of Finance if the Church was going to be equipped to meet the needs of an expanding population and flourishing industrial districts. A criticism of the Church's actions during this period was that it responded too hastily to the erection of nonconformist buildings by sub-dividing many urban parishes and erecting or restoring a substantial number of buildings, which would prove to be a significant hindrance as the century progressed.[33] The province also failed in establishing an effective church schools' policy, which was a tremendous failure when considering the significant battles which had been fought to retain such a distinctive religious education within Wales.

Owen's involvement within the sphere of education undoubtedly arose from the controversy surrounding the establishment of Board Schools in the wake of the industrial revolution and the substantial population expansion in urban areas. In Church schools, the basis of all education was religious and the Bible was read frequently and the Catechism of the Church was also taught. When the government began establishing new schools, discussion ensued regarding the propriety of allowing religious instruction to continue in this manner. The many nonconformist MPs in parliament firmly rejected the notion of any treasury money being invested in denominational teaching. This in turn resulted in the establishment of free education for all which saw the government establish responsibility for the maintenance of all schools, which included Church schools. The effect of assuming responsibility for all schools was fierce opposition by leading nonconformists to the premise that their taxes should subsidise the teaching of the Catechism in Church schools. Amidst these controversies Owen was a leading defendant of Church schools, attending numerous rallies and conventions. He spoke on the matter in the House of Lords and used his educational background from Lampeter and Llandovery as a tool in defeating the arguments of his opponents.

Following the disestablishment of the Church in Wales, Owen's contribution to the resolution of this matter was to seek to achieve a Concordat with the nonconformists over the matter of religious instruction. By the 1910s, many of the nonconformist leaders had

[33] E.T. Davies, *Disestablishment and Disendowment* (Penarth, 1970), p.11.

realised that the effect of little religious instruction in Board or County schools was resulting in the increasing secularization of the nation and potentially the ability of communist ideals to affect future generations.[34] Following numerous discussions a 'Religious Concordat' was established which recommended a united policy of religious education in all the schools of Wales based on the belief in the Trinity and the Incarnation of the Lord and His Resurrection. This concordat was presented to the Governing Body of the Church in Wales in 1924, however a significant number of Anglo-Catholics made a determined effort to oppose the measure and its adoption was defeated. This caused Owen a substantial amount of distress: 'Well, I can't do any more, but the Church will rue the day when she discovers what an opportunity was lost.'[35]

This episode speaks of Owen's failure to recognise the strong opposition within the Church to work in harmony with those who had caused its disestablishment. Owen was not noted for his adherence or understanding of Anglo-Catholicism, a tenet of the Church which was not widespread in his own predominantly rural diocese. However, Owen clearly miscalculated the strength of feeling that such an undertaking would evoke, and this perhaps indicated that his political adroitness was not always a tune to the concerns and feelings of the members of the Church.

Owen continued to direct policy within the Church and was aided in this by the appointment of Frank Morgan as the first secretary of the Representative Body of the Church in Wales. He of course had been a pupil of Owen's at Llandovery College. Morgan was to die in service in 1935. Owen was a great admirer of Morgan's diligence and work, stating that he 'astonished all those who worked with him' and that his work was 'always thorough, scholarly and accurate.'[36]

In his remaining years in office Owen reflected considerably on his episcopate, the role of the cathedral church and indeed his own spiritual and sacramental life. Although the city of St Davids had proved to be a retreat for him throughout his episcopacy through his residence in Brecon House, the cathedral had played little part in his work. It was not until

[34] J.T. Davies 'Bishop Owen D.D.' (1954), p.9.
[35] J.T. Davies 'Bishop Owen D.D.' (1954), p. 10.
[36] J. Owen, *An Essay on The Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917), p.19.

Dean Williams began his renewal of the cathedral's life in the 1920s that Owen came to recognise the value of that place to the wider diocese: 'I have been converted to the belief that the Cathedral at St Davids is going to be a great asset to the Diocese.'[37] That statement displays the political focus which much of Owen's episcopacy had taken. Little concentration or energy had been devoted to the seat of the diocese, and yet from that period onwards it was to play an increasing role in the spiritual life of the nation. This was testified by the visit of the Eastern patriarchs to the cathedral in 1926, and their presentation of a reliquary to house the relics of St David.

Owen's reflections on the sacramental and spiritual nature of his faith are also worth considering. In a letter to Dean Roberts of Bangor he remarked:

> The Catholicity of the Prayerbook should be the rallying cry of Welsh Churchmen. If we realise the spirit of the Prayerbook in our lives and can somehow make the Welsh nation feel its Scriptural power, nobody can forsee the power for good the Church in Wales will become to Cymru gyfan.[38]

Yet for a bishop who constantly testified to the importance of catholicity, few of the liturgical practices of catholicity seemed to have impacted upon him. When presented with a cope following his appointment as chaplain to the Order of St John he wore it only on two occasions. He never wore a mitre throughout his episcopal career.

Bishop Owen died on 4 November 1926. He had been ill from the September of that year onwards. Following from ordinations and meetings of the Governing Body he came to London, where he remained at a London Nursing Home until 31 October. He received his final communion from his former colleague, Bishop Watkin Williams, who had retired to London. His body was brought back to Abergwili and the funeral service was held in St Peter's Carmarthen. One newspaper concluded that it was the 'funeral of a Prince.'[39] News of Owen's death resulted in substantial testimonies and tributes being paid to his character and commitment to the life of the Church and of the Welsh nation. In the obituary which

[37] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p. 553.
[38] E.E. Owen, *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961), p.555.
[39] J.T. Davies 'Bishop Owen DD' (1954), p.14

appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* he was heralded as a 'Champion of the Welsh Church.'[40] Its uncredited author listed the wide range of campaigns which Owen fought and noted his diligence in seeking moral and financial redress for the Church. The obituary states that together with Edwards, Owen was responsible for bringing about the best possible settlement which the Church in Wales could have hoped for. In a letter to his widow, Archbishop Davidson paid tribute to him as being: 'one of the most distinguished Welshman of his time'.[41] His passion and zeal for campaigning were commended by the Bishop of London:

