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RESEARCH ARTICLE

'Are You Really Anglicans?' Reflections on Church Planting, Innovation and Ecclesiastical Authority in the Church of England

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Abstract

This paper seeks to grapple with questions of polity and innovation in the Church of England and specifically to explore the place of non-parochial forms of church within this tradition of Anglicanism. The paper begins by outlining recent developments within the Church of England around the 'mixed ecology' and church planting, before summarizing Alison Milbank's recent critique of these changes. Then, building on in example of the Guild Churches Act from London Diocese in the mid-twentieth century, it is argued that within a commitment to Anglican polity there lies a vision for creativity in mission which might sometimes mean the pursuing non-parochial forms of ministry.

Keywords: church planting; hooker; innovation; mixed ecology; polity

Are you really Anglicans?

The title of this paper is borrowed from one of the contributors to the 2024 Church Planting Theology Conference at Cranmer Hall in Durham. At the end of the conference, a series of panellists were invited to summarize their reflections on the preceding discussions. In his comments, Revd Simon Hall, a Baptist minister from Leeds said the following:

> I'm a Baptist. I've heard a wonderful amount of congregationalism in the room and quite a lot of presbyterianism in the room, and only very little episcopalianism in the room. You really need to sort that out . . . . Because if

I would thank two anonymous reviewers from this journal for their constructive comments on the paper, as well as participants in the Michael Ramsey Centre for Anglican Studies Research Seminar at Durham University for a productive discussion of the paper. Many thanks to those who gave very helpful feedback on earlier versions of the paper: Scott Harrower, Will Foulger, Alison Milbank, Nick Moore, Samuel Tranter, Christian Selvaratnam, Mark Powley, and Alan Bartlett.

> you're only Anglicans for the money, then it's all going to go really really badly wrong .... Are you really Anglicans?[1]

Hall's comments were met with a ripple of laughter. While he acknowledged his hope that his Anglican colleagues would 'see the light' and renounce episcopal forms of polity, he urged the Anglicans present to grapple with this question of how church planting and innovative forms of church could fit within the structures of their own traditions, rather than seeking to ignore, or act in violation of, their own systems of church polity. The implications of ignoring these systems of accountability and oversight are profound, Hall argued, pointing to a number of high-profile cases of abuse within Anglican contexts.

Hall is not alone in calling for a deeper grappling with Anglican polity amongst those in the conversation around church planting and innovation. In her extensive critique of the recent vision and strategy of the Church of England, Alison Milbank laments the 'excessive presentism'[2] which she thinks has little regard for the Church's history and systems of polity. For Milbank, the answer to present challenges the Church is facing lies not in seeking yet more innovation and change, but in a rediscovery of the importance and riches of the past and the systems of polity and governance which are integral to our identity as Anglicans.

This paper seeks to grapple with these questions of polity, and the relationship between governance and innovation, and thereby to explore the place of non-parochial forms of church within the Anglican tradition. More specifically, it will be argued that within a commitment to Anglican polity in the Church of England lies a vision for creativity in mission which might sometimes mean the pursuing of non-parochial forms of ministry. My hope is that these reflections offer correctives to two different sides of an often-polarized debate. First, in response to those who are sceptical of non-parochial forms of church, my aim is to show that innovation is an integral part of the Anglican tradition and that it has an important role to play in our response to the present cultural challenges, in ways that sometimes lead to offering mission beyond the scope of the parish. But secondly, in response to those who are often on the forefront of this innovation, my aim is to show that innovation must take place with a deep commitment to the authority within existing systems of governance. That is, innovation must exist within, not against, the systems of governance of the Church of England. These systems are not unnecessary red tape which get in the way of mission, but they are a vital part of what it means to exist within a historical tradition and to respond to the work of God today.

Some clarifications are in order before continuing. First, whilst Hall's comments (and this article's title) refer to 'Anglicanism', it is beyond the scope of this article to address the relationship between polity and innovation across the entirety of the Anglican Communion. As will become apparent shortly, the focus of this essay is the Church of England and the recent disagreements which have arisen within it on

[1]Hall, Simon, 'What have we learned? And where do we go next?' Centre for Church Planting Theology and Research Conference 2024, from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8u4OzAm5ErE, (accessed 15th May 2024).

[2]Milbank, Alison, *The Once and Future Parish,* (London: SCM Press, 2023), p. 12.

the subject of innovation.[3] Secondly, the topic of 'polity' is similarly vast, even if the focus is restricted only to the Church of England – this might encompass the place of liturgy, sacraments, church discipline and finance, to name but a few topics. The present discussion aims primarily to explore the role of governance and authority in the Church of England and to examine the relationship between authority and innovation, rather than to offer a comprehensive account of church polity.

Lastly, a clarification on the scope of the argument and its intended conclusions. Whilst this article asks about the relationship between innovation and polity, it stops short of claiming that present innovations within the Church of England (to be outlined in the next section) are examples of faithful innovation (by this, I mean innovation which is within the bounds of the Church's systems of governance). The final section will attempt to suggest how such a conversation might proceed, but it is beyond the scope of this article to offer a full-blown defence that these innovations are legitimate or illegitimate. Rather, the article seeks to bring clarity to the question of how innovation might come about within a commitment to a certain system of governance, with the hope of providing greater nuance and charity on both sides of the debate moving forward.

The paper has four sections. First, I provide some context for Hall's challenge and Milbank's remarks, outlining some of the recent developments in the vision and strategy of the Church of England, and the shift in ecclesiology that has emerged in the past two decades. Secondly, I consider the relationship between innovation and authority, drawing from Milbank and her use of Richard Hooker's ecclesiology. In doing so, I outline a vision of authority in the Church of England in which institutional polity provides the context for understanding authority, noting the conclusions which Milbank argues follow from this, namely a recommitment to the importance of the parochial system. Thirdly, to offer a contrasting view to Milbank's, I consider a historical example from the mid-twentieth century, in which the Church of England departed from its commitment to the parochial system in response to cultural challenges. Under the leadership of the then Bishop of London, William Wand, the Guild Churches Act of Parliament was passed in 1952, freeing 16 churches to operate in a non-parochial manner. As I highlight, this shift marked a significant change in polity but one which, I argue, was done with a deep faithfulness to the systems of polity in place. Lastly, I conclude by considering how this might inform our future reflections on strategy in the Church of England today, offering an outline of an Anglican view of innovation to help guide future conversations in this crucial area of ecclesiastical life.

