

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE PLACE OF THE SACRED IN SOCIETY

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(A paper presented at the Society's Durham Conference, April 2003)

This paper attempts an overview of currents of theological thinking on the place of the sacred in society. It considers the long tradition of active engagement between Church and State, which derives its authority from the New Testament and can be traced through St Augustine and Anglican Divines to the present day. Having examined contemporary arguments of those who question the propriety of such an arrangement it concludes that it remains theologically justifiable. The paper then turns to the particular question of the Establishment of the Church of England and engages both with those who support it and those who are in favour of disestablishment. It observes that Establishment functions at various levels in English society and, whilst acknowledging and welcoming the fact that its form will continue to change, argues that it offers distinct advantages to both Church and State. In a country where seventy-one per cent of the population professes itself to be Christian it gives the state legitimacy by reminding the latter that all authority derives from God and ensures that Christian influence for the maintenance of a just and peaceful society remains strong. Establishment reminds the Church that it has a responsibility to the whole nation, not just those who regularly attend its churches, and protects the mission and ministry of the Church throughout the parishes of the land.

INTRODUCTION

The place of the sacred in society is what might be referred to as a 'hot topic'—and not only in this country where the Golden Jubilee provoked a series of reflections on the relationship between monarch, State and Church. Attention was drawn by Will Hutton in *The Observer* recently to the fact that Pope John Paul II has been campaigning since the European Constitutional Convention was launched for Europe to recognise overtly that it owes its values and spiritual achievements to Christianity. The European Union Constitution should contain an invocation of God, the Pope argues, with 'an inclusive reference to the transcendent'. Europe's Protestant Churches are applying similar pressure: they want the Constitution to indicate the importance of Christian religion for Europe, and argue that Europe's adherence to democracy and rejection of political absolutism in any guise can best be achieved by an express reference to God in the preamble.¹ Hutton is prepared to concede at least that the answer to the question of where Europe's distinctive values come from cannot exclude Christianity. John Bruton, former Prime Minister of

¹ *The Observer*, 9 February 2003.

Ireland and member of the Convention on the Future of Europe, is looking for much more than a recognition of the Christendom legacy. He wants 'a constitutional recognition that belief in God is one of the sources of the values that inspire the EU and, of more immediate relevance, we are also looking for explicit recognition of the role of the Churches in the EU.'² It will be interesting to see what emerges from the Convention, and to see also how the things change when the European Union expands eastwards to include countries like Poland where the Church is very powerful.

The questions with which the Convention is wrestling are germane to the theme of this conference, the purpose of which, as I understand it, is to ask what form of Church-State relationship at the core of society provides the best means to enable the citizen to encounter and identify with the sacred, particularly the sacred represented by the Christian Church. It would be possible to write an entire paper on exactly what is to be understood by the term 'the sacred' and, indeed, what should be construed by the terms 'society' and 'State'. However, I am hoping to avoid such hurdles by declaring that, for the purposes of this paper, I shall follow the Pope in defining 'sacred' as the Christian faith. By society I shall mean society as it exists in Europe and North America, and by 'State' the governmental mechanisms of the countries in these regions. That said, what I shall attempt is an overview of important theological discussions concerning the issue of Church-State relationships in the recent past, before moving on to look at the specific situation in England. When reviewing the latter I shall consider the question initially from a national perspective and then from a local. I should add that, though I shall do my best to represent fairly the views of some of the most important theological contributions to debate about these issues, it will become apparent very early on where my own sympathies lie.

GENERAL THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Church and State in partnership: a noble precedent

The notion of the relationship between Church and State being a close one and of both institutions being ordained by God has a noble theological precedent. The Church and the State formed part of a theological whole in Christian thinking at least as far back as St Augustine, who used the experience of Israel in Babylon as the archetype for his conception of two political entities, the heavenly city, the Church, and the earthly city, the political order, co-existent in one time and space. In the celebrated Book XIX of his *City of God*, he tells us that:

the earthly city, which does not live by faith, seeks an earthly peace, and the end it proposes, in the well-ordered concord of civic obedience and rule, is the combination of men's wills to attain the things which are helpful to this life. The heavenly city, or rather the part of it which sojourns on earth and lives by faith, makes use of this peace only because it must, until this mortal condition which necessitates it shall pass away.

² J Bruton, *The Tablet*, 22 February 2003.