> and although often in London the people could not follow the actual words he spoke, in consequence of his Welsh accent, which grew more and more accentuated as he became excited, they all were deeply impressed by his earnestness and eloquence.[42]

It is the obituary in the *South Wales News* that most provides the most eloquent testimony to the contribution of Owen to the life of the Church and the Welsh nation:

> The supreme consolation of his closing years must have been the evidence that the age-long prejudices against it are disappearing. That it is now recognised as a truly national institution on its own merits, and not as formerly, by virtue of state patronage.[43]

This was the greatest of Owen's achievements during his tenure as bishop and in the many decades during which he campaigned against disestablishment. Upon its arrival he threw himself into the foray of establishing a new Church in Wales. It was as Morgan claimed, 'the bitter-sweet climax of the public career of Bishop John Owen'.[44] As this author recognised, more than anyone else it was Owen who was instrumental in placing the Church within the political and religious landscape of Wales as a valuable and influential institution. Without Owen, this movement may never have occurred. Archbishop Green was later to state the

---

[40] *Daily Telegraph*, 5 November 1926.
[41] The St Davids Cathedral Library Archive, Owen Family Collection- Davidson Letter to Mrs Owen, 12 November 1926.
[42] The St Davids Cathedral Library Archive, Owen Family Collection- Letter of the Bishop of London to Owen Family, 4 June 1929.
[43] *South Wales Daily News*, 5 November 1926.
[44] K. O. Morgan, 'Review of *The Later Life of Bishop Owen'*, *Welsh History Review* 1/3 (1962), p.348.

growing view that disestablishment had been a boon to the Church as a religious and social institution.[45] It ensured that the Church in Wales became more Welsh and more democratic. It was no longer dominated by a reactionary landed class which was in social and economic decline, but rather had re-established itself as the Catholic Church of the land. The transition between an established and disestablished status had been relatively smooth:

> The transition from the old to the new order was automatic; the worshippers in the Church in Wales were conscious of no change in the ministrations of the Church-not a Church or mission-room closed, not a single service dropped. There was neither jar nor friction nor outcry,[46]

[45] C.A.H. Green, *Disestablishment and Disendowment: the Experience of the Church in Wales* (London, 1935).
[46] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p. 320

Conclusion

'Bishop John Owen, as true a Welshman as ever lived'[1]

John Owen was born into a typical working class, nonconformist Welsh household during the middle of the nineteenth century. His parents nurtured him in the Calvinistic Methodist tradition which had increasingly gained prominence within the Welsh speaking areas of Wales. It was this upbringing which shaped and formed much of the valuable experience which Owen was to draw upon during his episcopal ministry, especially during his campaign against the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in the four Welsh dioceses. The Calvinistic Methodist tradition, with its (in nonconformist terms) relatively high view of the sacraments also shaped Owen's theology, which did alter and develop during his early adulthood, yet he retained a devotion to the sacraments which never left him. Owen's formation within the Anglican Church began during his education both in native Llŷn as well as in Oxford. In both places, he was heavily influenced by Anglican clergy whose knowledge and devotion to the Church impacted greatly upon Owen's imagination. This was unexpected as the established Church would have been considered the natural foe of any true Welsh-speaking nonconformist. For as Davies remarked: 'it is not too much to say that to be a Welshman meant in the great majority of cases that one was a Nonconformist in religion and a Liberal in politics.'[2] Yet here Owen displayed an openness of mind which would characterize him throughout his career. Undoubtedly his admittance to Oxford, a privilege which had only been possible for nonconformists for less than two decades prior to Owen's arrival at Jesus College, was to have a tremendous impact upon his future. It was here that he made the acquaintance of a distinctly Anglican circle of friends. Although Owen remained a Methodist until his confirmation at Appleby in 1879, the influence of these individuals, most notably A.G. Edwards, would be transformational. This circle of friends introduced him into the breadth of Anglicanism, so readily available in a city such as Oxford and, theologically as well as socially, Owen was shaped by these encounters.

[1] E.T. Davies, *Disestablishment and Disendowment* (Penarth, 1970), p.13.
[2] E.T. Davies, *Disestablishment and Disendowment* (Penarth, 1970), p.3.

His appointment, at a relatively young age to be Professor of Welsh at St David's College, Lampeter was indicative not only of the academic abilities which Owen possessed, but also of the significant influence which his relationship with Edwards had upon his ecclesiastical progression. A fluent Welsh speaker, who continued to struggle to be fully understood in English, it would have been expected for Owen to have sought to renew the life of the Welsh department which was at the time at a low ebb. Yet as many of his critics have commented, Owen did little to improve the provision of the Welsh language in the college, a pattern which he was to follow when he succeeded Edwards as Warden of Llandovery College. Edwards obviously acknowledged Owen's abilities, he promoted his cause, and as the present research has borne witness, was influential in ensuring his appointment both to the positions at Lampeter and at Llandovery, where he did little to deviate from his mentor's expectations. His appointment as Dean of St Asaph, following Edwards's elevation as bishop of the see, was surely one of the most politically motivated moves which Edwards made. Owen, not gifted liturgically, with virtually no knowledge of the diocese, was appointed in order that he might serve as 'lieutenant' to his friend and guide. Owen certainly succeeded in this role, and much of his energies during this period were confined to the issues surrounding the Tithe War. This debate, a matter which Owen would have been familiar with considering his own family background, was a distinctive social and religious struggle between the working-class nonconformists and the gentrified Anglicans. Owen now found himself on the other side of the social and institutional divide, and this experience enabled him to prove a formidable opponent to the Methodist radical Thomas Gee and his supporters. Owen learnt from Gee's political campaigns, especially in relation to the value and power of the printed word, and there is little doubt that Gee's own practices helped to shape Owen's own campaign in relation to disestablishment and the substantial amount of written material which he produced.