Context: Vision and Strategy in the Church of England Today

Before examining the questions regarding innovation, polity and authority, first consider the wider context in which these discussions take place. As with many major denominations in the West, the Church of England has seen a steady decline in church attendance over a number of decades. The 2021 census marked the first time that less than half of the population of England and Wales described

[3]This is not to say that there are no relevant issues in other provinces, but only that it is beyond the scope of this article to address the role of innovation in Anglicanism more broadly.

themselves as 'Christian'.[4] There have been many attempts to stop the trend of decline. The publication of the *Mission Shaped Church* (MSC) report in 2004 is important to note here. The report signalled a desire for the Church of England to look beyond its traditional forms of ecclesiology to find creative ways to engage with communities in mission, justifying this by noting that,

> The nature of community has so changed . . . that no one strategy will be adequate to fulfil the Anglican [mission] in England today . . . . Communities are now multi-layered, comprising neighbourhoods, usually with permeable boundaries, and a wide variety of networks, ranging from the relatively local to the global. Increased mobility and electronic communications technology have changed the nature of community . . . .[and so] our diverse consumer culture will never be reached by one standard form of church.'[5]

The publication of MSC precipitated a significant investment of time, energy and finance in so-called, 'fresh expressions of church', pioneering forms of church community aimed at engaging with those outside of inherited and established forms of church. By 2019, data suggested there were almost 9,100 fresh expressions in existence,[6] making up attendances equivalent of two averaged sized dioceses.[7] The report also brought attention to the concept of the 'mixed ecology' (or the 'mixed economy', as it was described in MSC), in which traditional inherited parish churches were encouraged to co-exist alongside pioneering mission projects. This concept had first been described by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams in the report, 'Good News in Wales', when he was then the Archbishop of Wales. Williams writes that, 'We may discern signs of hope . . . . These may be found particularly in the development of a mixed economy of Church life . . . There are ways of being church alongside the inherited parochial pattern'.[8] More recently, mixed *ecology* has been the preferred term in Church of England documents and proposals (such as the Vision and Strategy document discussed below). For as Tim Yao describes, "mixed economy' made practitioners think of budgets, business and commerce, whereas we were trying to bring the church back to something more simple and organic'.[9]

[4]Office for National Statistics, 'Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021', https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021 (accessed 14th May 2024).

[5]Cray, Graham (ed.), *Mission Shaped Church* (London: Canterbury Press, 2014), p. x.

[6]Nunney, Samuel, 'Fresh Expressions: State of Play', https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/fresh-expressions-state-of-play-report-2019.pdf (accessed on 15th May 2024), p. 3. It is notable that many of these fresh expressions are messy church, which are largely new congregations from parish churches. See Lings, George. *The Day of Small Things. An Analysis of Fresh Expressions of Church,* (Sheffield: Church Army, 2016) https://churcharmy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/the-day-of-small-things.pdf (accessed 15th May 2024), p. 124.

[7]Lings, *The Day of Small Things,* p. 10.

[8]Quoted in Müller, Sabrina. 'Towards the acceptance of diversity: a brief history of the mixed economy of Church and Continental European adaptations.' *Ecclesial Futures* 1, no. 1 (2020): p. 37.

[9]Quoted in Olsworth-Peters, Ed, *Mixed Ecology: Inhabiting an Integrated Church* (London: SPCK, 2024), p. 9.

Another important development came in 2011 as the Church of England introduced what were called, Bishops' Mission Orders' (BMOs), as part of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011.[10] The measure states that, 'Diocesan mission and ministry strategies support a variety of organizational and deployment arrangements to meet changing needs and new challenges. BMOs provide both space for experiment in mission and a means of accommodating non-territorial forms of church.'[11] BMOs are typically mission-focused communities which do not operate under the parochial system, but which are started to meet a significant need. For example, the measure describes an 'ecumenical appointment of a schools worker to three local secondary schools with the intention of creating a Christian community'.[12] Some BMOs function much like parish churches, but happen to meet within the boundaries of existing parishes, or across several parishes.[13] BMOs operate within a system of governance, accountable to a bishop and within a deanery.

Since 2011, this language of the 'mixed ecology' has been adopted widely in the central Church's vocabulary. For example, the Church of England's vision and strategy for the 2020s states that one of the Church's three priorities is for a 'mixed ecology' to be 'the norm', leading to a church that it hopes will be 'younger and more diverse' (another of its three central priorities).[14] In order to achieve these strategic priorities, the Church of England aims to see the start of 'ten thousand *new* Christian communities across the four areas of home, work/education, social and digital'.[15] Starting these new communities has so far been funded to the tune of £176.7 million from the Strategic Development Fund (SDF), a pot of money set aside by the Church Commissioners to fund its strategic missional priorities.[16] After concluding the SDF project in 2022 (many projects are still ongoing, but no more funding will be awarded through SDF), further money is planned to be invested, under the guise of the newly formed Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB). Before 2031, SMMIB may invest as much as £1.3billion in strategic mission and ministry.[17]

[10]Church of England, 'Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 Part 7: Mission Initiatives CODE OF PRACTICE' (2nd edn: July 2018): https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/gs-2109-code-of-practice-on-mission-initiatives.pdf (accessed 15th May 2024).

[11]Church of England, Mission and Pastoral Measure, p. 1.

[12]'Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011', p. 2

[13]See, for example, Vine Church Wynyard, which is profiled in Foulger, Will (ed.), *Shaping Place: Reflections on 4 SDF Projects in Durham Diocese,* (Durham: Centre for Church Planting Theology and Research, 2023): https://www.cranmerhall.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Shaping-Place.pdf (accessed 15th May 2024). As Foulger and colleagues note, Vine Church questions the 'binaries' that are sometimes placed on parish and planting (Foulger (ed.), 'Shaping Place', p. 44.

[14]Church of England, 'Vision and Strategy', https://www.churchofengland.org/about/vision-and-strategy (accessed 15th May 2024).

[15]Church of England, 'Vision and Strategy'.

[16]Davies, Madeline, 'Strategic Development Fund opens a route to faith, says study', *Church Times,* 2022: https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/11-march/news/uk/strategic-development-fund-opens-a-route-to-faith-says-study (accessed 15th May 2024).

[17]Church of England, 'New board to oversee 'unprecedented' Church of England investment in mission and ministry', https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/new-board-oversee-unprecedented-church-england-investment-mission-and-ministry (accessed 15th May 2024).

Recent shifts in strategy have seen a move away from fresh expressions towards a significant monetary investment in so-called 'resource churches'.[18] Rather than pioneering new modes of liturgy and community-engagement, resource churches instead focus on revitalizing existing parish churches by 'grafting' teams from larger churches (often, but not always from the evangelical tradition) to smaller, declining churches. Much of this work was initially done through the Diocese of London and Holy Trinity Brompton, leading to a charity being established, the Church Revitalization Trust (CRT), whose focus is to partner with local dioceses to 'plant and revitalize churches in towns and cities across the country'.[19] The model has since been replicated by many dioceses who work independently from CRT.

The result of this investment has been a return to a focus on parish churches as the centre of strategy in many dioceses. In his recent research on 11 dioceses in the Church of England, Will Fougler argues that 'we have seen a shift in the past decade from a focus on fresh expressions of church, towards starting new churches.'[20] While the focus of the SDF investment focused significantly on resource churches,[21] the new SMMIB funding appears to have a distinctive focus on 'doubling the number of children and young people', and 'increasing the diversity of people in touch with the Church across the country.'[22] It remains to be seen how this will develop in context, although early indications suggest there may be signs of increased attendance in the latest data.[23]

Clarifying the Relationship between Innovation and Authority

The initiatives of the past two decades represent a bold and innovative attempt to face the challenges of ministry today. But the scope and speed of these innovations has not been welcomed by all.

The theologian Andrew Root, writing more broadly on the theme of innovation in the Church, argues that an obsession with innovation is often associated with a

[18]See Shepherd, Jack, 'What's in a Name? An Examination of Current Definitions of Resource Churches' *Journal of Anglican Studies,* 22, no. 1 (2024): pp. 81–97; Shepherd, Jack, 'Creation Stories: What Were the First Resource Churches?' *Journal of Anglican Studies*, 22, no. 1 (2024): pp. 251–269.

