

**PHASES OF
CONVOCATION:
ANGLICAN SYNODS,
A.D. 601 TO A.D. 1860**

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Phases of Convocation: Anglican Synods, A.D. 601 to A.D. 1860 by Walter Peace

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WALTER PEACE

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PHASES OF CONVOCATION.

Anglican Synods,

A.D. 601 TO A.D. 1880.

BY

WILLIAM PEACE.

"An independent Ecclesiastical Association, possessed of deliberative, legislative, judicial, and executive authority, is incompatible with the supremacy of the crown, with the freedom of the subject, and with the welfare and peace of the kingdom."

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PHASES OF CONVOCATION.

CONVOCATION is an assembly, convoked, and meeting under the presidency of a superior, for the purpose of consulting and resolving upon such measures as may be considered necessary, in references to the subjects which may be placed before them.

In this country such assemblies have been known under the following titles:—

The *Ceale-gemot, or Holy Synod*, probably for regulating the minutiae of religion, and the details of religious worship.

The *Folk-gemot, or People's Council*, for the secular affairs of the country

The *Wittena-gemot, or Council of wise men*, for the consideration generally of all the affairs of the nation, foreign and domestic—the latter embracing all subjects of internal polity, including the maintenance and protection of the Christian religion.

In and over all these the Sovereign presided—without his authority they could not assemble—without his sanction, their deliberations and conclusions had no legal efficacy.

Councils.—After the interference of the Court of Rome, councils were assembled—sometimes composed of ecclesiastics only, sometimes of clerics and laymen. They were generally engaged upon Church questions; but occasionally interfered

in secular affairs. Most frequently the president was a legate of the Church of Rome, sometimes an archbishop with legatine authority, and sometimes an archbishop without that title, yet still acting as the *locum-tenens* of the Papal power. Such councils were generally summoned by the Sovereign, or with his sanction; sometimes without; he frequently sat in them, but seldom presided. Those councils were not assembled for consultation, or legislation; but, as the medium, through which decrees, previously agreed upon, were promulgated for the information and observance of all concerned.

During the period of the preceding councils under the Papal influence, the clergy obtained permission to assemble in a separate meeting, and to impose on themselves and on Church properties such taxes towards the expenses of the state as in their benevolence they might deem meet—and so doing they were exempted from the taxation imposed by Parliament. This privilege is supposed to have been granted, or at least recognized by the Conciliary Congress held at Berghamsted in 696, and by that which met at Cloves-hoo in 742. The privilege was, by mutual agreement, set aside in 1668.

In the exercise of that privilege, originated the assembling of our present Convocation.

The present Conciliar Institutions of this country are—

First. The Parliament or National Assembly: the Great Council of the Nation, consisting of two Houses, viz., the House of Lords, and the House of Commons. Their duty is to deliberate and legislate, in whatever is essential or advisable for the general interests and welfare of the empire. Whatever may be suggested must be approved by the two houses, before it be submitted to the consideration of the Sovereign, and it must receive the sanction of the Crown before it can possess any legal authority.

In this Council we recognise those which previously existed under the titles of *Wittena-gemot* and *Folk-gemot*.

Secondly. Ecclesiastical Councils. These are National Assemblies, called together originally by the Sovereigns, afterwards, under the direction of Rome, by the Papal Legate, for the consideration of Ecclesiastical and Church affairs.

In this assembly we may recognize the *Circ-gemot*, *Holy Synod* of the Saxons, which was a meeting wholly distinct from the *Folk-gemot*.

These councils have merged in that alluded to under our sixth division.

Thirdly. The Provincial Council or Synod. An assembly of the bishops and clergy of the province under the presidency of the archbishop, summoned by the writ of the archbishop, sometimes without, but more generally, I believe, under the direction of the Sovereign. It has deliberative and executive authority, so far as respects the carrying out within the province, the existing laws and regulations of the Church.

Fourthly. The Diocesan Synod. An assembly of the clergy, &c., of the diocese, summoned and presided over by the bishop of the diocese. In authority it is similar to that of the provincial synod, but restricted to the diocese in which it is held.

In these two assemblies we may again recognize the *Circ-gemot* of the Saxons.