Although Owen remained in the shadow of Edwards for much of his early career, his confidence and political adroitness were developing all the time, a factor which would shape his individual contribution to the life of the Church in the decades to come. During his tenure at St Asaph he developed a close personal relationship with W.E. Gladstone and although he was never totally at ease with powerful political leaders of the aristocracy or upper class, he well recognised the importance of nurturing such relationships. His time as

Dean also brought to the fore one of his greatest passions, which was the professional development of the clergy. At St Asaph, he instigated clergy schools and lectures which sought to improve the educational and theological standards of those who served in parishes. Owen remained devoted to the improvement of his clergy, both in terms of their wellbeing and their education, throughout his ministry. Such an interest was never displayed by Edwards, nor indeed many other members of the ecclesiastical leadership in Wales during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Owen's short period at St Asaph led to his return to St David's College, Lampeter as principal, and during this time he devoted himself to public campaigns, most notably in relation to the establishment and constitution of the University of Wales. This early part of Owen's career was extremely important in that it shaped not only his theology, but also altered his social and political positions. Much of the reason that Owen gained little recognition for his contribution to the life of the Church during these years was that he deferred instinctively to Edwards, whose influence not only attained for him positions of power, but also obliged him to remain loyal to his senior's political and religious views. Owen's distinct contribution, however, was to come to the fore during the campaign to disestablish the Church within Wales.

The historian D. Gareth Evans remarks that: 'The period from 1850 to 1914 encompassed the golden years of Welsh Nonconformity'[3] and it was into this golden era that Owen emerged as the champion of the Church's defence. Owen's elevation to the episcopacy seems to have stirred within him a profound sense of the call to leadership and in varied ways, he outgrew the control and influence of his friend and mentor, Edwards, and developed his own distinctive leadership style for which he came to be widely respected: 'He spoke in every great city in the Kingdom, and he helped more than any other living man to arouse among the English people some enthusiasm for the Church in Wales.'[4] Owen's commitment to the campaign is testified by his willingness to combat the arguments from which every quarter they arose, although disestablishment was intrinsically linked to the Liberal Party and its supporters. One of the predominant claims in favour of the move was that the Anglican Church no longer possessed a majority of adherents within Christian Wales. The Revival of 1904-5 combined with the nonconformists' success at placing

[3] D. G. Evans, *A History of Wales 1906-2000* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 320.
[4] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p.239.

themselves at the heart of industrial and thereby population expansions, had left the Church in a minority position. The problems for the Church were more significant than they were for many of their nonconformist counterparts for by 1914 almost half the population of Wales lived on the South Wales coalfield and the Church had not expanded into those areas at the same rate as many other denominations. The whole population of Wales had expanded tremendously during this period from 1,163,139 in 1851 to 2,523,500 in 1914, an increase of 117% in sixty-three years. Although the Church may have been weaker in terms of its presence and capability in certain industrial areas, Owen laboured the point throughout the campaign that the Church remained the largest single Christian denomination, and as a keen mathematician he sought repeatedly to use data to his advantage. Although the Liberal Party failed on numerous occasions to accept his challenge to establish a religious census, the instituting of the Royal Commission in 1906, at least provided Owen with the statistical support that he required. Critics of the Commission would conclude that much of its work was flawed, especially in its refusal to engage with issues such as national property, while the conduct of its chairman was certainly questionable, however the publication of its report not only supported Owen's basic contentions, but it testified to the increasing development of the Church's work within the nation. Much of this positive response would not have been possible without Owen's work as the co-ordinator of the Church's response to the Commission, in which he was ably assisted by Frank Morgan, a figure whose life and contribution to the Church in Wales deserves further scholarly research. The findings of the Commission also testified to Owen's firm resolve that the Revival of 1904-5 spiked the attendance figures of the various nonconformist denominations and that the long-term effects were neutral if not negative to the overall attendance picture.

Perhaps one of the most difficult issues which Owen had to face from his opponents was the concept that the Church was an alien body, whose structures and very existence had been imposed upon the people of Wales. As it has been highlighted in this study, there could be little doubt about the Welsh character of Owen's own life. The notion of an alien Church undoubtedly stemmed from the series of episcopal and other senior clergy appointments which were made, which propelled unsuitable, predominantly monoglot English speaking clergy, into the life of the Welsh Church. It was not until 1870 with Joshua

Hughes' appointment to the see of St Asaph that the tide began to turn. By the time of Owen's episcopacy, as Gem remarked: 'its Bishops are Welshmen, and are defending their Church with all the vigour of their Celtic race, for the sake, not of the English people, but of Welsh people.'[5] Owen consistently argued that the Church was the natural successor to that of St David, that allegations made regarding it having been imposed during the Norman Conquest were simply untrue, and that linguistically the Church was better able to serve the Welsh-speaking population than ever before, although ironically the need to minister in Welsh was greatly decreasing due to the industrial expansion of the South Wales coalfields. Although Owen's own commitment to the Welsh nation, its people, culture and language was clear, he was not aided during the debate by Edwards who consistently refused to recognise the significant political, social and cultural changes which were taking place around him. Edwards, who found himself much more comfortable in the political elite of Westminster, failed to identify with the needs of '*y Werin*' something which Owen at least attempted to do. Owen's very being testified to the emergence of the Episcopal Church as a distinctively Welsh body, and his efforts testified to his determination to impress upon the population the changing nature of the Church and its service to the nation.

Owen's understanding of his opponents' weaknesses came to the fore in his highly adept contention that disestablishment would lead to the secularization of the nation. Here Owen very much brought his own personal history and background into play, by seeking to impress upon the nonconformists that their actions would weaken the Christian life within Wales that they claimed they sought to conserve. Owen urged that the Christian witness embodied through the various denominations should unite to combat the greater evils of sin and materialism, and that not to contrive with what was ultimately a serious disservice to the nation:

> It ought surely to be possible for all Christian communities to respect each other's religious convictions and to work in peace, each on the religious lines which it believes to be true, for the common object of serving the spiritual welfare of Wales as a whole.[6]

[5] S.H. Gem (ed.) *The Proposed Robbery of the Churchpeople of Wales* (Oxford, 1912), p.6.
[6] J. Owen, *The Call of the Church to Service and the Unity of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1909), p.15.

