



The Anglican Imagination of Matthew Arnold

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ABSTRACT

This essay is an attempt to write Matthew Arnold into the narrative of Anglican thought in the nineteenth century. Overviews of general religious thought in the Victorian era give an appropriate nod to Arnold, but the institutional histories of the Anglican Church have not acknowledged his contributions to defining Anglican identity. In many ways, this is quite understandable: Arnold broke with much of traditional Christian doctrine. But, and just as significant, he never left the Church of England, and in fact he was an apologist for the Church at a time when even part of the clergy seemed alienated. He sought to expand the parameters of permitted religious opinion to include the largest number of English Christians in the warm embrace of the national Church. The essay concludes that the religious reflections of Arnold must be anchored in an Anglican context.

KEYWORDS: Catholicism, Church of England, Dissent, doctrine, Matthew Arnold, Protestantism

Introduction

While Matthew Arnold assented to few of the classical doctrines of historical Christianity, he adhered closely to the developed ritual and liturgical structure of the Anglican Church. The goal of this paper is to explore the nature of this apparent contradiction and, most importantly, to write Arnold into the history of Anglican thought in the Victorian period and, finally, to explore his contribution to Anglican

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self-understanding. Historians of English religion and literary critics acknowledge his significance in general nineteenth-century religious opinion-making, but he is commonly treated as a thinker who addressed himself singularly to large questions of faith and doubt, the challenge of biblical criticism or the Bible's role in public life and national culture. And while Arnold did devote much of his last two decades to discussing matters of general spiritual import, he also turned repeatedly to issues distressing the Church of England. Gerald Parsons notes, however, that his 'Broad Churchmanship was never properly addressed by the Church of England: both as a liberal and as layman he was marginalized and left aside'.² While Arnold could be a scourge to certain trends in Anglican theology, he kindled to the ancient forms of English worship and thought the Church of England, as settled at the Reformation, to be particularly well-suited to fit the British genius, a great source of unity in a time of terrible division. I argue in the following pages that Arnold was exhaustively engaged in the exigent religious deliberations of his age, and that the best way to properly understand his religious writings emerges through his commitment to Anglicanism, peculiar though that commitment may seem. This involves a reconsideration of his later writings, from *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) forward. In the Arnold literature, he is often described as a religious thinker and just as often there is little attempt to anchor his ideas in a particular tradition. But there is no view from nowhere. Whatever Arnold believed or denied in matters of religion, it must be understood in the wider Anglican context.

Unlike many religious liberals, Arnold sought a new faith within an old tradition. He warmed to the liturgy of the prayer book and did not dismiss the Thirty-Nine Articles. The old forms still had their hold on the people; however, their interpretation and application, and especially their hardening into dogma, no longer appealed to many of his countrymen. This was Arnold's project: to reorient society on a new foundation that in fact reached back to the natural truth of Christianity, a truth that could best be expressed through the traditions of a historical church. Arnold noted that this reorientation of society was a possibility that continental liberals would not countenance, remarking that his *Literature and Dogma* 'provokes a feeling of mingled astonishment and impatience; impatience, that religion should be set on

2. Gerald Parsons (ed.), 'Reform, Revival and Realignment: the Experience of Victorian Anglicanism', in *Religion in Victorian Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 14–66 (45).

new grounds when they had hoped that religion, the old ground having in the judgment of all rational persons given way, was going to ruin as fast as could be fairly expected; astonishment, that any man of liberal tendencies should not agree with them'.³

The first section considers a prevailing aspect in Arnold's religious writings: the growth of the Dissenting churches. From *Culture and Anarchy* to his final essays, Dissent stalks his work. In the religious and political realm, though the two largely collapsed into each other for Arnold, Dissent represented everything he opposed: individualism, separation for theological opinion, cultural vulgarity and narrowness. By understanding Arnold's judgments on Dissent we can better grasp the shape of opinions about the Established Church.

The paper then turns to Arnold's position as an Anglican thinker, which can only be understood in the context of his opposition to Dissent. The Church of England in this period was undergoing extensive adjustments, as its traditional prerogatives were under attack from Dissenters, secularists and some Anglican clergy. We will look at how a liberal justifies the maintenance of many of the Church of England's privileges; how the Church can be a moderate association for national unity; how the Anglican Church salvaged the best of Catholicism while avoiding the 'fanaticism' of Puritan Protestantism; and how Arnold felt his work was part of the solution to the new world in which the Church found itself, one described by Chadwick as a 'world moved out of an age of toleration, where a single church dominated, into an age of equality where speakers and writers sought to capture the public mind'.⁴ Few authors were better prepared for that challenge than Matthew Arnold.