[19]Church Revitalisation Trust, 'Our Mission', https://revitalisetrust.org/mission (accessed on 15th May 2024).

[20]Foulger, Will, *New Things: A Theological Investigation into the Work of Starting New Churches Across 11 Dioceses in the Church of England* (Durham: Centre for Church Planting Theology and Research, 2024), from: https://www.cranmerhall.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/New-Things-Final-1.pdf (accessed 15th May 2024), p. 68.

[21]Foulger notes that of 94 SDF-funded projects, 37 focused on resource churches (Foulger, *New Things*, p. 71).

[22]Church of England, 'New board to oversee "unprecedented" Church of England investment'.

[23]The Church of England's Statistics for Mission 2022 showed an increase in average weekly attendance from previous years (albeit a still decline from pre-Covid figures), but a small decline in the average weekly attendance at fresh expressions of church (see Church of England, 'Statistics for Mission 2022', https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/statisticsformission2022.pdf [accessed 30th July 2024]). While the 2023 figures have yet to be published, the Church of England is already reporting a 5% increase from the 2022 figures (See Church of England, 'Weekly Church attendance up five per cent in third year of consecutive growth' https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/weekly-church-attendance-five-cent-third-year-consecutive-growth [accessed 30th July 2024]).

rapidly declining institutional Church desperately trying to make a case for itself in the religious market, turning to business practices of entrepreneurship to survive. Root worries that amidst this scrambling to innovate until the rot of decline is stopped, the institution risks losing something crucial about its identity. The problem, as Root conceives it, is not that change itself is problematic in the Church; 'Our church forefathers and mothers may have done some innovative things', Root notes, 'but', he continues, 'they were never seeking innovation itself.'[24] In fact, Root argues, if we look to the history of the Western Church, reference to 'innovation . . . is almost always derogatory. Only in our contemporary moment has innovation become an overwhelmingly positive term.'.[25] In other words, the problem for Root is not the presence of things which are new, but the pursuit of innovation as the highest good, risks distorting what the Church is.

Relatedly, in his book, Church *Planting in the Secular West,* Stefan Paas warns of the dangers of allowing instrumentalization and innovation to ground our ecclesiology:

> Whatever cause we may think of to legitimize church planting (growth, the release of leadership, neighborhood transformation, etc.), the result is that ecclesiology is adapted to the good that is desired. Taking church growth as an example, even if its results would be beyond doubt . . . this would raise other questions such as 'Is it allowed to undress the church so much in the service of evangelism (or anything else)?' After all, simplifying the doctrine rendering Trinitarian faith into a more radical monotheism might make evangelism in Muslim countries considerably more successful. Lowering the bar for discipleship might increase the number of converts more than anything else. However, most Christians would find such measures irresponsible; clearly the end does not justify the means.[26]

The point highlighted well by both Root and Paas is not so much to question that innovative approaches are inherently bad, but to ask what goods are being pursued (and what goods are being neglected) in the name of innovation. Put simply, we cannot begin with pragmatism and work our way back to a theology to justify whatever is currently working. This is a failure of ecclesiology. It is a failure to take seriously what the Church is and has been over the past two millennia. For the Church is not primarily a community of Christians seeking to transform their communities and convert their friends at any cost. We must begin with a theological – not a pragmatic – vision of the Church; the Church is not a mere human institution, but as Milbank observes, a 'divine society', a 'mystical union . . . of all those who have, are or will be joined to Christ in baptism'.[27]

[24]Root, Andrew, *The Church After Innovation: Questioning Our Obsession with Work, Creativity, and Entrepreneurship*. (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2022), p. 63.

[25]*The Church After Innovation*, p. 20.

[26]Paas, Stefan, *Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2016), p. 243.

[27]Milbank, *Once and Future Parish,* p. 4.

For Milbank, a theology of participation in the mystical body of Christ, rightly conceived, helps us to see the importance of tradition and polity. Milbank's account seeks to emphasize an understanding of the Church through the lens of 'participation in God'.[28] For Milbank, this is rooted in the writings of the 16th Century Anglican theologian, Richard Hooker. As Milbank describes it, for Hooker, Anglican ecclesiology must be rooted 'in the whole tradition', since he 'assumed a continuity between the polity and the Church, making an argument in favour of national churches but grounded his understanding of the Church in its participation in God.'[29] This theological understanding of the Church is important for understanding the place of innovation, Milbank argues. It will be helpful to further flesh out Hooker's ecclesiology to see the force of Milbank's argument.

Hooker's 'delicately balanced ecclesiology' (to borrow a phrase from W. Bradford Littlejohn),[30] seeks to uphold a tension in the life of the Christian believer; that is, that on the one hand they rest 'entirely on Christ alone, completely righteous in him, though not in themselves', and on the other hand they rest 'upon the visible community of saints and the outward means God had ordained to inspire and nourish their faith and love'[31] This tension is seen in the distinction between the visible and invisible (or 'mystical', to use Hooker's terminology) Church.[32] As Hooker describes the mystical Church,

> That Church of Christ which we properly term his body mystical, can be but one, neither can that one be sensibly discerned by any man, inasmuch as the parts thereof are some in heaven already with Christ, and the rest that are on earth (albeit their natural persons be visible) we do not discern under this property, whereby they are truly and infallibly of that body. Only our minds by intellectual conceit are able to apprehend, that such a real body there is, a body collective, because it contains an huge multitude; a body mystical, because the mystery of their conjunction is removed altogether from sense.[33]

The mystical Church is known only to God and is under God's eternal law. As the 'invisible spouse' of Christ, it has no need for 'external polity', since the divine law which teaches 'faith and works of righteousness is itself alone sufficient for the Church of God'.[34] The mystical Church is comprised of those who are united with Christ, about whom only God knows the identity of.

[28]Milbank, *Once and Future Parish*, p. 4

[29]Milbank, *Once and Future Parish,* p .4.

[30]Littlejohn, W. Bradford. *Richard Hooker: a companion to his life and work.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015), p. 150.

[31]Littlejohn, *Richard Hooker,* p. 151.

[32]Note, I am here following both Littlejohn and Paul Dominiak in noting that Hooker makes a sharp distinction between the visible and invisible Church. Not all agree on this point in the secondary literature. See Littlejohn, *Richard Hooker,* p. 152; Dominiak, Paul Anthony, *Richard Hooker. The Architect of Participation*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), pp. 22–23.

[33]Hooker, Richard, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity,* Vol 1: Preface, Books I to IV, Edited by Arthurt Stephen McGrade (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), III.1, p. 138 I

[34]Hooker, *Laws,* III.11, p. 184.

Contrastingly, the visible Church is a 'sensibly known company,' which is recognizable through the 'outward profession of those things, which supernaturally appertain to the very essence of Christianity'.[35] The visible church – the political body of the institutional Church – is the context in which the believer engages in the process of sanctification, moving ever close to Christ through participation in the dominical sacraments and the liturgy.