Consequently, so long as it lives like a captive and a stranger in the earthly city, though it has already received the promise of redemption, and the gift of the Spirit as the earnest of it, it makes no scruple to obey the laws of the earthly city, whereby the things necessary for the maintenance of this mortal life are administered; and thus, as this life is common to both cities, so there is a harmony between them in regard to what belongs to it . . . The heavenly city, therefore, while in its state of pilgrimage, avails itself of the peace of earth, and, so far as it can without injuring faith and godliness, desires and maintains a common agreement among men regarding the acquisition of the necessities of life, and makes this earthly peace bear upon the peace of heaven.³

This passage has been much quoted, interpreted and misinterpreted. What is true, at the very least, is that Augustine's thought as represented here provided a foundation for medieval understandings of the Church's relationship to the State. He did not mean to imply an equivalence between the heavenly city and the Church, and the earthly city and the State but was talking, rather, of two principles, the love of self and the love of God, which *necessitated* the Church and the State. Since the Fall, the State had been part of the natural order as a bulwark against sin. Its function was to promote peace, and Christians and pagans had a common incentive to support it. This tradition developed through Aquinas, who also saw the State as part of the natural created order. Even Luther, who argued strongly for the separation of the 'Two Kingdoms', the spiritual and the secular, was clear that the authority of the State derived from God.

A partnership under strain

However, the historic notion of partnership between Church and State as two God-given institutions, divinely ordained for the good of humankind, came under severe strain in the twentieth century. It was eroded not just by the 'warmongering by some Bishops of the Church of England during the First World War' but also by the 'assimilation of Lutheranism to the Nazi regime in Germany in the 1930s, the concordats between the Holy See and the Fascist dictators, and the chauvinism of some national orthodox Churches'.⁴ During the last century, partly in response to these developments, considerable theological voices have raised questions about the Church and State being too closely related from first principles. In the Thirties the chief purpose of Karl Barth, arguably the greatest Christian theologian of the twentieth century, was to help the Church escape from what he saw as the quietist implications of Luther's doctrine of two governments, and to help it stand against Nazism. The fact that Barth was not successful, and that most Christians in Germany did not protest about what was going on led, ironically, to the most important theological voices in the middle of the twentieth century on the American side of the Atlantic being consumed with encouraging the Church to throw in its lot with the ideal of liberal democracy, which they saw as acting as a bulwark

³ St Augustine, *City of God*, Book XIX, Chapter 17.

⁴ P Avis, *Church, State and Establishment* (London: SPCK, 2001), p viii.

against Fascism. The work of Ernst Troeltsch, who developed a threefold typology of Church-type, sect-type and individual mysticism⁵, was used by H R Niebuhr in his hugely influential *Christ and Culture*.⁶ In it Niebuhr identifies five ways in which the Church may relate to the world—Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox and Christ the transformer of culture. They are presented in such a manner that only the last seems reasonable. Niebuhr's ethics imply that social action in support of liberal democracy is at the heart of faithful response to the gospel.

The problem with Niebuhr's approach is that it runs the risk of the Church becoming totally subservient to the prevailing social order and the Christian faith being robbed of any distinctive identity. Christianity then transmutes into what has been referred to as 'civil religion', the purpose of which is simply to uphold liberal democracy. However good an ideal the latter might be, the Christian gospel can never be exclusively associated with its promotion. Robert Bellah, a contemporary American thinker, espouses 'civil religion' in the tradition of Durkheim and Rousseau and in so doing reduces religion to the social, temporal and instrumental—it is simply yoked to political ends. Bellah's eschatological hope is for this civil religion (which is by no means an exclusively Christian one) to be exported to the world. As he himself says, 'A world civil religion could be accepted as a fulfilment and not as a denial of American civil religion. Indeed, such an outcome has been the eschatological hope of American civil religion from the beginning'.⁷ This is a pretty depressing scenario for those who care about the Christian gospel and many have reacted against it and other manifestations of attempts to hijack the gospel for political ends. It could be argued that, whereas the threat of civil religion to the Church may be great in America, a much greater danger in Europe is that of rampant secularism.⁸ However, from an Anglican perspective on this side of the Atlantic, Christopher Rowlands and others argue that the Church must not allow itself to become captive to any one secular model of society and government.⁹

⁵ E Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches* (New York: Macmillan, 1931).

⁶ H R Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951).

⁷ R Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p 186.

⁸ On this matter Oliver O'Donovan writes that 'the extent to which civil religion is an immediate and pressing threat to the authenticity of the church must, of course, be a matter of judgement which will vary from place to place and time to time. Reading the essays collected by John Witte in *Christianity and Democracy*, I am open to persuasion that the American situation is distinctive in this respect': O O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p 225.