Dissent

Concern about religious unity manifests itself only when that unity is threatened. Any internal Anglican consensus, however fragile, had been broken by the Oxford Movement in the 1830s and 40s and by the growth of 'theological liberalism'⁵ in the 1850s and 60s. The loss of Anglican unity prompted Thomas Arnold and later his son, Matthew,

3. Mathew Arnold, 'Preface to Last Essays', in R.H. Super (ed.), *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold* 8 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), p. 150.

4. O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 4.

5. Parsons, 'Reform, Revival and Realignment', p. 38.

to consider the broader context of Christian unity in England. Both were liberals who fought for the preservation of the Established Church when many religious liberals disclaimed it, and they sought not only concord among the various Anglican factions but among all English Christians. Thomas looked more kindly upon the Dissenting churches than his son, but each longed for the Church of England to be fully comprehensive. But comprehensiveness is a two-way street: it would require the consent of the Dissenters; and their understandable absence of enthusiasm for such an arrangement moved Arnold to reflect on the nature of religious unity and the role of the Church going forward. He attempted through his writings to persuade Dissenters to leave behind their separatist affinities and embrace the Anglican way, a way that had developed naturally and was particularly amenable to English sensibilities and temperament.

Deviation from religious normativity may often present a dilemma for the majority tradition, but it also creates an opportunity for refining self-definition. And Dissent provided that opportunity for Arnold. The Dissenting churches, it must be noted, did not agree on religious matters among themselves, but they were in concord in attempting to contract the political and cultural scope of the Church of England. The political maturity of Dissent and the embrace of the religious convictions of Puritan Protestantism prompted Arnold and others to reflect on the character of Anglicanism. For many Anglicans, Dissent was, in the phrase of the sociologist Kai Erikson, a 'boundary crisis'.⁶ Although Erikson's focus was on how Puritans in North America dealt with various agitations in the seventeenth century, his model fits the Anglican-Dissent dispute as well: a boundary crisis is about the flexibility of a tradition. Every tradition must at the same time be flexible and inflexible, redefining its borders as the needs of the hour dictate. With the domestic Anglican house in disorder, the Church of England and its advocates such as Arnold had to define themselves against further blurring at the margins. Arnold's observations on what he considers the errors of Dissent are on best display in his *St. Paul and Protestantism* and *Culture and Anarchy*.

One of the common Dissenter critiques of the Church of England was that it never entirely embraced the aims of the Protestant Reformation. Although its services were in English and the priests could marry, its ceremonies looked Roman, its archbishops acted like popes

6. See Kai Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Wiley, 1966).

and the Church was 'a mere lump of sacerdotalism and ritualism'.⁷ While Arnold personally had warm feelings toward the Catholic elements of Anglican ritual, he asserted that the 'Puritans'⁸ could not justly complain of these elements because they opted to separate from the Church of England. If they wished to have a seat at the table, they would have to enter into the broad Anglican embrace, which notionally allowed both Catholic and Protestant to worship together. The Church of England, after all, was a 'national Church'.⁹

It is a national Church because it does not form itself around theological opinion, which is naturally divisive. The Church of England at the Reformation, according to Arnold's reading of English political and religious history, insisted on common rites and liturgy, but allowed real differences in matters of metaphysical speculation. And not just common rites and liturgy, 'moral practice'¹⁰ as well united the faithful. 'Moral practice' is often the linchpin in the integrity of Arnold's religious thought. But separation as a result of differing religious views Arnold would not countenance. In fact, he argues that the Church of England did not separate from the Roman Catholic Church over issues of national sovereignty, the use of the vernacular or 'the doctrine of purgatory' but 'on plain points of morals [such as] the sale of indulgences'.¹¹ Unlike the radical reforms in Geneva and parts of Germany, the English Church 'made in her at the Reformation...the very least change which was absolutely necessary'.¹²

Arnold recognizes that the Church of England, in part, creates Dissent or non-conformity. Through mandatory clerical subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Church defines itself too narrowly. But even the Articles are 'large and loose' compared with the 'strict'¹³ prescriptions of the Dissenters. The formulations of the Dissenters naturally exclude a larger group than the more liberal Anglican standards. Dissent consciously secedes from common purposes. All of the practical and moral advantages for human perfection lay in union, not in sectarianism. And Arnold, in *St. Paul and Protestantism*,

7. Mathew Arnold, 'St. Paul and Protestantism', in R.H. Super (ed.), *Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold* 6 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968), p. 120.

8. Arnold, 'St. Paul and Protestantism', p. 120.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Arnold, 'St. Paul and Protestantism', p. 97.

11. Arnold, 'St. Paul and Protestantism', p. 98.

12. Arnold, 'St. Paul and Protestantism', p. 99.

13. Arnold, 'St. Paul and Protestantism', p. 77.

imagined that in his day 'the union of Protestants'¹⁴ was possible, although he did not judge the Church of England a Protestant group and wished to include Roman Catholics as well.¹⁵ Yet this suggested union, he writes, will gain no traction without Dissenters abandoning 'Scriptural Protestantism',¹⁶ the kind of Protestantism that assumes that the basis of Christian unity, theoretical though it may be, rests in a body of defined doctrine. This body of defined doctrine, according to Arnold, is based on an acutely defective understanding of Paul's conceptions concerning dogmas such as justification.