This call to unity fell on deaf ears, as proponents of disestablishment felt that the measure was much more related to the issue of the privileged position of one denomination over another than it was about the recognition of the virtue of religion per se. However, Owen consistently argued that the loss of recognition of the Christian religion within the public sphere would have serious consequences, and perhaps this prophetic message is worth reflection when considering the state of Christianity in Wales in the twenty-first century, which has witnessed a far greater decline than any of its counterparts in the other home nations. The divine principles of society were, in Owen's opinion, under attack, and he fought consistently to defend what he believed to be the inherent Christian character of the Welsh nation. Owen opposed disestablishment based on the national recognition of Christianity rather than those who viewed the measure as establishing religious equality.

Although Owen's arguments in relation to the threat of secularization were neither popular nor appreciated greatly at the time, he was consistent in championing the Church's pastoral provision to the nation. During Owen's tenure as Dean, his concern for the development of his clergy was primary, and throughout the debates surrounding disestablishment, he continued to strive for the improvement of the education and pastoral ability of the clergy and also the general ministry of the Church in every corner of the land. Owen was ably assisted in his arguments by the reports and data provided by the Royal Commission. The Commission's report highlighted the irony that the body 'ultimately disestablished was in far sounder health than it had been a century before.'[7] From 1910 onwards, Owen used the Commission's findings to highlight the deficiencies within the chapels, such as; over-capacity, lack of ministerial provision in significant areas and the inability to employ ministers at an acceptable level of pay. This contrasted with the Church's own situation which had dramatically improved; Owen would often reflect upon the changes within his own diocese to illustrate this. Owen recognised that it was only pastoral work which would ultimately defeat his opponents, and that investment in building projects, provision of clergy, the establishment of Sunday schools together with welfare programmes and Christian education, were vital to altering the population's view of the Church's ministry. It was through this development that Owen recognised that:

[7] P. Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales, 1536-1990* (London, 1992) p.297.

> the respect of the Welsh people generally for the Church as a spiritual society is very much greater now than it was thirty years ago. A glance at the Welsh press thirty years ago, fifteen years ago, and now, shows a most striking and creditable change of tone towards the Church.[8]

Despite his perpetual involvement in the campaign against disestablishment, Owen remained determined to concentrate the Church's efforts upon pastoral work and increasing provision for ordinary people to worship and enjoy the benefits of Christian fellowship.

Throughout Owen's episcopacy, prior to the passing of the Act of Disestablishment, he maintained that the government lacked the electoral support for its actions in respect of the Welsh Church. This was an argument which he repeated incessantly throughout the campaign. He maintained that at no general election was the issue of disestablishment placed before the electorate in a clear and concise manner, and sought to research the publications of MPs when citing their failure to place it clearly in their manifesto. This behaviour however, shows that Owen could sometimes harbour unrealistic expectations, for it would not be possible for anybody to be able effectively to ascertain the content of discussion of every Liberal candidate in each general election. Owen believed that the decision to disestablish the Church was ideologically driven, rather than the will of the people, an opinion that has been supported by many historians: 'I am convinced that it (disestablishment) is not a popular agitation, but a manufactured one; in other words, it did not originate with the people, but is thrust upon them.'[9] Regardless of the validity of their actions, the Liberal Party through its parliamentary majority possessed the ability to enact the measure, particularly after the reform of the House of Lords; this was an action which Owen, as a peer or lord spiritual himself, considered to be a violation of democratic principles. Nevertheless, throughout the course of the discussion on this matter, Owen failed to recognise that the campaign to disestablish the Church was the function of the move to create a 'New Wales' ('*Cymru Fydd*'), through which the Liberal Party and its radical Welsh MPs aspired to forge an emerging cultural and social identity. Disestablishment was

[8] J. Owen, *The Call of the Church to Service and the Unity of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1909), p.8.
[9] E.T. Davies, *Disestablishment and Disendowment* (Penarth, 1970), p.1.

the political goal of those who aspired to form a different nation. Owen desperately sought assistance from England, particularly in seeking to raise opposition to the Liberals, and this failed, and his argument that there was precedent for distinctively Welsh legislation was considered weak at best, for as Matthews commented: 'Nor did Gladstone have any philosophical objection to this process, for he had long come to recognise that the circumstance of the Church in Wales were peculiar, and needed special treatment.'[10] Owen devoted a considerable amount of effort to developing arguments in relation to the electoral accountability and validity of the government's actions, much of which was wasted as he gained little support or sympathy.

Although Owen's efforts in respect of the electoral argument may have been of little consequence, his contribution to the argument regarding the validity or otherwise of the dismemberment of the Church was considerable. Throughout the campaign, Owen was vociferous in his desire to see the Church retain its unity with the see of Canterbury, maintaining that the government had no right to interfere in what was a distinctly religious matter. Owen maintained that even before the political union of England and Wales, the Welsh Church had merged with Canterbury rather than been unified by an Act of Parliament. Consequently, dismemberment was a wilful act of discourtesy, which sought to damage the catholicity of the Church. The catholicity of the Church was significant to Owen. Perhaps due to his background, his commitment to Anglicanism had led him to value the wider perspective which membership of the Catholic and Apostolic Church offered. His fear, like that of other leading Welsh Churchmen, was that the dismemberment of the Church would lead to a weakening of this understanding and that the Welsh Church would find itself unable to cope with the larger social and moral issues which were likely to present themselves during the twentieth century. Throughout the discussion surrounding dismemberment, he was strongly supported by Archbishop Davidson; however, he was undermined by fellow Anglicans who were in favour of disestablishment. Owen did seek to identify the weakness of his opponents' arguments on this issue, for the nonconformists had themselves failed to create a separate Welsh Free Church Council for fear of the damage it would cause to the movement in the United Kingdom as a whole. For Owen, this was

[10] K.O. Morgan, 'Gladstone and Wales', *Welsh History Review* 1/1 (1960), p.81.

remarkable as he stated: 'If the Free Church Council possessed some sense of humour, it would have some sense of justice.'[11] Owen maintained that dismemberment was an act of injustice, which served only to damage the life of the Church in toto.