Fifthly. Convocation. The assembly generally recognized under that appellation, is a meeting of the clergy of each province, convened to come together at the same time as the Parliament is assembled. This assembly is indebted for its origin to the decrees of the councils held at Berghamsted in 696, and at Cloves-hoo in 742, which empowered the clergy to tax themselves, at the same time exempting the Church property from the taxes imposed by Parliament. In 1663, this privilege ceased, and the clergy and the Church were

again included under the general taxation of the country. The object for which Convocation was originally assembled therefore no longer exists, and the meeting would probably have ceased, but that the writ of the Sovereign is accompanied by a writ of the archbishop, under which it may be recognized as a sort of Provincial Assembly, or Church Council, to give advice in Ecclesiastical affairs should it be required of them.

Then we have—

Sixthly. An Ecclesiastical Council, to be summoned occasionally, when it shall be thought advisable to consider of any alterations to be made in the liturgy of the Church, in the articles of religion, or in the Ecclesiastical Canons. Such council is summoned by the king's writ, under the sign manual and great seal. The subjects to be considered must be placed before it by royal authority: it is not competent to it to entertain any questions, but such as are so submitted for consideration.

This council is held under the Act of 25th Henry VIII., which set aside the Supremacy of the Vatican, and vested in the Sovereign of these Realms the whole and sole Supremacy in Church and State within his Royal Jurisdiction.

As the rules and regulations of the Church and of religion have been placed upon a well-balanced, safe, and Scriptural footing, this last council is not assembled, except it be necessary to entertain the question of alteration in the Ecclesiastical Establishment of the country.

Such is at this time our conciliar position in respect of Ecclesiastical affairs. And, it is submitted, if duly observed, it will be found fully equal to every requirement of the Church, and to the interests of pure religion.

Any attempt to alter it would be open to serious objection: it would probably involve the country in many and great difficulties.

Before I proceed, I would notice an opinion, which has been more than once advanced, that Convocation, should be considered a National Synod, the great council of the nation, for ecclesiastical affairs, namely, for the government of the Church, in respect of discipline and the arrangement of public worship; and for the explaining, appointing, and enforcing the observance of those doctrines, which the Church of England does or should hold. And that such Convocation, or national synod, should be endowed with legislative, judicial, and executive powers, be separated from the state, and be absolutely independent of all secular control, even the supremacy of the Sovereign.

Such a suggestion is however untenable; it may appear plausible, it may be flattering to those who hold ecclesiastical authority, but it is opposed by insurmountable temporal difficulties, it is contrary to the mind of God.

If we turn to the history of the Jews, the people more immediately under the special protection of the Almighty, and to the period when Jehovah issued his laws, and gave directions for the celebration of public worship, we shall find God did not give His command to a priest, but to the leader, the ruler, and civil governor of His people. It was to Moses He delivered His commandments, and to Moses that He gave directions in respect of the services that should be appointed and observed. It was to Moses He gave authority to invest Aaron with the priesthood, and when Aaron was disobedient, it was through Moses the divine reproof was conveyed. When the people rebelled, it was by the directions of Moses, that the priest offered up, and made the atonement of reconciliation:—and when Aaron died, God directed Moses to appoint his successor, and to invest him with the insignia and authority belonging to the office of high priest.

When Christianity was struggling amid the heathen world,

and exposed to the persecution of the idolatrous nations, God was pleased to raise up the Emperor Constantine as the protector of the struggling church. The Church of Rome has been, and is, under the protection of the Pope, a temporal sovereign with secular power. The Greek Church is under the protection of the Czar of Russia. In England the Church is, as it were, embodied in, a part of the constitution of the country; and has ever been under the protection of the secular authority, the sovereign of the land; even under the infliction of the papal scourge, the Sovereign retained a certain control; and in a previous age, when the country was overrun by the pagan, the Church claimed to be, and was, under the protection of the secular power, she was under that protection when withdrawn for safety into the more retired part of the country.

Should the views of those who desire the separation of Church and state be ever realized, the Reformed Protestant Church of this land will forfeit the title, she will have no claim to it, of the Church of Great Britain. Her parochial system will be no longer recognised; she will dwindle into a Congregational Church. Her bishops and other ecclesiastical officers may exercise authority over such congregations so long as the members of which they may be composed shall be content to obey:—but the spiritual censure of such pastors will have no weight with those who withdraw from her communion, or question their authority, and she will possess no secular means of enforcing obedience, or punishing disobedience: as members of the community, equally with, but not in a greater degree than the members of any other religious or secular society, the individual members of such congregational church may seek, and will obtain the protection of the law in respect of their civil titles: but the claims to church property, and territorial titles will open a wide field for disputation.