⁹ C Rowlands, 'My Kingdom is not of this world' in K Leech (ed.), *Setting the Church of England Free: The Case for Disestablishment* (Croydon: the Jubilee Group, 2001), p 23.

'Pure Christianity' versus 'Constantinianism'

For some, developments like that illustrated by Robert Bellah, and the resulting emasculation of the Church and the gospel, are the inevitable consequences of what is referred to as 'Constantinianism', that is, the Church's attitude to the world since the conversion of Constantine in the fourth century. The most influential theologian to propound this view was John Howard Yoder.¹⁰ He and those who follow him point out that eschatology and ecclesiology swapped places after the legalisation of Christianity since

before the shift, the beleaguered Church represented God's providential working in the world. Afterwards, the empire supported the Church and the success of the two went hand in hand. It was now the empire as a whole rather than simply the Church, which made God's providence visible. There was no reason for the Church to confront society: its new duty was to support society.¹¹

John Howard Yoder's criticism of 'Constantinianism' has been influential on many who, with him, have objected to what they see as the capitulation of the Christian faith to the prevailing social order. One of the best known and most able is Stanley Hauerwas, who is impatient with the 'liberal democratic' ideal which Niebuhr and others were so concerned to support. He is not only concerned about the removal of any transcendent element from the Christian faith when it is interpreted in this manner. He is also, like Yoder, deeply disturbed by what he sees as the violence of the nation state. Hauerwas is clear that the whole point of philosophical and political developments since the Enlightenment was to create people incapable of killing each other in the name of God. 'Ironically,' he writes, 'since the Enlightenment's triumph, people no longer kill one another in the name of God but in the name of nation states'.¹² Similarly, the philosopher Alastair MacIntyre describes the modern nation state, in whatever guise, as:

a dangerous and unmanageable institution, presenting itself on the one hand as a bureaucratic supplier of goods and services, which is always about to, and never does, give its clients value for money, and on the other as a repository of sacred values, which from time to time invites one to lay down one's life on its behalf. As I have remarked elsewhere . . . it is like being asked to die for the telephone company.¹³

¹⁰ J H Yoder, 'Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics' in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

¹¹ S Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998), p 108. It would not be fair to characterise this as Wells' position—he is describing the approach of John Howard Yoder and those who take after him. Wells' analysis of the theology of Hauerwas is well worth reading in this context.

¹² S Hauerwas, *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), p 129.

¹³ A MacIntyre, 'A Partial Response to My Critics' in J Horton and S Mendus, (eds), *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alastair MacIntyre* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), p 303.

Whilst Hauerwas and others are right to point out that unquestioning commitment to the ideal of the nation state amounts to idolatry, it should also be noted in passing that, in both England and the United States, it has been the Churches that have spoken out most resoundingly against government policy towards Iraq. Indeed, it could be said that they have constituted the only reasoned and calm opposition to military action. In England, this has been as true of the Established Church as of others. The broader question is whether any such close relationship to the State is an aberration within the Christian tradition, a betrayal of 'pure Christianity'. Tom Wright suggests that the idea that it is owes as much to Enlightenment rhetoric as to any sound theology. It has, he tells us, been one of the major achievements of that rhetoric to pour scorn on the period 'from the settlement of Constantine right through to the eighteenth century as a hopeless compromise, "the fall of the Church" almost.'¹⁴ Wright makes reference to the inadequacy of the legacy of the Enlightenment, for, among other things, 'the assumption of a split-level world in which religion and faith belong upstairs and society and politics downstairs.'¹⁵

It is difficult to say how much contemporary criticisms of the Christendom model owe to modernity. It is certainly true that, though those who oppose 'Constantinianism' would also see themselves as opposing much of what has become the norm in modernity, in particular the privatisation of religion, it may be that by advocating the separation of Church and State they are playing into the hands that same modernity. Wright remarks that the very word 'Christendom' has become a sneer whereas, as Oliver O'Donovan points out, 'even our refusal of Christendom has been learned from Christendom. Its insights and errors have fashioned, sometimes by repetition and sometimes by reaction, the insights and errors which comprise the platitudes of our day.'¹⁶ Wright is dismissive of those who are critical of Church engagement with the State:

Though there is a vital point to be made about the dangers of assuming too ready an identification between the cause of the gospel and the cause of any particular country, nation or State, this criticism is trivial and superficial, and completely fails to take into account the long, complex and by no means compromised tradition of serious Christian political thought throughout the millennium and a half from 300AD to 1800AD. To look no further than our own islands, the very close association of the Celtic kings such as Oswald with the Celtic bishops such as Aidan speaks of a co-operation in which the bishops, many of them real saints, were certainly not compromised but were able to guide entire societies as well as individual souls. It is from such roots that our own contemporary situation grows. And it is simply false to suggest that from the time of Constantine onwards the Church was

¹⁴ N T Wright, *God and Caesar, Then and Now*, Lecture given in Westminster Abbey, 22 April 2002.