'We owe a duty to the past, but we owe a still greater duty to the future, and as trustees we have no choice but to defend our trust to the utmost of our power.'[12] This sentence testifies to Owen's commitment to defend the Church, its property and its endowments. Throughout the campaign the disestablishment measure was intrinsically linked to the measure to disendow the historic Church of the Welsh nation. Owen contested this notion always. Although he perceived there to be no need to remove the status of the established Church, he could not identify the need to equalize the financial situations of the various denominations. In many of his publications Owen challenges the right of his opponents to lay claim to the Church's endowments prior to 1662. He did appreciate the concept, as presented by some, that these endowments were national property and therefore should be equally enjoyed by all members of the population. Some remarkable claims were made about the nature of these endowments during the campaign, and certainly Owen did little to address some of the misinformation which was voiced by proponents of the Church's position. Owen's own contribution to this debate was greatly aided by that of Lord Selborne, who also viewed the measure as merely an opportunity to plunder the Church. Owen was not confined to opposing the measure on principle; he also took considerable opportunity to educate the public regarding the accurate financial situation which faced the Church. He recognised quite clearly that a stable financial basis was required for the Church to function effectively and that the removal of endowments would cause greater harm to individual parishes and their clergy than to the dioceses or other institutions. The issue of clergy poverty was of primary concern to Owen, a concern which displayed the pastoral nature of his character and his thoughtful consideration of the wider implications of such a measure. Although the measures put forward by the Liberal government for the alternative use of these endowments was popular, nevertheless Owen continued to press the point that the endowments were being effectively used, a point which was testified by the report of the Royal Commission and that these endowments

[11] J. Owen, *Welsh Disestablishment and Political Tactics* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.5.
[12] J. Owen, *The Duty and Encouragement of Welsh Churchmen* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.5.

were supporting the pastoral provision in every community. Owen concentrated on educating the public about this measure in the hope that they would not be deceived by what he considered to be the political opportunism of the Liberal Party and its supporters.

> The crude hands that first essayed the task of unravelling and of disentangling were conscientiously reckless of the fate or even of the life of the Church. Secularised endowments, cathedrals turned into music-halls, alienated Churchyards, clergy to be pensioned and turned adrift, the use of the Churches only granted if Protestant, every bond of continuity, authority and order to be hacked through-these were the ideals that inspired the imagination of the patriarchs of disestablishment.[13]

The despondency eloquently expressed by Edwards in the above remark, is testimony to his general attitude towards the fate of the Church following the passing of the disestablishment bill in 1914. It was, though, during the period 1914-20 that Owen's increasing significance for both Church and nation came most obviously to the fore, a contribution which has only faintly been recognised either by his contemporaries or indeed by subsequent students of Welsh religious, political and social history. Both A. G. Edwards, Bishop of St Asaph, and Watkin Williams of Bangor were incredibly doubtful about the future of the Church following the passing of the Act and resigned themselves to inactivity. Owen, on the other hand, faced resolutely the reality of the situation and with a sense of renewed vigour sought to ensure the best possible future for the Anglican Church in Wales. One of the most pressing issues which faced Owen was the impending implementation of the measure, however this was delayed due to the Great War, and its continuation far beyond the expectation of politicians at the time. The effects of the War however were to constrain Owen, mostly due to a sense of national duty, to refrain from controversy in respect of the measure, and merely to plan strategically for the Church's future. This action was not without its critics, and there were many within the Church who felt that Owen failed to display the heroic leadership which had exemplified his conduct in the period until the passing of the bill. This is an unfair criticism considering the seriousness with which Owen took his episcopal role as a focus for unity and that within numerous spheres of public life, political and social unity was being sought for the common good. Owen's opinion was

[13] A.G. Edwards, *Memories* (London, 1927), p.315.

clear that 'the salt of spiritual life is that true humility which springs from thankfulness and results in hope.'[14]

This hope came into fruition through the Cardiff Convention of 1917. Owen together with Justice Sankey and a small group of other leading figures, which did not include episcopal colleagues, planned for this gathering, the intention of which was to lay the foundation for the establishment of the new Anglican settlement within Wales. Within this Convention it is possible to depict Owen as displaying the vision for a prosperous future for the Church whilst retaining an eye to the detail of the proposals being brought forward. The Cardiff Convention was a remarkable event which produced proposals not only for a new province but also the Governing Body and the Representative Body, whose basic composition and purpose has remained unchanged for almost one hundred years. During the debates Owen's campaign for the increased voice of the laity and of women, shows him to be a visionary for his generation. His contribution in advocating the title of 'The Church in Wales' for the new province, whilst it was opposed by some, is testimony to his sincere desire to retain the Catholicity of the new province and emphasise its service to the nation, for as he remarked: 'there is no real antithesis between true Catholicity and true nationality.'[15]

Owen's political skills were also attested to during this period by his willingness to take advantage of the changed political landscape following the general election of 1918. The loss of a Liberal majority in parliament, and the focus of the coalition government on securing a lasting peace, offered the Church an opportunity to redress some of its grievances, this was an opportunity which Owen took with gladness. The formulation and enactment of the 1919 Amending Act was a significant personal triumph for Owen. The Act which encompassed the revaluation of tithe as well as several other measures enabled the Church to gain considerably in financial terms. Much of this was made possible by the consistent attention to detail which Owen had paid to the bill when it was passed and his ability to use those figures to his own advantage when seeking redress. The Amending Act contributed significantly to the initial potential of the Church in Wales, and its creation and

[14] J. Owen, *The Welsh Disestablishment Bill, Facts and Principles* (Cardiff, 1912), p.8.
[15] J. Owen, *An Essay on The Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917), p.18.

passing would not have been possible without Owen's contribution. It should however be recorded that throughout this period Owen remained determined to refrain from controversial speeches and acts, in order not only to preserve political unity, but also to seek to recover much of the damage which he felt had been done to the Church and other denominations within Wales due to the controversy surrounding disestablishment.