How does Hooker envisage the relationship between the mystical and visible Church? As Paul Dominiak describes it, 'the logic of Chalcedonian Christology' provides an important grammar for Hooker's theology of participation. Dominiak notes,

> Hooker analogously describes how the two natures of the Church are not to be conflated or confused, but relate in that the visible shares in, and ultimately enjoys union with, the mystical . . . the visible Church exists as an intermingled body of saints and sinners, or wheat and tares . . . Hooker refuses to transplant the perfection of the mystical Church onto the visible, but still retains a sense that the visible performance and polity of the established Church remains suspended as a participatory body from God's gracious influence, striving towards mystical fulfilment'.[36]

Hooker resists conflating the mystical and visible bodies of the Church but sees the visible as a means of participating in the mystical body. Thus, the 'contingent, dispositive practices of the 'visible' political body of the institutional Church', play the role of mediating the Church's 'participation in Christ.'[37] The visible Church is the means by which those who are justified by faith are live out their sanctification by responding to God's grace.[38]

Unlike the mystical body (which is subject only to divine law), within the mediatory and contingent body of the visible Church some form of institutional polity is required. But as Hooker goes on to describe, 'he which affirms speech to be necessary among all men throughout the world, does not thereby import that all men must necessarily speak one kind of language. Even so, the necessity of polity and regiment in all Churches may be held, without holding any one certain form to be necessary in them all.'[39] In other words, given the human fallibility in discerning the purposes of God, some kind of structure is needed to govern the practice of the Church. Just like the imperfect way in which language captures meaning, there are many different systems through which this task of discernment might occur. The laws of the visible Church are not to be equated with the divine law. Hooker is clear that any attempt to claim that Scripture contains a necessary polity for the life of the

[35]Hooker, *Laws,* III.1.3, p. 138–39.
[36]Dominiak, *Richard Hooker. The Architect of Participation,* pp. 154–55.
[37]Dominiak, *Richard Hooker. The Architect of Participation,* p. 154.
[38]Littlejohn, *Richard Hooker,* p. 157.
[39]Hooker, *Laws,* III.2, p. 146.

visible Church risks transposing 'the divine polity of the church *qua* mystical to the church *qua* political.'[40]

But to say that the law of the visible Church is not to be conflated into the divine law and is not to say that the visible Church polity lacks authority; as Littlejohn writes, it 'does not mean . . . that all ceremonies of the church are at the whim of human discretion – certainly not the sacraments, since these are instruments of communion with God (even if secondary details of their administration are discretionary).'[41] Despite the contingency of its polity, the visible Church has been given authority by God. For example, Hooker writes that, 'the first institution of Bishops was from Heaven, was even of God, the Holy Ghost was the Author of it'.[42] Summarizing Hooker's theology of polity, Dominiak explains that, for Hooker,

> human reason (inspired by the Holy Spirit) leads the visible Church . . . the utility, benefit and popularity of a custom testifies to its provisional truth and, through a communication of idioms, lends to it divine authority as the mediation through which eternal law reads itself into the world. The laws of the Church are then said to be authored by God, where the life of the Church demonstrably conforms to the activity of the Holy Spirit.'[43]

Thus, the structures and governance of the visible Church are not perfect or directly divinely inspired in the sense that divine law is. Yet, they do have divine authority. To exist within a tradition, for Hooker, is to recognize its authority from God, while holding in tension that this authority is provisional and revisable.

To summarize the key points which are relevant for the present discussion: for Hooker, the visible Church is not to be confused by the divinely ordered mystical Church, known only to God, yet it is the nonetheless the primary means of participating in Christ's mystical body this side of the eschaton. Moreover, the contingent polity and structure of the visible Church are divinely ordered and authoritative in a provisional and revisable manner.

So, to return to Milbank's discussion, we can now see the weight of her emphasis on participation in the contingent forms of visible Church polity. Milbank's worry is that many cases of church planting are simply not faithful expressions of the Anglican tradition because of their lack of engagement with the systems of Anglican polity and tradition. All too often, Milbank thinks, church planting strategies 'simply ignore . . . Anglican traditions and define . . . [themselves] against it'.[44] For example, Milbank writes,

> pioneers or planters are of course right to see the Holy Spirit at work everywhere and to help nurture people of good will and projects that serve the kingdom . . . .The ecclesiological outworking of all this in these projects,

[40]Neelands, W. David. 'Richard Hooker on the Identity of the Visible and Invisible Church.' In *Richard Hooker and the English Reformation,* edited by W.J. Torrance Kirby (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2003), p. 108. Quoted in Dominiak, *Richard Hooker. The Architect of Participation*, p. 158.

[41]Littlejohn, *Richard Hooker,* p. 159.

[42]*Laws,* VII.5, p. 88.

[43]Dominiak, *Richard Hooker. The Architect of Participation*, pp. 165–166.

[44]Milbank, *Once and Future Parish*, p. 85.

> however, can sometimes be in the direction of the local group *inventing* the religious expression this takes . . . They forget that worship is not simply something that we do but is also a gift from God.[45]

Through the lens of Hooker's account, we can see the worry which Milbank articulates here of being too quick to dispense with traditions without wrestling with the authority that they have been given to mediate the Church's participation in Christ. The idea that the Holy Spirit can be discerned by an individual or group apart from, or in conflict with, the received authority of tradition is a failure to grasp something crucial about Anglican ecclesiology.

We must first acknowledge the giftedness of the visible Church from God, before we can make sense of revision or reform. And for Milbank, one of the *gifts* of the Anglican tradition is the historic parochial system, which, she thinks, is more than adequate (properly resourced) to deal with the issues we face in the contemporary Church. In fact, Milbank thinks, the parish system can avoid some of the problems with what she calls the 'novel ecclesial models'[46] of fresh expressions and church planting (or revitalization). As she argues, whilst fresh expressions and pioneer ministry recognize something deeply important about context, place and understanding people in their particularities, they miss an emphasis on tradition and the importance of the sacraments for the life of the Church. Contrastingly, the second ecclesial model, which can be found in the church planting movement, especially the designating of resource churches through SDF funding, recognizes the need to be sacramental and ecclesial, but it is too often 'imperialistic', favouring the strategies of 'managerial growth missiology'[47] paying little attention to the specifics of people and place. In contrast to this, 'The parochial model, when well done, combines the best of the two novel ecclesial modes [church planting and fresh expressions.]'.[48] Milbank's claim is thus twofold: (i) that parish ministry is deeply rooted in a decisively Anglican ecclesiology, and, (ii) that the parish system is more than adequate to meet the contextual needs of engaging with today's world.

There are many who operate in pioneering and church planting contexts who have strong disagreements about aspects of Anglican tradition, particularly this second claim that the parish system can meet the needs of today's contexts. Of course, if this is the case, they might simply reject the tradition they are in, and look for somewhere else to exercise their ministry. But if they wish to *remain* within a tradition, then they must more seriously wrestle with the question of how to do so with integrity and in faithfulness to how this tradition has collectively discerned the will of God throughout its history. To suppose otherwise is to adopt a position of epistemic superiority when it comes to hearing the voice of God. It makes the case that we no longer need the voices of the community of faith, including those who have come before, to make sense of where and how God might be at work. Moreover, Milbank's emphasis on the *giftedness* of tradition offers a helpful perspective for those engaged in conversation around strategy and vision to see the

[45]Milbank, *Once and Future Parish*, p. 82.
[46]Milbank, *Once and Future Parish*, p. 85.
[47]Milbank, *Once and Future Parish*, p. 70.
[48]Milbank, *Once and Future Parish*, p. 85.

riches of the past: not as 'limiting factor', or something to move beyond, but as a profound source of wisdom and divine authority through which we are invited to look at our present and our future.