¹⁵ N T Wright, *op cit*.

¹⁶ O O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*, p 194.

muzzled, forced to do what its political masters told it. Of course that happened sometimes—just as it does in some countries today, such as the United States, where non-Establishment is much vaunted.¹⁷

What the Bible says

Can this argument be settled by appeal to the Bible? Yoder and those who oppose Constantinianism would see their authority deriving from the life and death of Christ as it is recorded in the scriptures. Central to their concern, as has already been indicated, is the issue of violence and they would hold that Christianity requires pacifism because of the witness of Jesus. ‘Those who live by the sword will die by the sword’, said Jesus, and when push came to shove, instead of getting himself out of trouble with the authorities by violence, he submitted himself to it. He even rebuked those who wanted to turn to violence in the Garden of Gethsemane. As a result, martyrdom was always the way of the early Christians because that had been the way of Jesus. They believed that the world was to be won by the blood of the martyrs rather than armed conflict.

Yoder characterises four options which were open to Jesus in his relationship with the authorities: that of the Herodians and Saducees, who accepted Roman power as a given and tried to work with it; that of the Zealots, the revolutionaries who attempted to overthrow it by force; that of the Pharisees, who kept themselves pure and separate; and that of the Dead Sea communities, who withdrew in order to find a place where they could be ‘pure and faithful’. Jesus chose none of these but, rather, the cross, the formation of an alternative community that challenged everyone so much that it led to his death.¹⁸ The same sort of choice, Yoder would say, is open to us and if Jesus did not choose the way of the Herodians and Saducees, neither should we. He points out that Jesus could not possibly have chosen the ‘establishment’ way of the latter, since their party was against him from the beginning. It was their head, Caiaphas, who stated that it was expedient that one life should be sacrificed – whether justly or unjustly mattered little – for the sake of the community.¹⁹ Yoder goes on to say that:

it does come to this: if religion is to sanction the order that exists, it must defend that order even against criticism by the prophetic word, even at the cost of the life or the liberty of a prophet. The critic-from-within-the-establishment, the house prophet, will, if he stays inside when the crunch comes, be with Herod after all. This has not changed in our day.²⁰

Yoder’s criticisms are powerful, but they derive from one strand in the New Testament witness, and one interpretation of that strand. Not only would

¹⁷ N T Wright, *God and Caesar, Then and Now*.

¹⁸ See J H Yoder, ‘The Original Revolution’ in *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Grand Rapids: W B Eerdmans, 1997), pp 165-179.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p 171.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p 171.

it be hard to argue that the Biblical witness as a whole does not sanction violence under any circumstances. It is also necessary to do justice to the conviction of both the Old and New Testaments that earthly powers are instituted by God. Jesus explicitly acknowledges before Pilate that the latter's authority has been given him by God and Jesus does not say that his kingdom is not *of* this world but, rather, *from* the earth. Elsewhere the New Testament is clear that earthly authorities are God ordained. In the hymn of the cosmic Christ in Colossians, all earthly authorities are described as having been created through, and for, Christ: 'For in him all things in heaven and in earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him'.²¹ Earthly authorities are a bulwark against anarchy. Wright explains these New Testament insights in a straightforward manner:

God does not want anarchy; nor, of course, do we. It's all very fine to talk about the wickedness of earthly rulers, but when someone steals my car I want justice, and I don't want to have to do it myself. It's all very well to say people in power are self-seeking, but if nobody is in power the bullies and the burglars have it all their own way and God doesn't want that; so God has instituted rulers and authorities, even at the obvious risk that most of them don't acknowledge him and only have a shaky idea of what justice actually is, in order to bring into his world such order as is possible until the day when the rule of Jesus himself is as complete on earth as in heaven.²²