Arnold's most significant statements about Dissent appear in *Culture and Anarchy*. Dissenting churches were challenging the privileges of the Anglican Church in Ireland and elsewhere. He asserts that they, in fact, are not aiming for the common good, but rather the same narrow self-interest they see as pursued by the Church of England. The broad scope in matters of theology permitted by the national Church allows for the flourishing of human perfection, because it encourages the full development of human beings, whereas Dissent or Nonconformity have a partial view of human need, of the whole human person. The whole person, according to Arnold, aspires to perfectibility, and all historical religions must have an ideal of human perfectibility. So he assures his readers that he is no adversary of the 'Nonconformists; for, on the contrary, what we aim at is their perfection'.¹⁷ While he focuses on their perfection (a service no doubt warmly received by the nonconformists, who were surely unaware of their prior imperfection), he does not judge it possible that that perfection can be arrived at through Nonconformity to the normative tradition: 'but do not let us fail to see clearly that their idea of human perfection is narrow and inadequate, and that the Dissidence of Dissent and the Protestantism of the Protestant religion will never bring humanity to its true goal'.¹⁸ And the true goal of humanity is

14. Arnold, 'St. Paul and Protestantism', p. 107.

15. The Arnold family had a mixed relationship with Catholicism: Matthew's father, the educational reformer Thomas Arnold, did not believe that Catholics could be part of a union of Christians, whereas Matthew's brother, Tom, converted in 1856 to Catholicism (returning to the Anglican fold in 1865 and, finally, ending as a Catholic again in 1876). Both Arnold and his brothers were on warm terms with Newman.

16. Arnold, 'St. Paul and Protestantism', p. 107.

17. Mathew Arnold, 'Culture and Anarchy', in R.H. Super (ed.), *Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold* 5 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965), p. 235.

18. Arnold, 'Culture and Anarchy', p. 103.

perfection, and this can only take place in a national institution such as an established Church (Arnold allows that Roman Catholicism and Judaism, though not national, are exceptions to the rule).¹⁹ The state and its appendages, including the Church, pursue common goals, while separatists deem that deviance from accepted and classically defined norms is permissible on account of minor theological differences.

In *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold sets out his well-known classification of Hellenism and Hebraism as the two opposite but not opposing, complementary elements of human nature. He accuses Dissenters of cultivating the Hebraic side without giving attention to Hellenism. The two feed into each other, and the appropriate balance of the two – it need not always be an even division – prepares the conditions for the possibility of perfection. The end of the combination of these two elements is perfection, which Arnold at times identifies with salvation.²⁰ Hellenism is about effortlessness, mental clarity and openness to the currents of the time, whereas Hebraism concerns itself with fidelity and self-denial. Contemporary England hebraizes, concerned with submission to narrow theological speculation rather than the free play of the mind, which Arnold associates with Periclean Athens. English religion, especially that of the Dissenters, nurtures only the moral side of men and women, and thus unable to promote an integrated personality. Puritans, dissenters, nonconformists, by whatever name attaches itself to them, focus on doing and not thinking. Their biblical interpretation, on the Pauline writings particularly, is naïve and unthinking, unwilling to see development in doctrine and moral life. Hellenism, on the other hand, stresses reason, aesthetic discrimination and comprehensiveness in religious life. And his contemporaries are in need of a large measure of Hellenism, just as England needed a greater portion of Hebraism at the time of the Reformation. It is not the fault of the Dissenter, Arnold writes loftily: ‘He is, I say, a victim of Hebraism, of the tendency to cultivate strictness of conscience rather than spontaneity of consciousness.’ The Dissenter must attend to all ‘other points at which his nature must come to its best, besides the points which he himself knows and thinks of’.²¹ Dissent,

19. Arnold, ‘Culture and Anarchy’, p. 238.

20. By such identification, it is easy to understand why so many critics have accused Arnold of trying to save the sacred by secularizing and then calling it sacred. This criticism runs from F.H. Bradley to T.S. Eliot and today to James Wood. In particular, see Wood’s, *The Broken Estate: Essays on Literature and Belief* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999).