However, as I will go on to argue, while Milbank's premises seem right, it is far from clear that the conclusion follows from the premises. Put another way: I think she diagnoses the problem insightfully, but I am not convinced hers is the only treatment available. That is, it's not obvious that a theology of participation in the structures of Anglican polity and governance lead only to a doubling down on the parish system, however important this might be. In his insightful work exploring the concept of 'place' in Anglican ecclesiology, Will Foulger asks the following of Milbank and her colleagues: 'Might it not be at least possible that our longing for place will lead us to question as much as embrace the current system as we find it? Might there even be a drive for us to embrace other, non-parochial forms of church?'[49] This is an important question for us to consider. And it is important to see that it is also not an entirely new question. As I will highlight in the next section, exploring an example from the mid-twentieth century, which I think has some important parallels to the questions we are currently asking in the Church of England, will help to offer a different perspective on Foulger's question and Milbank's concerns.

Authority and Innovation: The 1952 Guild Churches Act

In this section, I outline a historical example of non-parochial innovation, which, I argue, was the result of faithful engagement with Anglican systems of polity. It is important to note that the primary aim of this case study is relatively modest, namely, that it attempts to show how faithful forms of innovation can result in forms of ecclesiology that are non-parochial. It is not my intention to claim that this particular example should be replicated, nor do I seek to assess the success of contemporary churches operating under the same principles today.

Consider the Guild Churches Act of Parliament in 1952. This Act marked a significant shift in Anglican polity, in response to the profound cultural challenges in post-war London. Under the leadership of the then Bishop of London, William Wand, an Act of Parliament would seek to reimagine what faithful ministry in the Church of England might look like in a moment of significant cultural change. Following World War Two, many of the forty-seven parish churches of central London were in a state of disrepair, some of which were deemed beyond repair. Added to this was the significant shift in how the residents of London related to their sense of place. In the words of Bishop Wand in the second reading of the Bill to the House of Lords (on 3rd July 1952),

> there are forty-seven churches in the City of London, and there is a population of not much more than 5,000: only about 5,000 people actually sleep in the City of London. On the other hand, nearly 500,000 people work there by day. The existence of this congested population during the day and the small population

[49]Foulger, Will. *Present in Every Place? The Church of England's New Churches, and the Future of the Parish*. (London: SCM Press, 2023), p. 41.

> at night time involves a very special problem. The question is, how to use the forty-seven churches to the best advantage.[50]

Wand's proposal was that of these forty-seven churches, twenty-four remain parish churches, seven be decommissioned and closed, and sixteen repurposed as so-called 'guild churches'. In Wand's words, these sixteen churches, 'shall be taken out of the parochial organization of the City altogether and shall be used mainly to minister to the day-time population of the City. This involves, of course, running quite contrary to the customary procedure in the Church of England.'[51] The wording of the act, which was eventually passed, noted that,

1. 'the Bishop of London should be empowered to designate and establish certain churches in the city of London as guild churches and that such churches should be available for worship ministrations and religious instruction to the non-resident population of the city',[52] and,
2. 'the administration of the affairs of each church so designated and established should be discharged as nearly as possible as that of a parish church but that the minister thereof should have no territorial jurisdiction and be free from any parochial responsibility and from the jurisdiction of the incumbent of the parish.'[53]

As the Act summarizes, 'The primary purpose of a guild church and the primary duty of the minister officiating therein shall be to serve and minister to the non-resident day-time population of the city.'[54] After a series of debates in the House of Commons and the House of Lords during the course of 1952 (which show a remarkable level of support for the proposal), the Act was passed into law on 1st August 1952. Of the sixteen proposed churches during the first schedule, fourteen were designated as guild churches, and as of 2024, twelve of these fourteen continue to operate as guild churches.[55]

In many respects, these proposals were radical and unprecedented, something which, despite a lack of substantial opposition to the Bill, did not go unnoticed at the time. For instance, on the third reading of the Bill in the House of Commons, the MP for Belfast South, Mr C.H. Cage noted that, 'It is the first departure in a thousand years from the parish system, and these churches, which will in other respects be similar to parish churches, will have congregations which will not have,

[50]House of Lords, 'Second Reading of City of London (Guild Churches) Bill', 3rd July 1952, vol 177, cc673-6, https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1952/jul/03/city-of-london-guild-churches-bill (accessed 15th May, 2024).

[51]Bishop of London in House of Lords, 'Second Reading'.

[52]'City of London (Guild Churches) Act, 1952', https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukla/Geo6and1Eliz2/15-16/38/enacted (accessed 15th May), p. 1.

[53]*Guild Churches Act* 1952, p. 1.

[54]*Guild Churches Act* 1952, p. 4.

[55]Of the fifteen churches listed in the second schedule, none were designated as guild churches, although some appear to operate in this capacity, despite being parish churches. See Appendix 1 for a full list of proposed guild churches and their current designation.

so to speak, a residential qualification'.[56] As the historian Roger Lloyd has observed, while the Guild Churches Act aimed at 'supplementing the parochial system', rather than replacing it, it was nonetheless a significant political change in the Church of England.[57] Lloyd writes, that before this point, 'No man could legally be the concern of two vicars at once unless the law was changed. But the only possible change would mean that the Church must officially admit that parish churches as such no longer serve the needs of the people at work, and they are the chaplaincies of private family life'.[58] While there are other instances of non-parochial churches in the Church of England,[59] one of the unique changes brought about by the Guild Churches Act was that existing parish churches were removed from the parish system, while remaining a part of the mission of the Church of England.

At the time, these radical changes were justified in response to the significant challenges of cultural change and a shift in the relationship between people and place, not to mention the significant economic challenges faced by the Diocese in restoring war-damaged church buildings. In the third reading of the Bill in the House of Commons, Sir Harold Webbe, the MP for Cities of London and Westminster, speaks of his hope that guild churches will meet a 'very real need' of the spiritual desires of those who work in the city.'[60] Throughout the debate in both the Lords and the Commons, members were both realistic about the scale of the challenges but also hopeful that a new approach would bring about real change in the Church of England's engagement with non-residential working communities.

It was also acknowledged throughout the debate, that the parochial system alone was not sufficient to meet these needs; in its second reading the House of Lords, Bishop Wand spoke of his hope that the Bill would bring 'much more freedom to practise special techniques or to introduce new ways of doing church work, which it is impossible to practise under the old and still traditional parochial system.'[61] This is not to say that there was a disregard for the parish system, or its place in the Church of England, quite the contrary. For example, in the discussion of the 1960 amendment to the Act, there is some concern that 'however many more guild churches are designated, there will always be left sufficient parish churches, conveniently situated for the present and possible future resident population'.[62] This concern is immediately followed by Eric Fletcher, MP for Islington East reporting that, 'I am authorised by the Bishop of London not only to give that assurance, but also to give the assurance that care will be taken to see that there is always a

[56]House of Commons, 'Third Reading of City of London (Guild Churches) Bill', 12 June 1952, vol 502 cc471-82, https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1952/jun/12/city-of-london-guild-churches-bell-by (accessed 15th May 2024).