This is not a Fascist's charter, but, rather, places a large burden upon rulers which many would prefer to ignore. Wright suggests that it is striking that our monarchy, and some of the other monarchies that still remain, openly acknowledge and indeed celebrate this responsibility. It is the responsibility of the Church to work with such God-ordained earthly authorities. There is no doubt that such an approach is 'messy'. Wright points out that, contrary to what is sometimes suggested by those with a secularist agenda, Jesus's answer to the question of whether taxes should be paid to Caesar does not advocate a separation of the spheres of Caesar and God. At the surface level the saying indicated that God claims the whole of life, including questions about taxes. More deeply, 'God is present in the ambiguity, summoning people to an allegiance which transcended but certainly included the ambiguous position they found themselves in *vis-à-vis* the occupying power'.²³

Despite the powerful criticisms of Yoder and other distinguished theologians, I would suggest that it is not only the weight of Christian tradition but a legitimate reading of the Bible as a whole, including the New Testament witness, that obliges the Church to see the State as an institution ordained by God and therefore to work constructively with

²¹ Colossians 1 : 16-17.

²² N T Wright, *God and Caesar, Then and Now*.

²³ N T Wright, *op cit*.

it. If Jesus and the authors of the New Testament were able to see divine authority vested in an occupying power, it is all the more incumbent on us to work with governments which, to greater or lesser extent, acknowledge that their power comes from God. From this perspective, Edmund Burke's insistence that the ecclesiastical Establishment 'consecrates the State' by giving it stability, virtue and historical continuity retains its validity. Earthly authority becomes idolatrous only when it does not acknowledge God. It is the Church's role to ensure that it does—and that means working with it.

The Christian tradition of political theology rediscovered

A magisterial attempt to rediscover this great tradition of political theology which derives from the Biblical witness, and to which theologians have looked since the time of St Augustine's *City of God*, is to be found in Oliver O'Donovan's book, *The Desire of the Nations*. He points to the dangers of the separation of politics and theology which he describes as 'both poles of the authority-dialectic in the modern tradition: State sovereignty on the one hand, popular sovereignty on the other', and suggests that they are 'best understood as the residual fragments of an original theological whole, which owe their opposition and arbitrariness to the loss of their common centre of attraction'.²⁴ Modern political thought, founded, as it often is, on an avowedly anti-sacral basis, has reached an impasse because 'the notion that we set up political authority, as a device to secure our own essentially private, local and unpolitical purposes, has left Western democracies in a state of pervasive moral debilitation, which, from time to time, inevitably throws up idolatrous and authoritarian reactions'.²⁵

O'Donovan argues that 'we cannot discuss the question of secular government, the question from which Western political theology has too often been content to start, unless we approach it historically, from a Christology that has been displayed in narrative form as the Gospel'.²⁶ He sets out to 'push back the horizon of commonplace politics and open it up to the activity of God . . . [for] . . . we must look to the horizon of God's redemptive purposes if we are to grasp the full meaning of political events that pass before our eyes'.²⁷ O'Donovan is intent upon recapturing that noble Christian tradition which has been determinative in the Church since Augustine and has been exemplified in the Anglican tradition by Hooker, Burke, Coleridge, Gladstone and Maurice. Referring to Hooker and Coleridge, Peter Sedgwick points out that:

it is not that either of these theologians deny the nature of Christian community, but that they saw beyond the Christian community a *telos* in which individual and corporate existence found a unity and ultimately an eschatological fulfilment. Even in the radically demarcated existence

²⁴ O O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology*, p 81.

²⁵ O O'Donovan, *op cit*, p 49.

²⁶ O O'Donovan, *op cit*, p 133.

²⁷ O O'Donovan, *op cit*, p 2.

of contemporary modernity, where each self is divided into fragments and the hidden depths of each soul (or each sexual being) are the primary referent of particular action, Anglican polity can witness to the need to love well in each particular locality.²⁸

Sedgwick proposes that the life of the Church is continually being illuminated by and illuminating the nature of the civil commonwealth: 'the one does not survive without the other: for Christ is present in both, calling people to freedom and service within the graced fellowship of the entire community that is the society wherein the Church is set'.²⁹ An inspirational figure in our own day, who is committed to both social transformation and spiritual renewal, is the American Jim Wallis of the Sojourners community. He writes that a 'prophetic politics rooted in moral principles could again spark people's imagination and involvement' and that 'to shape a new future we must first find the moral foundations and resources for a new social vision'.³⁰ I believe that it is the role of the Church, nurtured by its worship, to provide that vision and allow it to spread by active engagement with the State.