21. Arnold, ‘Culture and Anarchy’, p. 180.

then, is in reality defective, according to Arnold. Defective in the literal sense: Dissent is naturally imperfect and does not contain within itself the possibility of perfection.²²

But Arnold does seek their salvation, a salvation that would require them to join the national Church whose privileges they scorn. Rather than calling for their removal from society (very unlikely, in any case), Arnold 'downgrades' them, marginalizes their position, instead of attempting to 'outcast' them. In Mary Douglas' words, what Arnold would thus be setting up is a 'hierarchy' and not an 'enclave'.²³ The former allows for pluralism if not equality; the latter countenances no deviance. He delimits the parameters of Anglican, and thus normative, identity against Dissent while endeavouring to persuade Dissenters of their deficient religious understandings and how those deficiencies can be repaired. I concur and conclude with the view of David Ward, who maintains that 'Arnold could conceive of Dissenters having full standing as citizens and Churchmen in the Victorian nation – provided they stopped thinking and acting like Dissenters. The price of acceptance was the loss of identity. [It is] a rhetoric of assimilation'.²⁴ One of the central elements in Arnold's religious prose generally and his specifically Anglican writings is the emphasis on unity, and his sense of unity did not allow for pluralism and certainly not equality. He saw the established Church as both a way, part of the way, to perfection and a moderate force holding at bay anarchy and sectarianism.

Arnold's Anglican Structures

The Church of England in Arnold's era was partially losing its influence in government, in homes and in churches. Many of the trappings of establishment were removed, and in some substantive ways the Church of England's status moved from atop the religious hierarchy to first among equals. Its position may not have been secure, but its moral and political pull was still considerable, even if less than before. The objective of Arnold, then, was not to re-create the Anglican

22. For a highly individual yet scholarly criticism of Arnold's determined and persistent attack on Non-Conformity/Dissent, see Clyde Binfield's, *So Down to Prayers: Studies in English Nonconformity, 1780–1920* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977). I thank an anonymous referee for this bibliographic pointer.

23. See Mary Douglas, 'Introduction to Group/Grid Analysis', in *Essays in the Sociology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1982).

24. David A. Ward, 'Transformed Religion: Matthew Arnold and the Refining of Dissent', *Renascence* 53.2 (2001), pp. 97–117 (108–109).

Church of the past but to ensure its continued place in national culture and by extension, to reduce the influence of Nonconformity or Dissent in public life. The Church of England had to change in order to keep up with the renewed earthy, vigorous vitality of the Protestant churches and the intellectual revival of a formerly moribund English Catholicism.²⁵ Old avenues to preserving the status of the Church in national life were slowly being choked off. Arnold, as we shall see, had left to him only one weapon in his armamentarium: persuasion through moral and historical argument.

Although to bias a paper too much towards biography often results in crude psychologizing. I believe there is little doubt that in issues relating to the Church of England, Arnold drew heavily upon the work of his father, notwithstanding their very real differences in religious matters. Thomas Arnold called for Church reform, was a liberal in religion and politics, and would not seem to be a natural ally of a frequently hidebound Tory apologetic for the safeguarding of the Church's privileges. Yet Thomas Arnold went as far as any Tory churchman to support the political, religious and emotional claims of the Church upon English Christians. He sought, as his son would seek, a Church that comprehended on a broad basis all Christians, that the radicalism engendered by Dissent could be tempered through the doctrinal pluralism of the established Church.

In his work *The Principles of Church Reform*, Arnold outlined the minimal set of beliefs necessary for an Anglican: 'belief in God, in Christ as Saviour, in the Scriptures as containing the revelation of God's will to man, in notions of right and wrong'.²⁶ Assent to these few doctrines would, or ought to, occasion little dissension: they could be found in almost all Christian denominations. A Roman Catholic, however, could not allow this arrangement to trump his or her allegiance to the Church's *magisterium*, the official body of Church teaching. Unitarians and Quakers, Chadwick adds, could not consent to the arrangement either.²⁷ But most Protestant denominations theoretically could, and Arnold earnestly hoped they would, otherwise 'the establishment is gone, marriage will become a private ceremony, universities will cease to control religious education'.²⁸ The absence of

25. Peter T. Marsh, *The Victorian Church in Decline: Archibald Tait and the Church of England, 1868–1882* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 1.

26. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, p. 44.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, p. 45.

Christian unity caused Arnold very real and very existential pain: 'I groan over the divisions of the Church, of all our evils.'²⁹

This arrangement would mean that the Church was an appendage of the state. The notion of a truly national Church and of complete Church-state alliance was allowed to lie fallow. Thomas Arnold, 'the unusual Whig, assumed it as an axiom. The church is not a corporation separate from the state but the state in its religious aspect.'³⁰ This idea would later be repeated by his son: 'the Church of England is not a private sect but a national institution'.³¹ The path to the fulfillment of the Christian mission on earth was through a state-regulated church. The Church at the Reformation serendipitously 'stumbled' upon the idea of the king as the political head of the Church, the clergy as ministers of and for the state in its collective identity: 'I can understand no perfect Church, or perfect State, without their blending into one in this ultimate form.'³² Citizens of England needed instruction in the proper ethical life, and only a respected and public institution, funded by that state, could perform such a role. The Church required the state in enforcing the good and the right through public persuasion and, if need be, through judicial warrant or legislative action.³³ The aims of church and state, in Thomas Arnold's design, dovetailed perfectly. Much of the substance of his Anglican identity would be replicated by his son.