[57]Lloyd, Roger, *The Church of England 1900–1965*, (London: SCM Press, 1966), p. 527.

[58]Lloyd, *The Church of England 1900–1965*, p. 528.

[59]For example, consider the ways in which chapels of ease were built in the sixteenth-century Church of England to serve areas of 'rapidly expanding population' which were deemed too far from the parish church (Kitching, Christopher, 'Church and Chapelry in Sixteenth-Century England.' *Studies in Church History*, *16*, (1979), p. 279.

[60]Lloyd, *The Church of England 1900–1965*, p. 528.

[61]House of Lords, 'Second Reading'.

[62]Mr Tom Driberg, MP Barking in House of Commons, 'Second Reading of City of London (Guild Churches) Bill', 25th Feb 1960, vol 618, cc670-84m, https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1960/feb/25/city-of-london-guild-churches-bill-by (accessed 15th May 2024).

sufficient number of parish churches in the City representative of the different traditions of the Church of England.'[63] The emphasis was very much placed on the need to *supplement* the Parish system and to adapt to the challenges of the post-war era, rather than trying to destroy or undermine parochial ministry.

Moreover, the innovation provided by the Guild Churches Act was consistently lauded throughout the debates in the House of Commons. In the third reading in the House of Commons, Cage describes the 'industry and idealism' of Bishop Wand and the Archdeacon, attributed by the fact that the Bill was 'virtually unopposed'.[64] Eight years later, in the discussion of the Bill's amendment, Sir Hubert Ashton, the Second Church Estates Commissioner, states that,

> it is perfectly right and fair to claim that this important and imaginative scheme for the City of London guild churches is working well and has, by and large, provided the results that had been anticipated. ... the proposals under the present Act are working well, and that after much thought and preliminary investigation they have provided an imaginative and up-to-date way of meeting the religious needs of the City in this modern world'[65]

In the same debate, Tom Driberg, the MP for Barking says the guild churches have been 'an ingenious and imaginative instrument for dealing with several related problems'.[66]

The Guild Churches Act was seen as a creative and bold response which offered a new sense of direction in a challenging cultural moment. Whilst the focus of the change was exceptional and local, there was a hope that it might provide some precedent for widespread change in the Church of England. For example, Bishop Wand hoped that the Act might also provide something of a litmus test for future change. He is quoted as saying that, 'It is my wish and hope that the City may become a great ecclesiastical laboratory in which new methods of ministry, new spiritual experiments and new pastoral techniques may be tried out for the benefit of the whole church'.[67] This sense of creativity for the sake of the whole Church captures something important about what it is to participate in the structures of the Church. Rather than a stubborn doubling down on what happened in the past, the ministry of Bishop Wand and his contemporaries represented a real care for what had gone before, coupled with a realism about the Church of the present, and a sense of possibility about the Church of the future.

What's more, despite the radical and unprecedented nature of these changes to Church polity and their proposal to supplement the parish system for missional benefits, it is important to recognize that these changes were conceived within an Anglican structure and theology of authority. In 1951, when he was surely formulating and consulting on the Guild Churches Act, Bishop Wand published a

[63]House of Commons, 'Second Reading'.
[64]House of Commons, 'Third Reading'.
[65]House of Commons, 'Second Reading'.
[66]House of Commons, 'Second Reading'.
[67]Quoted by Sir John Crowder, Second Church Estates Commissioner, on the third reading of the Bill in the House of Commons, 1952 (House of Commons, 'Third Reading').

short book, *What the Church of England Stands for: A Guide to Its Authority in the Twentieth Century*. Within these pages, Wand offers a succinct summary of what ecclesial authority looks like in the Anglican tradition.

Wand, like Milbank and Hooker, is clear that engagement in and through the institutional structures of the Church is vital for our participation in the one body of Christ. For instance, Wand writes that, 'one part of the universal Church is the Church of England which is the divinely authorized organization of Christ in this land.'[68] Wand begins his defence of Anglican authority by noting the widespread desire amongst human beings to seek 'authoritative guidance' from God. Where the Church of England differs from some protestant traditions, Wand thinks, is in its rejection that individuals can receive authority and guidance with 'sufficient clarity', through 'direct intuition',[69] hence the need for the Church to operate as a kind of 'trustee' in the discernment of divine guidance.[70] Wand thinks of the work of the institutional Church as playing a crucial role in understanding divine authority.

This authority is outlined by Wand in contrast to typical political systems; the Church's constitution, 'cannot be defined in terms that are normally applied to political systems. It is neither an autocracy nor a democracy. It is essentially a theocracy. The Church believes itself to be under divine ordering'.[71] In participating in this theocracy of the Church, Wand acknowledges that both ministers and laity must discern together the will of God. This is not, Wand insists, a democratic system. Rather, he writes that,

> what we have come to recognize in these days as democratic methods have been incorporated into the theocracy of the Church. They do not in themselves represent any new principle, but are merely modern ways of expressing the age-long recognition of God's relation to His whole Church. Thus in the exercise of authority the Church as a whole is engaged. The ministers have their own functions to perform, but that does not mean that they exercise any autocratic control of Church affairs. This applies even to bishops who enjoy no autocratic powers but constitutional rights. When they act officially, they act only as representing the will and authority of the Church as a whole.[72]

The Guild Churches Act is a striking example of how the work of all of God's people plays a role in discerning direction and polity for the Church. For instance, before arriving at the two Houses of Parliament (composed predominantly of lay people), the Act will likely have passed through the Church of England Assembly (a precursor to General Synod, which existed between 1919–1970), which required approval by the House of Bishops, House of Clergy and House of Laity.[73] The Act

[68]Wand, J.W.C. *What the Church of England Stands for*, (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co. Ltd., fourth impression, 1959), p. 27.

[69]*What the Church of England Stands for*, p. 16.

[70]*What the Church of England Stands for*, p. 18.

[71]*What the Church of England Stands for*, p. 126.

[72]*What the Church of England Stands for*, p. 128.

[73]For a helpful overview of changes in systems of governance in the nineteenth century and twentieth century, see Podmore, Colin. "Self-Government Without Disestablishment: From the Enabling Act to the General Synod." *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 21, no. 3 (2019): pp. 312–328.

came about through a long period of discernment, episcopal vision and strategy, and ultimately, a change in ecclesiastical law. Wand's proposals brought about significant changes which were both conservative (i.e., they weren't marked by wholesale ecclesiastical reform), but also creative in bringing about changes in polity which were spurred by the freedom to reimagine something suited to context.

Whilst this shift marked a departure from exclusive and traditional parish ministry, it did so in a way that took seriously the importance of the Church adapting to the needs of culture and society in a local context. In doing so, the Church was able to create a new way of engaging with the city, which brought about many years of fruitful ministry to the workers of the City of London, some of which are still operating today. Wand's hope that this experimentation would lead to an ecclesiastical laboratory in which guild churches were adopted more widely in the Church didn't turn out to be entirely true. Very few guild churches exist outside of London, in an officially designated (or otherwise) capacity. However, the spirit of creativity embodied by Wand's vision is vital for the mission of the Church of England today as we face our own cultural crises. This is not to say that Wand's proposals should be emulated. Indeed, it would be no criticism of my argument to claim that guild churches are no longer required or functioning healthily today. Rather, the case study offers one example of how to engage deeply with tradition, polity and governance and yet establish forms of worship and mission which happen to be non-parochial.