Church and State in constructive but not consuming partnership

We should be clear that such an approach does not imply that the Church is simply concerned with the values of society. John Habgood writes that the Church has a social function in society but its role is not confined to that: 'Christianity is not just about values. Nor is its primary function to secure social stability, though this may in practice emerge as one of its useful functions. A faith reduced to this role, however, would have become as secularised as the society in which it is set'.³¹ However, as he writes elsewhere, 'a formal public commitment to religious faith at least provides a basis on which cohesion can be built'.³² Discussion in theological circles is too often polarised between those who argue that a Church with close links to the State is robbed of all its prophetic power and eschatological edge, and those who dismiss a Church entirely separate from the State as a 'sect', which thereby loses much of its influence for good and the gospel in the world. It does not seem to me that it needs to be 'either/or'. In order to remain true to gospel values the Church needs to attend to its scriptures and tradition and nurture its worshipping life, but this should not prevent it from engaging actively and positively with the State. The new society which Jesus formed, the Church, was given, according to John Howard Yoder, a new way of life:

²⁸ P Sedgwick, 'On Anglican Polity' in D Ford and D L Stamp, *Essentials of Christian Community: Essays for Daniel Hardy* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), p 198.

²⁹ P Sedgwick, *op cit*, p 198.

³⁰ J Wallis, *The Soul of Politics: A Practical Prophetic Vision for Change* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), p xxiv.

³¹ J Habgood, *Church and Nation in a Secular Age* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983), p 49.

³² J Habgood, *Making Sense* (London: SPCK, 1993), p 144.

He gave them a new way to deal with offenders—by forgiving them. He gave them a new way to deal with violence—by suffering. He gave them a new way to deal with money—by sharing it. He gave them a new way to deal with problems of leadership—by drawing upon the gift of every member, even the most humble. He gave them a new way to deal with a corrupt society—by building a new order, not smashing the old.³³

I would suggest that the Church can actively promote this way of life in humble service to the nations in which it is set.

The question remains however, of what, if any, of the ‘Christendom’ model is still or has ever been valid. I have suggested that there are powerful arguments against it to be found in a study of the New Testament but that a legitimate reading of the latter and the weight of Christian tradition argues for a close working relationship between Church and State. These will remain valid as long as a largish proportion of the population of a country is loosely associated with the Church or, at least, would describe themselves as Christian. Stanley Hauerwas quotes George Lindbeck’s observation that contemporary Christianity is in an ‘awkwardly intermediate stage of having once been culturally established but not yet clearly disestablished’.³⁴ Few would argue with the fact that Christianity is not as culturally established in Europe and America as it once was, but the jury is out on what the future will hold: there is no guarantee that it will soon be clearly culturally disestablished. It seems to me that many churchpeople adopt a rather fatalistic view in this regard. I am more optimistic about the future and concur with Paul Avis, who writes: ‘As a result of our amnesia with regard to the tradition, there is, I believe, a danger that we may misread the signs of the times. I think there is evidence that some are making precisely that mistake. To me, the signs do not point to ever-advancing secularization and ever-increasing distance between the Church and State’.³⁵ None of us is in a position to predict what the future will hold and Christians should not, it seems to me, adopt a fatalistic attitude about the inevitability of rampant secularisation. A return to faith is just as possible.

However, at the end of the day, we need to look in very pragmatic terms at what a close relationship between Church and State will do for the mission of the Church and human flourishing in general in any particular society rather than coming to any blanket conclusion.³⁶ In a rare admission that ‘Constantinianism’ and Christendom might once have had their place, Stanley Hauerwas and James Fodor write: ‘We believe that however much

³³ J H Yoder, ‘The Original Revolution’, p 176.

³⁴ S Hauerwas, *After Christendom* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), p 23.

³⁵ P Avis, *Church, State and Establishment* (London: SPCK, 2001), p ix.

³⁶ For an interesting comparison of the situation in different contexts, particularly Ireland, see E McDonagh, ‘Prophecy or Politics? The Role of the Churches in Society’ in M Thiessen Nation and S Wells, *Faithfulness and Fortitude. In Conversation with the Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas* (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke 2000), pp 287-312.

Christendom may have, at certain times and in certain places, represented the Church's faithful and unfaithful witness, that day is now behind us'.³⁷ They go on to suggest that wilderness is where we now dwell as Christians and that 'as we know from Jesus' own temptations, wilderness means learning how to live under conditions of great testing. It means living a life that continually calls for the deployment of the "survival skills" of witness and mission and prayer. For those who think they are in control, who are convinced that they are called to rule, these skills cannot but atrophy'.³⁸ I am not convinced that as Christians in Western society we are yet in the wilderness, or that it is abundantly clear that we shall be in the near future. Insofar as Hauerwas and Fodor warn against the dangers of power they should be heeded, but I do not believe that the present Establishment of the Church of England means any accompanying illusion that it is the role of the Church to govern: its role is to serve. In order to do so it is given a place in public discourse for its own good and that of the society in which it is set. Neither, in my experience, does its relationship with the State result in an atrophying of witness, mission and prayer—quite the reverse, in fact. In order to substantiate this case I turn now to look at the position of the Church of England in its relationship to the State.