What makes the idea of an explicitly Anglican identity in the thought of Matthew Arnold peculiar is that he wrote 'a good deal which is at variance with the body of theological doctrine commonly received in the Church of England'.³⁴ Despite this peculiarity, he recommends himself as an ally of the Anglican clergy and their institutions. Non-Anglicans have counselled Arnold that he is in fact 'one of the worst enemies that the Church has'.³⁵ He denies the charge: he declares that whatever divergences in religious opinion he may

29. See Ward, 'Transformed Religion', p. 100.

30. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, p. 45.

31. Arnold, 'The Church of England', in *Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold* 8, p. 64.

32. Arthur Stanley, *Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold: Late Headmaster of Rugby School, and Regius Professor of Modern History in the University of Oxford 2* (London: B. Fellowes, 4th edn, 1845), p. 187.

33. See Desmond Bowen, *The Idea of the Victorian Church: A Study of the Church of England, 1833-1889* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1968), p. 358.

34. Arnold, 'Puritanism and the Church of England', in 'St. Paul and Protestantism', p. 65.

35. *Ibid.*

have with Anglican divines, he has affection for the liturgy and ritual of the Church and, most importantly, he encourages what he considers to be the mission of the established tradition, that is, to be 'a society for the promotion of what is commonly called *goodness*'.³⁶ He believed the mission of this society to be menaced on three sides: by Dissent, by the prevailing Anglican attitudes towards the Bible and biblical criticism, and a certain kind of religious liberalism that seemed resigned to or even pleased by the reduction of status in public life for the Church of England. Arnold's advocacy for the Church of England extends to a willingness to spurn his own writings critical of the Church and its approach to the Bible. He declared that if he were forced to decide between his 'writings which seek to put a new construction on much in the Bible' and his works that encourage the promotion of goodness, he would choose the latter because biblical criticism 'or the demolition of the systems of theologians, will never avail to teach men their duty or to assist them in the discharge of it'.³⁷ Thus, he offered his talents for a defence of the established Church.

The Church of England, if it ever did, no longer maintained a monopoly. The religious circumstance that Matthew Arnold confronted is best described as pluralist. Peter Berger tells us that 'ex-monopolies can no longer take for granted the allegiance of client populations. As a result, the religious tradition now has to be *marketed*. It must be "sold" to a clientele no longer constrained to "buy"'.³⁸ In order to convince Dissenters and other non-Anglicans to join or, at minimum, accept an established Church, he would have to present persuasive arguments for why this Church's purpose was only to introduce the right and the good rather than enforce religious discipline by theological tests as practiced by Dissenters and Roman Catholics. What Berger calls 'plausibility structures' began failing the Church of England, and its supporters such as Arnold had to construct new 'legitimations'³⁹ because of the novel situation. The plausibility of Anglican privilege in a pluralist environment was weakened by the emergent plausibility of other Christian denominations. These denominations could claim a rough numerical parity with the Church of England, and in a market situation, common to democracies, numbers matter politically. Thus the Church was going through a

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Peter Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969), p. 137.

39. Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion*, p. 47.

crisis of plausibility: 'The less firm the plausibility structure becomes, the more acute will be the need for world-maintaining legitimations',⁴⁰ writes Berger.

Arnold attempts to carry out various 'world-maintaining legitimations'. Anglicanism was specially designed to fit the needs and desires of the English people, according to him. It contained the Protestant principle of national sovereignty (of course, the English church prior to the Reformation was largely independent of Rome's reach) and carried over Catholic elements and sentiments, in particular the liturgy and ritual of the Catholic Church. Arnold's point is that the Church of England maintains historic continuity with the developed traditions of Christianity. It is neither a historical *novum*, an intrusion into the natural order of things, like Protestantism nor a tradition unwilling to admit development like Roman Catholicism. He writes: 'The Church of England existed before Protestantism, and contains much besides Protestantism.' The schismatic, separatist inclinations of Puritan Protestantism never overtook the 'church-order' of Anglicanism. For all of its errors, the Church of England refused to separate due to theological differences over doctrines such as 'election and justification'.⁴¹ Arnold admits that these doctrines exist within Anglican theology, but the institution of the Church itself did not originate from the doctrines. English Protestantism, on the other hand, has attached itself to a fixed understanding of election and justification. By doing so, and assuming that understanding does not change through development and incremental enlightenment, the Dissenters and nonconformists must maintain a subsequent commitment to those doctrines in the face of transformations in the discernment of religious truth. So it is that the Church of England, often characterized as narrow, is considered by Arnold to be 'more serviceable than Puritanism to religious progress'.⁴²

What cheers Arnold about the Church of England in contrast to the Dissenting churches is its public character. If, as he asserts, the goal of religion is the promotion of goodness and that nothing commands the attention of women and men as goodness does, then 'it is in human nature that what interests men very much they should not leave to private and chance handling, but should give to it a public institution'.⁴³ The Church acts as a gatekeeper for public morality. There is