The establishment of the Church in Wales in March 1920 was a watershed in Owen's life. The existence of such a body, which he had spent over twenty years of his ministry opposing, had come into existence, and yet the change created little effect upon the Welsh population or the political classes. There are many commentators who view the effects of disestablishment as having been incredibly positive for the life of the Church. Price argues that the history of the Church in Wales since 1920 was the 'gradual integration, after the alienation of the eighteenth century, of the Church into Welsh society.'[16] This smooth transition was certainly, in part, the responsibility of Owen, who for the previous six years since the passing of the bill had sought to prepare the foundations for this new body, of which he continued to be a leading figure. The establishment of the new province, a move which Owen had consistently argued for, came into being. Yet the election of an archbishop for the new province, seemingly brought out the deferential nature of Owen's character, and placed him as the faithful lieutenant to Edwards, a role he had occupied for much of the 1880s and 1890s. Edwards's election, based on his seniority, is a practice which the Church in Wales has maintained for almost a century, but the wisdom of such a move remains debatable. Edwards, having served as a bishop for almost thirty years, had little appetite for the changes which were necessary for the continuation of the growth which the Church had experienced within recent years. The establishment of the Diocese of Swansea and Brecon also created significant hostility in the relationship between Owen and Edwards. The dispute regarding the propriety of electing Edward Bevan to the see, who had served as suffragan Bishop of Swansea for many years, due to his inability to speak Welsh, caused a division between the two, which continued to plague their relationship for several years afterwards. Owen's determination however to see Bevan elected is indicative that his willingness to be loyal to his mentor, as would have been the case some forty years previously, was no longer

[16] D.T.W. Price, *A History of the Church in Wales in the Twentieth Century* (Penarth, 1990), p.23.

the greatest factor in his decision making. Owen campaigned for the best candidate despite the criticism he received both from Edwards and others who viewed that the Welsh language was once again being relegated in its importance within the life of the Church.

The final years of Owen's episcopate were once again dominated by financial concerns. The desire to re-endow the Church through the Million Pound Appeal was an important act in ensuring the financial security of the Church. Owen contributed significantly to raising the profile of this appeal both within Wales and England. Although Owen notes his disquiet that the appeal was not as successful as he may have wished, the economic climate in which such substantial funds were raised was incredibly pressurised. By establishing the Appeal, Owen contributed to the security of the Church centrally thereby enabling his concentration to turn, once more, to the issue of clergy poverty. The disendowment of the Church had led to many individual incumbents being appointed to parishes with little, if any, income. Owen, through the diocesan structures which he had constructed and strengthened over several years, sought to ensure that there was a basic level of pay for all incumbents regardless of the geographical location of their parish. His concern for the welfare of his clergy is testimony to his continued desire to ensure the welfare of those committed to his charge.

Owen's death in 1926 robbed the Church and the nation of one of its most formidable champions. The testimony to his work and contribution was considerable at the time, as Roger Brown attests: 'Although he had fought hard for the Welsh Church in press and on platform he had done so in a style that all respected.'[17] Owen was always gracious in his conduct, and through his own personal background, was respectful of his opponents despite his strong disagreement with their principles and arguments. Owen's own desire to seek the unity of Christians within Wales was admirable, yet it never came to fruition, as K. O. Morgan commented:

> A reader surveying the controversy forty years on, after years in which disestablishment seems to have enhanced rather than to have impaired the

[17] R.L. Brown, *In Pursuit of a Welsh Episcopate: Appointments to Welsh Sees 1840-1905,* (Cardiff, 2005), p.253.

> vitality of the new Welsh Church, may perhaps question such partisanship, in contrast with which Owen's vision of Christian unity seems attenuated and remote.[18]

Nevertheless, Owen remained determined to fight against disestablishment in any way possible, and was consistent in his view that 'no amount of repetition can make true what is untrue.'[19] His contribution to the defence of the Church has been significantly underestimated. Although there were many others who, like him, published pamphlets and spoke at rallies, Owen's breadth of knowledge and skill at deploying that knowledge to the benefit of his arguments is quite remarkable. For the Church, he was its primary spokesperson, and literature from that period attests to the respect in which his views and the data he presented was held. Notably Owen's prominence in the historical record of the Church in Wales has been diminished by his service and loyalty to Edwards, which was most keenly seen prior to his elevation to the episcopate and following the establishment of the Church in Wales in 1920. Owen placed his call to service above personal ambition, yet in doing so he denied the Church the leadership which it required in the 1920s thus enabling Edwards to retain control over an organization to which he was only half-heartedly committed. Yet Owen's contribution to the success of the Church in Wales following disestablishment remained highly significant. His attention to detail, his determination to ensure the best possible settlement following the cessation of the First World War is testimony to his desire to see the Church flourish, as it had done for much of the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Disestablishment was a measure against which Owen fought vigorously, yet he did so, not for the benefit of his own position, or for political power but simply that 'Church Defence (was) for the sake of Church Work, and Church Work for the sake of Church Life.'[20] Owen is one of the most significant figures in the religious and political history of Wales during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His contribution to the Church in Wales was of significant value and his life deserves the appreciation not afforded him by historians and commentators in the past. John Owen was the champion of the Church in every respect, and without his contribution the fate of the Church in Wales would have been poorer by far.

---

[18] K. O. Morgan, 'Review of *The Later Life of Bishop Owen'*, *Welsh History Review* 1/3 (1962) p.351.
[19] J. Owen, *Welsh Disestablishment and Political Tactics* (Carmarthen, 1911), p.9.
[20] J. Owen, 'Presidential Address at the St Davids Diocesan Conference at Aberystwyth', 21 September 1910.

Bibliography

Manuscript Sources:

John Owen Collection, National Library of Wales

Owen Family Collection, St Davids Cathedral Library Archive

Davies, J.T. 'Bishop Owen D.D.' (1954)

Owen, J. 'College Friends'

Printed Sources:

(1) Primary Sources:

Owen, J. *An Essay on the Church in Wales and its Convention* (Lampeter, 1917).

Owen, J. 'Atgofion' *Y Llan* (1921).

Owen, J. *Church Work and Church Defence* (Cardiff, 1910).

Owen, J. *Mesur Dadgysylltiad i Gymru, beth ydyw* (Carmarthen, 1912)

Owen, J. *Principles of Welsh Church Defence* (Carmarthen, 1906).

Owen, J. *Presidential Address at the St Davids Diocesan Conference at Aberystwyth* (1910).

Owen, J. *Presidential Address at the St Davids Diocesan Conference at Carmarthen* (1915).

Owen, J. *The Acceptance of the Welsh Church Temporalities Act, 1919* (London, 1919).

Owen, J. *The Call of the Church to Service and the Unity of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1909).