Towards a Theology of Faithful Anglican Innovation

Where do these reflections leave us? In this penultimate section, I aim to outline a view of faithful Anglican innovation bound to the Church's historic systems of polity, but able to imagine new ways of ministering to the challenges of today's culture. I will stop short of arguing that the current forms of innovation in the Church of England *can* in fact be described in these terms. However, my hope is that the discussion helps to clarify future dialogue on this issue.

While an ecclesiology of participation surely means that church planters must take seriously Milbank's insistence to understand and respect their shared history, it ought also to lead to the freedom to imagine new possibilities for today's contexts. And this might also raise the possibility of engaging in non-parochial forms of church, as it did for Bishop Wand and his contemporaries. As Wand evidently grasped all too well, it is nowhere a part of a view of participation that the governance of our particular traditions is unchangeable, unchallengeable, or infallible, not even the parish system.

In fact, as Dominiak puts it, we must resist seeing an emphasis on tradition in our account of participation as turning the national church 'or its bishops merely into being a locus of repressive temporal, authority.'[74] Instead, on Hooker's account, 'the political character of the visible Church ennobles it and its orders as a creative co-participant in the unfolding of the eternal law in the world and the contiguous desire

[74]Dominiak, *Richard Hooker. The Architect of Participation*, p. 172.

to participate in God . . . The visible Church is a mediatory, penultimate and historically contingent institution open to creative variety and change.'[75] As Dominiak argues, participation in God establishes human beings as co-creative legislators; so, when it comes to establishing the right order for the visible Church, this is a human decision, and not one divinely mandated in the Scriptures,[76] but one which has significant authority nonetheless. Because Hooker's ecclesiology seeks to avoid conflating the visible Church and mystical Church, there is a crucial place of reform within a system committed to the Church's authority. Daniel Eppley, in writing about Hooker's engagement with puritan thinkers, describes Hooker as seeking to encourage 'dissent without disloyalty', or, 'critically thinking loyalty.'[77] In other words, Eppley writes, Hooker's view of polity in the Church emphasizes both 'the essential validity of the established church' but also, the importance of working 'for reform within the structures of the church.'[78]

Indeed, the notion of newness or innovation as creating something new, or as a kind of creation *ex nihilo*, with no reference to context and history, is not a distinctly Christian approach to creativity at all. This is a claim explored in depth in the work of the Anglican theologian, Trevor Hart in his excellent work on creativity.[79] Hart argues that a Christian view of creativity is always bound to certain limits and must be understood within the accountability of Christian community. Echoing Milbank's discussion of tradition, Hart maintains that all creativity must acknowledge the *givenness* of its situation. Hart puts it like this:

> receiving those givens in some sense as 'gift', creativity arises and flourishes in the form of imaginative response, working gladly, respectfully, and lovingly within the proper limits entailed by them yet making something more of the gift than its given form alone already amounts to and handing it on for reception and response by others in their turn.[80]

For Hart, creativity is rooted in the language of gift and response, faithfully responding to those things which constrain us, and collaborating with others and with God to create; in Hart's words, 'what God calls for and calls forth from those created in his image are responses which, receiving the world and gift, discover in its givenness opportunities for the exercise of creative freedom as well as constraint and for collaboration with – rather than contradiction of – God's own vision for all that the world may yet be and become.'[81] For Hart, creativity is not the task of creating the new, but of working within the giftedness of context and the accountability this creates, while still remaining open to what could be.

[75]Dominiak, *Richard Hooker. The Architect of Participation*, p. 172.

[76]With thanks to an anonymous referee for this clarification, and the wording of this point.

[77]Eppley, Daniel, *Reading the Bible with Richard Hooker* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016), pp. 188–218. Quoted in Dominiak, *Richard Hooker. The Architect of Participation,* p. 168.

[78]Eppley, *Reading the Bible*, p. 189. Quoted in Dominiak, *Richard Hooker. The Architect of Participation*, p. 168.

[79]Hart is ordained in the Scottish Episcopal Church. Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church, 'Rector', http://www.stasstas.com/rector.html (accessed 30th July 2024).

[80]Hart, *Making Good,* (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2014), p. 251.

[81]Hart, *Making Good,* p. 284.

Hart's depiction of creativity provides a helpful model for thinking about the task of ecclesiology and innovation. The anticipation of what might be must be situated within an acknowledgement and faithfulness of what has been. Surely, this is precisely what it means to faithfully participate in the body of Christ in and through tradition. But the idea that participation prevents one from diverting from even the most central components of the past is surely not right. This is not to say that Milbank is wrong to note the missional potential and gift of the parish system.[82] But if we take seriously the need to participate in the body of Christ, we must ask afresh, as Bishop Wand did in post-war London, where God might be calling for change, reform and a reimagining of the structures of the Church today, even if this means that we too must *supplement* the wonderful gift of the parish system with other forms of ecclesial engagement.

Perhaps, like Wand, the Church of England must seek to create the 'ecclesiastical laboratories' for today, in which 'new spiritual experiments' can 'benefit the whole church'.[83] Viewed through this lens, the mark of success is not whether guild churches are still working today, but rather in how they have shaped the imagination and ecclesiology of the present Church. Mirroring Wand's language, Stefan Paas writes that, at their best, 'Church plants are ecclesial laboratories: free havens for missiological experiments.'[84] As Paas goes on to argue, the reason why innovation is important is not primarily because it leads to numerical growth (note his worries about a growth focus model cited earlier in the paper), but because it creates the potential for new forms of church to engage more deeply with their context. Paas writes,

> We do not need more churches, but we desperately need contextual and credible churches. As far as this is more a matter of innovation than adaptation I think we cannot and should not avoid new church planting. More than ever we need incubators of creativity, sacrifice, and inspiration at the organizational margins of ecclesiastical life. This, and nothing else, legitimates church planting in a post – Christian society.[85]

The image presented here is starkly different from the vision of innovation presented at the beginning of this paper, in which (following Root) innovation itself is the highest ecclesial good. Rather, innovation within the givenness of structure provides a way of exploring new possibilities to engage afresh with the challenge of today's culture.

[82]Indeed, as Foulger's recent research has highlighted, recent diocesan strategy has seen a return to the emphasis on parish as the centre of church planting. See Foulger, *New Things*.

[83]Quoted by Sir John Crowder, Second Church Estates Commissioner, on the third reading of the ill in the House of Commons, 1952 (House of Commons, 'Third Reading').

[84]Paas, Stefan. 'Church renewal by church planting: The significance of church planting for the future of Christianity in Europe.' *Theology today* 68, no. 4 (2012): 467–477, p. 467.

[85]Paas, 'Church renewal by church planting', p. 475.

Faithful Innovation in the Church of England Today

Whilst we have considered many issues related to innovation and Church polity, one question lingers, namely: Do the current innovations of the Church of England count as instances of faithful innovation?