40. Ibid.

41. Arnold, 'St. Paul and Protestantism', p. 6.

42. Arnold, 'St. Paul and Protestantism', p. 87.

43. Arnold, 'The Church of England', p. 67.

nothing meanly authoritarian behind what Arnold says, as he does not wish the Church to have any legislative or judicial power; it would instruct by 'its powers of attractiveness'.⁴⁴ The model here is economic: public goods and the public *good* are corporate matters, involving all citizens, unlike 'art and literature',⁴⁵ which are best left to individual discretion. Only an established Church has the moral capital to persuade men and women about goodness. And if goodness were the aim of the state, then that state would be wise in retaining a moderate national Church that could provide the ritual and liturgical forms for the expression of goodness. Theological opinion, however, is to be left to personal opinion: two people might disagree about the nature of Christ on a Thursday, yet on Sunday morning they are seated in the same Church pew. Arnold's centrism accordingly embraces two models: the cathedral and the bazaar. The cathedral is the Catholic top-down model that claims exclusive access to truth, whereas the bazaar is like Protestant Nonconformity with its multitude of small businesses clamouring for a greater market share. Arnold's understanding of Anglican identity endeavours to join the two together: the Church of England will have all the privileges of an exclusive and dominant Church but will encourage a diversity of religious viewpoints.⁴⁶

Part of the Church's moral capital, and thus its claims upon English Christians, is based on its 'religious moderation'.⁴⁷ Here Arnold unambiguously defends the Church of England as centrist, 'a *reasonable Establishment*'.⁴⁸ The Anglican centrism of Matthew Arnold finds its expressions in its public form, which allows for a large measure of diversity in theological understanding but insists that public worship be consistent with the developed tradition. As a member of an institution of 'religious moderation', 'instead of battling for his own private forms for expressing the inexpressible and defining the undefinable, a man takes those which have commended themselves most to the religious notions of his nation'.⁴⁹ While intellectual contemplation is an individual

44. Arnold, 'The Church of England', p. 86.

45. Arnold, 'The Church of England', p. 67.

46. I came across the image of the cathedral and bazaar in a famous discussion by Eric S. Raymond regarding computer code and open source software. See his *Cathedral and the Bazaar: Musings on Linux and Open Source by an Accidental Revolutionary* (Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly, 2001).

47. Arnold, 'Culture and Anarchy', p. 239.

48. Arnold, 'The Church of England', p. 80.

49. Arnold, 'Culture and Anarchy', p. 239.

endeavour, religious ceremony cannot be private, as the private, in Arnold's understanding, is a literal deprivation:⁵⁰ 'The consecration of common consent, antiquity is everything for religious worship [and] should be as much a common and public act. Man worships best, therefore, with the community; he philosophises best alone.'⁵¹ Arnold does not maintain that public ritual life is directly revealed by divine will but only that the religious traditions of the English Church have developed along historical lines and by the silent consensus of the faithful. Because the individual Anglican comes to the Church with the forms of religious life already established, he has more time to devote to cultivate 'other sides of his nature'.⁵²

Arnold admires intellectual and linguistic humility towards that which our immediate experience cannot define. Attempts at a thorough and settled definition of dogmas such as election and justification are pointless. What matters, Arnold quotes Bishop Butler, is to observe that 'things are what they are, why, then, should we desire to be deceived?'⁵³ Consequently, the Church of England because of its moderation and its humility – Arnold was surely speaking of the Church's aspirations and not its reality – sought 'to get at the real truth'⁵⁴ in a manner unknown to other churches, especially the Dissenting denominations. Getting at the truth, so far as we can know it, requires public institutions, institutions that are subject to state control and responsibility. During Arnold's time, the calls for disestablishment were growing, even within his own church; but he went against the current of his fellow liberals by persevering in his belief that the body public gains nothing and in fact loses much by dismantling the Church of England's state support. While he was a pluralist in religious opinion, Arnold desired 'comprehension and union'⁵⁵ and not disestablishment.

Arnold's defence of the Church of England was more than theoretical. As part of the push for disestablishment, Dissenters understandably wanted to be able to bury their dead with their own rites and with their own ministers. Up to this time, only Anglican ministers and Anglican rites were permitted in public burial grounds. Arnold defended the established practice, although he believed that the state