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

At the national level: arguments for and against Establishment

As we are all aware, the status quo in England includes a complicated and close relationship between the Church of England and the State which is referred to as 'Establishment'. At national level Establishment means what most people think of when the Established Church is mentioned: 'that nexus of crown and Church seen at royal weddings, funerals and, above all a coronation; bishops regarded as local dignitaries and assigned seats in the House of Lords; the General Synod's view of itself as a parallel parliament, as if the two bodies had some sort of equality; the Church Commissioners and the way in which, even after recent difficulties . . . inherited wealth remains important for the Church of England'.³⁹ Establishment means much more than this, of course, for the life of the national Church is woven into the life of the nation in very many ways, not least through its public law duties in respect of 'rites of passage' and partnership with the State in the provision of education. The Chadwick Commission, the last to look at Church-State relationships, produced a working definition of Establishment as meaning the laws which apply to the Church of England and not to other Churches.⁴⁰ However, 'establishment' is a slippery term. Jeremy Morris points out that Establishment as we know it today 'is much more recent and itself more "modern" than is usually assumed. It is quite different, in other words, from Establishment as it was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries . . . A survey of its history suggests that the

³⁷ S Hauerwas, *Wilderness Wanderings* (London: SCM Press, 2001), p 217.

³⁸ S Hauerwas, *ibid.*, p 217.

³⁹ W Carr, 'A Developing Establishment', in *Theology*, Vol. CII, (1999), p 4.

⁴⁰ *Church and State 1970* (London: CIO, 1970), p 2.

situation of the Church of England today is more like one of incomplete disestablishment'.⁴¹ Whatever degree of establishment one would ascribe to the present situation, it is a quintessentially Anglican arrangement. Indeed, it is a quintessentially *English* arrangement, and the fact that it is both tells us much about the manner in which Englishness and Anglicanism have so much in common. It is a pragmatic arrangement which has emerged over a period and, though not even those who are in favour of it generally argue that it is anything like what might be proposed if one were starting from scratch, it has much to be said for it in that, to use the criteria articulated by Hauerwas and Fodor, it facilitates witness, mission and prayer. I believe that Establishment is of practical and theological benefit, though it remains a subject of intense debate. It is to that debate that we now turn.

A Church enslaved by the State?

In the last century argument about Establishment in England focussed upon three main issues: whether Establishment stunts the Christian witness of the Church, whether it is inappropriate in an increasingly multicultural society, and finally whether the Church of England in particular and the Churches in general now enjoy so little support that they are marginal to the life of the nation. Vociferous argument about Establishment in the Church of England in the twentieth century is said by some to date from the rejection of what became the 1928 Prayer Book. (It is somewhat salutary to note, in passing, that whereas theologians elsewhere in Europe were concentrating upon confronting great evils in the last century, the Church of England was preoccupied with the minutiae of liturgy.) Hensley Henson, Bishop of Durham, who had been a supporter of Establishment until the Enabling Act (the Church of England Assembly (Powers) Act 1919), which he opposed, became an even more ardent critic of it after the Prayer Book debacle. He compared Establishment, famously, to 'a magnificent roof ravaged by the death watch beetle, yet masking by its appearance a fatal though unheeded weakness'⁴² and argued that Establishment enslaved the Church to secular forces in a manner which was destructive of her true influence. Is this the case? There are some who would think so. For example, it is suggested by Tom Hurcombe that the Church of England is 'married to the status quo and thereby its prophetic witness is blunted'.⁴³

⁴¹ Jeremy Morris, 'The Future of Church and State' in D Dormer et al (eds) *Anglicanism: the Answer to Modernity* (London: Continuum, 2003), p 163. Keith Ward has characterised what we see in England today as a 'weak view' of Establishment. He speaks of this 'weak view' in the following terms: 'A particular religion could be sanctioned in society, by the maintenance of institutions (like universities or schools) for encouraging religious understanding or practice. One would not be compelled to hold specific beliefs (dissent would still be permitted). But certain intellectual disciplines and spiritual practices might be positively supported by the State as an important contribution to the life of the community': K Ward, 'Is a Christian State a Contradiction?' in D Cohn-Sherbok and D McLellan (eds) *Religion in Public Life* (Basingstoke and New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), p 1.