It is not my intention here to fully answer this question. This paper's aim was not a defence of church planting or innovation. Rather, more modestly, my aim has been to show how innovation *might* occur within an Anglican system of governance. As noted in the introduction of this paper, the reflections offered here pose challenges to both sides of the debate on church planting in the Church of England.

First, in response to those who are suspicious that any form of innovation might truly be 'Anglican' I hope that I have shown the possibility of significant change in response to cultural challenges which is deeply rooted in the systems and governance of the Church. Indeed, it might be argued, there are some striking similarities between the proposal put forward by Bishop Wand and the provisions under Bishops' Mission Orders, as outlined earlier in the paper. To put forward this case compellingly would need significantly more argument, but it is at least worth noticing some superficial parallels. Both guild churches and BMOs are non-parochial forms of church, existing within the structures of accountability within the Church of England in order to meet a specific contextual and missional need. Both went through stringent debate through the structures of the Church, seeking to faithfully reimagine what ministry might look like in a time of significant change. While specific examples of BMOs might still be subject to theological reflection about their engagement with tradition and appropriateness for context, it is difficult to claim that the principle of a non-parochial form of mission is itself problematic here.

Secondly, the challenge raised by this discussion to those in pioneering or non-parochial contexts is to take seriously what it means to operate with an Anglican view of authority. To take one example, consider the place of liturgy within non-parochial church contexts. While there are many planters and pioneers who I am sure would advocate strongly for lay presidency and may be happy to use informal liturgy in the context of the eucharist, to do so would be to fail to take seriously what it means to exist within a tradition of authority. Indeed, the ordained leaders of such contexts have made a declaration that 'in public prayer and administration of the sacraments . . . [they] will use only the forms of service which are authorized or allowed by Canon.'[86] While the publication of Common Worship in the early 2000s brought about room for considerable liturgical flexibility, the canons are very clear about the permissible forms of eucharistic liturgy, and who can lead such liturgy. This does not mean that those pursuing innovation and change cannot engage in the process of trying to reform and adapt liturgies for present contexts. But to disregard these commitments for the sake of mission is to fail to take seriously what it is to exist within a tradition of authority.

Moreover, even when liturgical forms used in these contexts have been arguably legal under canon law (e.g., through the appeal to Canon B5 that permits variations of liturgy according to the discretion of the minister), there has sometimes been a

[86]Church of England, 'Declaration of Assent', https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/ministry/declaration-assent (accessed 15th May 2024).

failure to grasp the reality that Anglicanism is not only a local expression of church, but also national and global. In other words, sometimes an appeal to particular contexts and scenarios might have been justified in its benefit to a particular context, but then this has had no impact on the wider Church. This is a failure to grasp the realities of polity in the Church of England in which our structures of governance are not merely local and congregational, but also national and episcopal.

A quick example will help to illustrate the point. Consider a context in which an abridged eucharistic liturgy is compiled for the sake of engaging with a community of adults with complex needs. For the gathered community, the liturgy is much more accessible than the authorized forms of liturgy available in *Common Worship* and enables them to engage with a group of people otherwise outside of the Church's worship. In providing an exception for this BMO to use different eucharistic liturgy the following implications follow: (i) the wider Church has had no input in discerning the appropriateness of this liturgy for use in public worship, or its theological soundness. And (ii), the existing authorized liturgies of the Church have not been properly scrutinized and challenged by the wisdom gained from this context. In other words, because this context has worked in exception to forms of polity, rather than trying to change and challenge them, authorized liturgies are not being renewed by those on the edges of the Church. The way in which Wand speaks of guild churches as providing an *ecclesiastical laboratories* can only happen if innovation engages in and through polity, rather than in opposition of, or seeking to find loop holes.

Surely much more could be said on this issue of authority. For example: What makes the 'mixed ecology' cohesive? How do non-parochial forms of ministry relate to or weave with parochial forms? How do the different missional communities and aims of the 'mixed ecology' align?[87] These are questions which must be addressed as the discussion is refined and nuanced, even if they are beyond the scope of the present paper.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has not been to argue that the existing models and practices of those pioneering new forms of church are participating faithfully in the authority of tradition. This is not a defence of the Church of England's strategy and vision. But to answer Hall's initial question: Are you really Anglicans? I hope I have shown the possibility of deep engagement with systems of governance and polity which provide possibilities for imagination, creativity and to rethink the riches of the past to engage deeply with the cultural challenges of the present. This provides a challenge and an encouragement. The challenge is to look afresh at the possibilities of ministry today within the giftedness of tradition and shared polity. But it also encourages us to see that faithfulness to Church polity and authority might look very different for different contexts and in different times.

[87]With thanks to an anonymous referee for posing these questions.

Appendix 1. List of Designated Guild Churches and their Present Designation

1. All Hallows, London Wall (ceased to be guild church 1994, now home to XLP charity)
2. Still open St Andrew Holborn (still operating as guild church)
3. St Benet, Paul's Wharf (still operating as guild church)
4. St. Botolph Without Aldersgate (still operating as guild church)
5. St. Dunstan-in-the-West (still operating as guild church)
6. St. Ethelburga-the-Virgin (significantly damaged by IRA bomb in 1993, now home to Centre for Reconciliation and Peace)
7. St. Katherine Cree (still operating as guild church)
8. St. Lawrence, Jewry (still operating as guild church)
9. St. Margaret Patterns (still operating as guild church)
10. St. Martin Lundgate (still operating as guild church)
11. St. Mary Abchurch (still operating as guild church)
12. St. Mary the Virgin, Aldermanbury (was not repaired, the remains of the church were moved to Missouri USA in 1966 and rebuilt)
13. St. Mary, Aldermary (still operating as guild church)
14. St. Mary, Woolnoth (still operating as guild church)
15. St. Michael, Paternoster Royal (never opened as a guild church, originally home to the Duke of Edinburgh's Mission to Seafarers, now a chapel within the offices of the Bishop of London)
16. St. Nicholas Cole Abbey (still operating as guild church)

Second schedule:

17. St. Andrew Undershaft (now part of the parish of St Helen's Bishopsgate)
18. St. Andrew by the Wardobe (remains a parish church, never designated as guild church)
19. St. Bartholomew the Great Smithfield (remains a parish church, never designated as guild church)
20. St. Boltoph Bishopsgate (remains a parish church, never designated as guild church)
21. St. Bride Fleet Street (remains a parish church, never designated as guild church)
22. St. Edmund the King (part of the St Edmund & St Mary Woolnoth team parish, never designated as guild church)
23. St. Giles Cripplegate (remains a parish church, never designated as guild church)
24. St. Helen Bishopsgate (remains a parish church, never designated as guild church)
25. St. James Garlickhythe (remains a parish church, never designated as guild church)
26. St. Margaret Lothbury (remains a parish church, never designated as guild church, but operates very similarly to guild church, e.g., no Sunday eucharist)
27. St. Mary at Hill (remains a parish church, never designated as guild church)
28. St. Mary-lew-Bow (remains a parish church, never designated as guild church)
29. St. Sepulchre Holborn (remains a parish church, never designated as guild church)
30. St. Stephen Walbrook (remains a parish church, never designated as guild church)
31. St. Vedast Foster Lane (remains a parish church, never designated as guild church)

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