50. From the Latin *privāre*, to deprive.

51. Arnold, 'Culture and Anarchy', p. 197.

52. Arnold, 'Culture and Anarchy', p. 239.

53. Arnold, 'The Church of England', p. 80.

54. Arnold, 'The Church of England', p. 81.

55. Arnold, 'The Church of England', p. 86.

should respect the practices of Scottish Presbyterians and Roman Catholics. He attempted to legitimate it by arguing that its public character removed it from private concern. Religiously and aesthetically a public act of a ritual sort needed to be 'done and said worthily'.⁵⁶ The state in its religious form promotes goodness and culture, and these cannot be properly administered through private rite and liturgy. The state, in Arnold's understanding, cannot tolerate a plurality of approaches to goodness and culture. Public acts can be trusted because of their communal and transparent nature, 'and worship and devotion is eminently a public matter'.⁵⁷ Moreover, these acts have historical continuity with the English Church. For Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy*, 'the State is of the religion of all its citizens, without the fanaticism of any of them'.⁵⁸ National institutions are occupied with broader concerns than sectarians focused on a handful of issues rather than the common good: sectarians have no corporate sense of the larger whole, and their narrowness passes away into an anarchic individualism. The Church of England calls for a maximum of ritual and liturgical conformity with a minimum of doctrinal conformity. As Chesterton wrote perceptively, 'while Arnold would loosen the theological bonds of the Church, he would not loosen the bonds of the State. You must not disestablish the Church: you must not even leave the Church: you must stop inside it and think what you choose.'⁵⁹

Arnold asserts that he is an optimist: although the common Englishman or Englishwoman effortlessly stumbles into 'vulgarity' — and Arnold persistently identifies Dissent with coarseness — 'no people has shown more attachment than the English to old and dignified forms calculated to save us from it'.⁶⁰ Vulgarity is equated with the private and separate in religious life, and the vulgar has no public authority. The 'community'⁶¹ insists on the established forms, and communal privileges trump an individual's wishes in the use of land

56. Arnold, 'A Last Word on the Burials Bill', in *Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold* 8, p. 90.

57. Arnold, 'Culture and Anarchy', p. 197.

58. Arnold, 'Culture and Anarchy', p. 193.

59. G.K. Chesterton. *The Victorian Age in Literature* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1913), pp. 76–77. He suggested a darker implication of Arnold's embrace of state religion: 'he was trying to restore Paganism: for this State Ritualism without theology, and without much belief, actually was the practice of the ancient world. Arnold may have thought that he was building an altar to the Unknown God; but he was really building it to Divus Caesar.'

60. Arnold, 'A Last Word on the Burials Bill', p. 90.

61. Arnold, 'A Last Word on the Burials Bill', p. 91.

designated for public use. That is to say, the Anglican burial-rite was considered satisfactory by the people; they did not, as a majority, plump for the burial services of the Dissenters.

And this is part of Arnold's larger argument concerning the exceptional character of the English Church. Whereas many European states have dominant ecclesiastical institutions, whether Catholic or Protestant, they were not built upon the same template as the Church of England. In the sixteenth century, according to Arnold's reading of the history, those with Catholic tendencies and those with Lutheran or Calvinist leanings buried their differences to establish a Church that would be satisfactory to the majority of English Christians. This Church, the one defended so ably by Hooker and Butler, would be comprehensive; it would, on paper, fall in the theological middle between Rome and Wittenberg/Geneva. Because the national Church of England was intended to agree with the religious sensibilities of the English people, and to lay to rest theological and political difference to the greatest extent possible, 'therefore to no Church can dissent be so mortifying because dissent is the denial, not only of her profession of the truth, but also of her success in her direct design'.⁶² Religious unity in the present and continuity with the past are the vital aspects of Anglican moderation, and 'a need of human nature'.⁶³

But Arnold is not a High Church Tory apologist for the Anglican Church. He does not consider the Thirty-Nine Articles, the basic theological schema of the Church, to be at the level of verifiable truth. It is, above all, not 'science'.⁶⁴ As we have seen in some of his more general religious works, to mix religious truth with scientific truth for Arnold is a category error. Science rests below poetry, and religion is poetry. In his vision of a reconstituted and reinvigorated Church of England, resting on firmer grounds, Arnold suggests that rather than a theological test of an ordinand's belief, all that should be obliged is 'a general consent'⁶⁵ to the Articles and the liturgy of the Church. He admits and even embraces the idea of change within the Church itself and, by extension, its self-definition. However, these changes ought not to extend to change in the language of liturgy, for example, but instead our understanding of the meaning and intention of that liturgy. Anglicans have been reared on the forms of the Book

62. Arnold, 'A Last Word on the Burials Bill', p. 96.

63. Arnold, 'A Last Word on the Burials Bill', p. 110.

64. Arnold, 'A Psychological Parallel', in *Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold* 8, p. 130.

65. Ibid.

of Common Prayer: do not alter its content, its public face; alter instead its presentation. It is not science, but poetry, playing on sentiment and holding close to experience. The religious expressions that the authors of the Prayer Book were attempted to articulate are 'what we honour also'.⁶⁶