Owen, J. *The Church in Wales Royal Commission-An Address* (Carmarthen, 1911).

Owen, J. *The Dismemberment of the Church* (Carmarthen, 1913).

Owen, J. *The Duty and Encouragement of Welsh Churchmen* (Carmarthen, 1911).

Owen, J. *The Financial Position of a Welsh Diocese and the Welsh Bill* (Carmarthen, 1913).

Owen, J. *The Present Position of the Church in Wales* (Carmarthen, 1911).

Owen, J. *The Prime Minister and Welsh Disestablishment* (Carmarthen, 1909).

Owen, J. *The Principles of the Welsh Disestablishment Bill* (Cardiff, 1909).

Owen, J. *The Welsh Disestablishment Bill, Facts and Principles* (Cardiff, 1912).

Owen, J. *The Welsh Disestablishment Bill, What it means* (London, 1911).

Owen, J. *Three addresses on the Disestablishment Bill* (Carmarthen, 1912).

Owen, J. *Welsh Disestablishment and Political Tactics* (Carmarthen, 1911).

Owen, J. 'Welsh Nationalism,' *Wales (*1912), p.343

Owen, J. *Welsh Nationality and the Welsh Church Bill* (Carmarthen, 1914).

Owen, J. *Welsh Nationality and the Welsh Church Bill, Mr Asquith's Tactics and Pledges* (Carmarthen, 1914).

(2) Secondary Sources:

The South Wales Daily News

The Times

The Western Mail

The Church Times

The Daily Telegraph

The Church Quarterly Review

Spectator

National Review

Church Eclectic

Catholic World

Yr Haul

Y Llan

The Debates on the Welsh Disestablishment Bill Examined (London, 1912).

Hansard, 4th & 5th series, 1911-19.

Notes on the Report of the Royal Commission on the Church of England and other Religious bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire (London, 1911).

Official Report of the Proceedings of the Convention of the Church in Wales held at Cardiff (Cardiff, 1917).

The Royal Commission on the Church of England and other Religious bodies in Wales and Monmouthshire (London, 1910).

Crockford Clerical Directory (Oxford, 1909).

The Bible

The Progress of the Church in Wales, Anti-Liberation Society, Leaflet No.xxx London, 1890.

The General Census of England and Wales (1901).

Liberation Society Conference (1866).

Balfour, A.J. & Bridgeman, W.C. & Smith F.E. *Speeches on the Disestablishment Bill* (London, 1909)

Bell, G.K.A. *Randall Davidson* (Oxford, 1952).

Bell, P.M.H. *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales* (London, 1969).

Benbough-Jackson, M. 'Ritual, Symbol and Politics: Gladstone, Swansea and Wales in 1887', Welsh History Review, (2013).

Bradley, J.F. *Nonconformists and the Welsh Church Bill* (London, 1912).

Brook, S. (ed.), *Where we Belong II, Life in the Brecon Beacons* (Llanfrynach, 2011).

Brown, R.L. *David Howell: A Pool of Spirituality* (Dinbych, 1998).

Brown, R.L. *In Pursuit of a Welsh Episcopate, Appointments to Welsh Sees 1840-1905* (Cardiff, 2005).

Brown, R.L. 'Traitor and Compromisers: The Shadow Side of the Church's Fight against Disestablishment', *Journal of Welsh Religious History* 3 (1995), pp. 35-53.

Cambrensis, V. *The Rise and Decline of Welsh Nonconformity* (London, 1912).

Cavendish, Lady Frederick. *The Church in Wales* (London, 1895).

Chadwick, O. *The Victorian Church* (London, 1987).

Childs, D. 'A Goodly Heritage-John Sankey', *Friends of St Davids Cathedral* (1984), pp.7-13

Clayton, H.J. *The Indictment and Defence of the Church in Wales* (London, 1911).

Clarke, H.W. *A History of the Church in Wales* (London, 1896).

Cragoe, M. 'A Question of Culture, Welsh Church and St Asaph' *Welsh History Review* 18/3 (1996), pp. 228-72.

Cragoe, M. & Williams C. *Wales and War: Society, Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cardiff, 2007)

Cutts, E. *The Case of the Welsh Church* (London, 1893).

Davies, D.T. (ed.), *Hanes Eglwysi a Phlwyfi Lleyn* (Pwllheli, 1910).

Davies, E.T. *Disestablishment and Disendowment* (Penarth, 1970).

Davies, E.T. *Disestablishment of the Church* (Towyn, 1986).

Davies, R.R. & Jenkins, G.H. *From Medieval to Modern Wales: Historical Essays in Honour of K.O. Morgan & R.A. Griffiths* (Cardiff, 2004).

Duncan-Jones, A.S. 'Alfred George Edwards', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

Edwards, A.G. *A Handbook on Welsh Church Defence* (London, 1895).

Edwards, A.G. *Landmarks in the History of the Welsh Church* (London, 1912).

Edwards, A.G. *Facts and Figures about Church and Dissent in Wales* (Carmarthen, 1888).

Edwards, A.G. *Memories* (London, 1927).

Edwards, H.T. *Wales and the Welsh Church* (London, 1889).

Edwards, N. 'The Conservative Party and Wales' *National Library of Wales Journal* (2006).

Edwards, W. *Four Centuries of Nonconformist Disabilities 1500-1912* (London, 1912).

Edwards, W. *A Plea for the Disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales* (Pontypool, 1892).

Emery, G.F. *The Peoples' Guide to the Welsh Church Disestablishment Bill* (London, 1909).

Evans, D.G. *A History of Wales 1906-2000* (Cardiff, 2000).

Evans, H. *The Case for Disestablishment* (Carmarthen, 1907).

Evans, W.G. *A History of Llandovery College* (Cardiff, 1981).

Gem, S.H. (ed.), *The Proposed Robbery of the Churchpeople of Wales* (Oxford, 1912).

George, W.B. 'Welsh Disestablishment and Welsh Nationalism' *Publications of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales* (1970).

Gibson, W. & Morgan-Guy, J. *Religion and Society in the Diocese of St Davids 1485-2011* (Farnham, 2015)

Gladstone, W.E. *A Chapter of Autobiography* (London, 1868).

