

BOOK REVIEWS

The State of the Church and the Church of the State: Re-imagining the Church of England for our World Today

MICHAEL TURNBULL AND DONALD MCFADYEN

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In the mid-1990s the name of Michael Turnbull, then Bishop of Durham, was particularly associated with the report of the Archbishops' Commission, which he chaired, on the Organisation of the Church of England, a report which resulted in, *inter alia*, the Archbishops' Council. The present book, with a foreword by the Rt Hon Frank Field MP, digs deeper into similar ground. It is less concerned with the detailed organisation and more with the overall vision and orientation of the Church of England, and it provides a substantial philosophical analysis and rationale for the relationship between the national church and the state. In doing so, it answers some criticisms that the Turnbull report received. In fairness, it should be said that the term 'Archbishops' Council' was not Turnbull's proposal; the Commission's title 'National Council' was overturned by the General Synod, despite warnings that this would make the council hierarchical and inward-looking, less directed towards engaging leadership from all parts of the Church, not least those living or working on boundaries with the secular world. The present book wrestles with the fallout from the Synod's misjudgement but it looks much wider and perceptively at the changes in the common life and culture of the nation through recent decades and at the decline in identity confidence in both nation and organised religion.

With McFadyen, a parish priest in the Diocese of Ely and previously a Church Army corporate planner, Turnbull now considers the dangers facing the Church, alongside its strengths and the opportunities that it could yet embrace. They believe that the Church has focused too defensively on its own survival amid the challenges from declining numbers, thinly spread clergy, other faiths and secular militants; it should not tailor its structures by the twin traps either of management science diktats or of biblical literalism, but focus instead on its historic role of seeking the unity of the nation within the Kingdom of God. They hark back to King Alfred and Theodore of Tarsus, to Bede and Benedict Biscop, to Hooker and to William Temple, as they call congregations to look wider than the gathered club.

Hooker and Temple are particular sources as they explore the role of law in the formation of human societies and seek a more fundamental rationale for

the Big Society of political mantras: what is society *for* and what would make it better? They note the human desire for togetherness and the laws required for togetherness to remain intact, quoting Hooker's belief that rich forms of being together are needed for people to achieve their full human nature. Hooker and Temple both believed that this went beyond extroverts temperamentally liking company or introverts liking solitude; while a life lived in profound relationship with others is a successful life, the impulse and controls for this must spring not merely from rules and laws imposed by government but from shared agreement on the deepest desires from within the human heart. As Temple observed, early Christian thinkers did not understand natural law as simply scientific observation of phenomena but as the work of reason using observation to reach into the mind of God. So there is discrimination between means and ends, with human beings always seen as ultimate and never proximate, always the goal of society and never merely its instruments or its casualties.

Temple is quoted again when the authors tackle the nature of the unwritten English constitution. How does it exist? They see it rooted in its link to a monarch anointed for responsibility. This book was written prior to the 2013 Westminster Abbey service which focused chiefly on the anointing, not the crowning, as it celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of the Queen's coronation, but the authors are in tune with that. In 1928 Temple suggested that popular sentiment then interpreted the king 'not as chiefly the head of the State but rather as the impersonation of the Community – a greater thing. When the King opens Parliament, we see the Community, in his person, calling on its servant, the State, to discharge its functions.'¹ The role of government then, as servant, is to work with the grain of what makes citizens/subjects part of that embodied nation. A state in which wealth, fame and celebrity are lauded above all cuts across the grain and gives young people no idea of collective good. Usefully, the authors reflect on Margaret Thatcher's misunderstood phrase that 'there is no such thing as society' and set it in its context, but nonetheless unpick the limitations of her claim in the same interview that the living tapestry of men and women depends on the willingness of each to take responsibility towards one another. The authors see that as a very different idea from one in which we have permanent responsibility towards our neighbours, however different they may be, simply by sharing their humanity. That living tapestry requires a sturdy frame of valued institutions (education, law, medicine, religion and others) which keep the nation human, institutions which are not downgraded to mere economic levers, losing authority to a centralised state.

The churches, and specifically the Church of England, are among those institutions for human flourishing, holding a particular vision of the nation and its

1 William Temple, *Christianity and the State* (London, 1928), p 119.

human activities as intended to display the glory of God. Again Hooker is the authors' guide – locked, as he was, in a debate between Catholic obedience to Rome and Puritan obedience to scripture-led Geneva, and finding a deeper logic in the truth of the world as the truth of God. The world is ordered, not chaotic, because God himself obeys law, his fundamental characteristic, neither remote from the world nor tainted by it but creatively involved to bring about its unity. Following Hooker, the authors see the Church of England as a *logos* church with human reason nothing less than a participation in divine reason – as distinct from linear churches which see God and human beings as fundamentally separated, with divine illumination coming solely through the supernatural revelation of scripture and with the church itself made secondary, a 'gospel business'. This, then, has implications for the Church's organisation and its leadership, and indeed for the theological colleges, which largely neglect the study of ecclesiology, assuming that all know what the Church is and is for. Good leadership depends on a right understanding of those being led and of the essence of the Church that is being led. Hooker characteristically argues for bishops not as part of a divine ordering but as a good ordering with six identifiable benefits, which remain relevant today. It is part of his understanding that the practical and theological are neither of them acceptable alternatives to church polity, but need to be 'thought together', each enriching the other. Similarly, the authors find their underlying premise in Professor Dan Hardy, who, in an unpublished submission to the Lambeth Commission on Communion, maintained that the Church of England sees unity differently from other churches:

Unlike churches claiming truth either based on revelation of the eternal unity of God in God's acts or on succession as the One Body of Christ which suppose that the unity of God is already known, Anglicanism is primarily focused on its historical task: it commits itself to 'bring many into one' in the Kingdom of God, and thereby to come to know the unity of God. (cited on pp 127–128)

This profound book is worth prolonged reading, not least by ecclesiastical lawyers, who will find its pages shot through with a constant theme of law, the law of the state, the law of the church and the perfect law which is the very nature of God (James 1:25).

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