Matthew Arnold's Anglicanism was a theory of the Church in changed times. Like his father, Arnold hitched Broad Church liberalism in matters of theological doctrine to a High Church understanding of the corporate nature of the Church. In its liberalism, the Anglican fold was to comprehend all English Christians who accepted its minimal demands. In its conservatism or continuity with the past, the Church of England was to maintain its traditional privileges and retain its status as the established, national Church.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to establish Matthew Arnold as an Anglican thinker. Although not part of the ordained clergy, Arnold contributed to the advance of Anglican self-understanding and definition at a time when Anglican boundaries were being radically redefined politically, religiously and culturally. Politically, the Church of England's status as the established national Church was being challenged on a large scale for the first time; culturally, the slow growth of secularism as an intellectual alternative disputed the 'plausibility structure' of the Church as the best path to defining reality; and religiously, Anglicanism was pressed by the swift growth of the Dissenting churches and the concomitant loss of congregants.

The Church of England was leaking like a sieve, and Matthew Arnold resolved to put forward a solution that would allow it to meet the adversities of the present while preparing for an unsure future. I think we can therefore confidently place Arnold among important Anglican thinkers, although he 'can be called Christian only insofar as one allows nonsupernatural Christianity as possible'.⁶⁷ As for the on the ground success of Arnold's strategies, I think we may safely say that little of his specific Anglican perceptions have made it into the self-definition of the Church, but much of his more general religious thoughts was filtered into Anglicanism: contemporary liberal Anglicanism (thus excluding Anglican evangelicalism), has accepted

66. Arnold, 'A Psychological Parallel', p. 135.

67. A.P. Roberts, *Arnold and God* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 200.

Arnold's diminution of the supernatural into the natural while emphasizing the ethical and experiential aspects of Christianity. This process has been necessary to a great extent because of the rise of and need to compete with other credible intellectual structures, from other traditions both inside and outside of Christianity. Peter Berger writes: 'Probably for the first time in history, the religious legitimations of the world have lost their plausibility not only for a few intellectuals and other marginal individuals but for broad masses of entire societies'.⁶⁸ Arnold's adjustments to classical Christian doctrine and belief were a form of religious legitimation in changed circumstances, but a moderately conservative adjustment: he did not wish to dispense with the traditional imagery, liturgy or symbolism of the English Church, but he did undertake to fundamentally rethink the recognized meanings given to those doctrines and beliefs.

At the beginning of the paper I asserted that Arnold's Anglicanism is more secure than his Christianity. The sociologist Grace Davie, in a discussion of contemporary patterns of religious belief in Europe, has described a phenomenon called 'believing without belonging'.⁶⁹ In her theory, traditional Christian ideals have not been lost but rather have been transmuted into a more diffuse religiosity or spirituality without the moral authority of institutions such as churches.

This situation is Arnold's, but reversed: he belonged without believing. He was an Anglican first and a Christian second.⁷⁰ But he was in an ambiguous position as a conservative Anglican and a liberal Christian. His liberalism towards matters of dogma and belief placed him outside the Anglo-Catholic circles to which he warmed, while his retention of the Anglican public arrangement – the classical ritual and liturgical forms, along with the political advantages of an established Church – alienated him from liberal clergyman within the Church and non-Anglicans outside of it. Arnold could speak with liberals, but not worship with them; conversely, he could worship

68. Peter Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969), p. 125.

69. Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 93–116.

70. This point is certainly open to challenge. A recent biographer, Nicholas Murray, notes that the religious writings of Arnold 'could scarcely have been written by a man to whom Christianity meant nothing. [He] remained a believer and a worshipper after his own fashion until – quite literally – the day he died.' Nicholas Murray, *A Life of Matthew Arnold* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996), pp. 51–52.

with Anglican conservatives, but could not speak with them. He was, as in his famous image, caught 'between two worlds'.⁷¹ In the Anglican nineteenth century, he was an outlier: a theological liberal who did not wish to dissolve the historical bonds of Church and state. I think because Arnold was an outlier he is difficult to place in the narrative of Victorian Anglican thought. Although not a conventional Anglo-Catholic, evangelical or liberal, he is still an important contributor to Anglican self-understanding. One imagines that the Anglican present would be quite different had the Church of England assumed his ideas, although one cannot say that it would have provided a better present, but surely different.⁷²

71. Nicholas Sagovsky, argues that the theology of the Catholic (formerly Anglican) priest George Tyrrell (1862–1909) had significant parallels to Arnold, concluding that both attempted to balance the needs of the day with the claims of tradition. See his *Between Two Worlds: George Tyrrell's Relationship to the Thought of Matthew Arnold* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

72. Of course, Arnold's Anglicanism in no way resembles Anglicanism today, whether in thought, demographics and location. As the heart of Anglicanism has begun to move to points south (one thinks especially of Nigeria), the issue of an established Church with centuries of privilege disappeared as Anglican missions moved into areas where the Church was unknown. The Church of England is as much a part of what Philip Jenkins calls the 'Global South' as it part of England. See Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).