Green, C.A.H. 'Welsh Disestablishment,' *Nineteenth Century* (1914).

Green, C.A.H. *Disestablishment and Disendowment: the Experience of the Church in Wales* (London, 1935).

Hylson-Smith, K. *Evangelicals in the Church of England 1734-1984* (Edinburgh, 1988).

James, J.W. *A Church History of Wales* (Ilfracombe, 1945).

Jenkins, P. *A History of Modern Wales, 1536-1990* (London, 1992).

Johnes, A.J. *An Essay on the Causes which produced dissent from the Established Church in the Principality of Wales* (London, 1832).

Jones, B. *Primary Charge to the Clergy of St Davids* (London, 1877).

Jones, B.R. (ed.), *Floreat Landubriense* (Llandysul, 1998).

Jones, F.P. *Radicaliaeth a'r Werin Gymreig yn y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg* (Caerdydd, 1977).

Jones, G. *New Work on the Welsh Church Bill Controversy* (London, 1913).

Jones G.E. & Roderick, G.W. *A History of Education in Wales* (Cardiff, 2003).

Jones, G.H. *A Celt Looks at the World* (Cardiff, 1946).

Jones, I.W. *Y Llinyn Arian* (Dinbych, 1998).

Jones, J.G. 'Dean Charles Vaughan, A.J. Williams and the Disestablishment Debate of November 1885' *Journal of Welsh Religious History* (2000).

Jones, O. 'The Archdeaconry of Brecon', *Brycheiniog* 22 (1987), pp. 15-21.

Jones, P.M. 'The Welsh Church Act Fund of Denbighshire: a review of the Welsh Church Act Funds to Denbighshire under the Welsh Church Acts of 1914 and 1919' *Transactions of the Denbighshire Historical Society* (2000).

Jones, R.T. (trans. S.P. Jones), *Faith and the Crisis of a Nation, Wales 1890-1914* (Cardiff, 2004).

Jones, R.T. *Hanes Annibynwyr Cymru* (Swansea, 1966).

Jones, R.T. 'The Origins of the Nonconformist Disestablishment Campaign, 1830-40' *Publications of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales* (1970).

Jones, T.M. *Cofiant y Parchedig Roger Edwards* (Grwecsam, 1908).

Lerry, G.G. *Alfred George Edwards: Archbishop of Wales* (Oswestry, 1940).

Lewis, E. 'Review of *The Later Life of Bishop Owen'*, *Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales* 12 (1962), pp.70-2.

Lunn, H. 'An Archbishop's Memories and Lessons from Welsh Disestablishment', *Review of the English Churches* 5 (1928), pp. 206-12.

Machin, G.I.T. *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain 1869 to 1921* (Oxford, 1987).

Mackintosh, W.H. *Disestablishment and Liberation: The Movement for the Separation of the Anglican Church from State Control* (London, 1972).

Matthew, *H.C.G. Gladstone, 1875-1898* (Oxford, 1995).

Morgan, D.D. *Lewis Edwards* (Caerdydd, 2009).

Morgan, D.D. *The Span of the Cross: Christian Religion and Society in Wales, 1914-2000* (Cardiff, 1999).

Morgan, K.O. *Freedom or Sacrilege, A History of the Campaign for Welsh Disestablishment* (Penarth, 1966).

Morgan, K.O. *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880-1980* (Oxford, 1981).

Morgan, K.O. 'Review of *The Later Life of Bishop Owen'*, *Welsh History Review* 1/3 (1962), pp. 348-53.

Morgan, K.O. 'Liberal, Nationalists and Mr Gladstone', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1960), pp. 36-62.

Morgan, K.O. 'Gladstone and Wales' *Welsh History Review* 1/1 (1960), pp. 65-82.

Nelmes, G.V. 'Stuart Rendel and Welsh Liberal Political Organisations in the late Nineteenth Century', *Welsh History Review* (1979), pp. 468-85.

Ormsby-Gore, W.G.A. *Welsh Disestablishment and Disendowment* (London, 1912).

Owen, E.E. *The Early Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1958).

Owen, E.E. *The Later Life of Bishop Owen* (Llandysul, 1961).

Parry, G. 'Hanes Ysgol Botwnnog', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1957), pp. 1-17.

Pope, R. 'Welsh Methodists and the Establishment in the Nineteenth Century', *Welsh Journal of Religious History* (2011).

Price, D.T.W, *A History of the Church in Wales in the Twentieth Century* (Penarth, 1990).

Price, D.T.W. 'John Owen' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

Price, D.T.W. 'Francis John Jayne' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

Price, D.T.W. *A History of Saint David's University College Lampeter; Volume One: to 1898* (Cardiff, 1977).

Price, W.W. 'John Griffith', *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* (London, 1959).

Renowden, R. *Genial, Kind Divine, Watkin Hebert Williams 1845-1944* (Denbigh, 1988).

Reynolds, J.S. *The Evangelicals at Oxford 1735-1871* (Oxford, 1975).

Robbins, K. & Morgan-Guy, J. (eds.), *Bold Imagining* (Llandysul, 2002).

Robbins, K. 'Episcopacy in Wales', *Journal of Welsh Religious History* 4 (1996), pp. 63-78.

Selborne, R. *A Defence of the Church of England against Disestablishment* (London, 1887).

Smith, B. 'Bishop Edwards of St Asaph and Disestablishment' *Transactions of the Denbighshire Historical Society* (2011).

Vincent, A. 'T. H. Green' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

Wade-Evans, A. *Papers for Thinking Welshmen* (London, 1907).

Walker, D. 'Disestablishment and Independence', in D. Walker (ed.), *A History of the Church in Wales* (Penarth, 1976), pp. 164-87.

Williams, D. *A History of Modern Wales* (London, 1977).

Williams, G. & Jacob, W. & Yates, N. & Knight, F, *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment 1603-1920* (Cardiff, 2007).

Williams, J.G. *The University Movement in Wales* (Cardiff, 1993).

Williams, R. *The Attack on the Church in Wales* (London, 1912).

Websites:

www.appleby.cumbria.sch.uk

www.eisteddfod.org.uk

www.llgc.org.uk