⁴² H Henson, *Bishoprick Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), p 90.

⁴³ T Hurcombe, 'Disestablishing the Kingdom' in K Leech (ed), *Setting the Church*

It might be said in reply that it is difficult to see this blunting in practice in, for example, recent outspoken pronouncements on war with Iraq on the part of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Rowan Williams, having been critical of Establishment in the past, has spoken recently of its benefits. He perhaps appreciates that, though he may well be criticised strongly by members of the government for making pronouncements which are critical of the latter, he is certainly not restrained from making them and, ironically, it is the very fact that he is the Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of the Established Church, that means that his comments are given the attention they are. George Carey suggested that it is 'morally incumbent upon governments that have a say in the life of the Church to listen carefully when that Church has something to share which it regards as important. Again, that has certainly been my own experience.'⁴⁴ In recent years politicians have railed against what is seen as the Church's interference in politics, particularly at the time of the publication of 'Faith in the City', which rather suggests that the prophetic witness of the Church has not at all been dampened. As George Carey observed, 'I do not feel that Establishment constrained criticism or plain speaking when appropriate. Nor as I recall, was that charge levelled against my immediate predecessor. Indeed, I seem to recall the Church of England being described more than once in the nineteen-eighties as the "main opposition party"'.⁴⁵

Some would argue that Establishment does not give the Church of England sufficient control over its own affairs. But if there is truth in Morris's contention that Establishment has been transformed over the centuries, it is certainly the case that things have changed greatly since Henson's day. As Paul Avis puts it: 'With synodical government, control of its doctrine, worship and discipline, and complete responsibility for nominating (if not actually appointing) its bishops, the Church of England has, I believe, nothing to complain about in the conditions of Establishment and much to be thankful for'.⁴⁶ In practice there is, it seems to me, very little control over the Church and its life by the State, and certainly not enough to impede its witness. Some of the things about which complaints are made, like the State's involvement in the appointment of bishops, have much to be said for them, of which more later.

Multiculturalism

As far as multiculturalism is concerned, it is interesting to note that a great deal of support for the Establishment by law of the Church of England comes from those of other denominations and faiths. This is largely because such people understand that much of the pressure for the disestablishment of the Church comes not from those who would see other denominations and faiths being treated 'fairly' but from those with

of England Free: The Case for Disestablishment (Croydon: the Jubilee Group, 2001), p 23.

⁴⁴ G Carey, *Holding Together: Church and Nation in the Twenty-First Century*, Lecture at Lambeth Palace, 23 April 2002.

⁴⁵ G Carey, *op cit*.

⁴⁶ P Avis, *Church, State and Establishment*.

a clearly secularist agenda. So, the Catholic theologians Eamon Duffy⁴⁷ and Adrian Hastings have been firm supporters of Establishment. The latter has written that Establishment functions as the servant of a healthy dualism in which 'religion is accepted as not being finally subject to State authority but the bearer of a kind of independent sovereignty which merits public recognition'.⁴⁸ From a Muslim perspective, Tariq Modood suggests that 'the minimal nature of an Anglican Establishment, its proven openness to other denominations and faiths seeking public space, and the fact that its very existence is an ongoing recognition of the public character of religion, are all reasons why it may seem far less intimidating to the minority faiths than a triumphal secularism'.⁴⁹ The leading Muslim spokesman Dr Zaki Badawi has said that 'where you don't have an Established Church of a broadly tolerant kind like the Church of England, you get either fanatical secularism, as in France, or fanatical extremism, as in the United States'.⁵⁰ The Chief Rabbi has suggested that the Church of England provides a kind of umbrella under which all the major religions can make their contribution to public life, and in his 1990 Reith Lectures argued that disestablishment would represent 'a significant retreat from the notion that we share any beliefs and values at all. And that would be a path to more, not fewer, tensions'.⁵¹ It is ironic that the most outspoken defenders of the Establishment are now the Chief Rabbi and the leading Muslim spokesman, Dr Zaki Badawi.

A secularised society?

But do not those who point out how secularised Britain now is have a valid argument? In 1983 John Habgood recognised the numerical weakness of the Church⁵² and the situation is worse now. Why should an organisation with only a million or so regular worshippers have the influence it is given by law in our society? But the situation is not so straightforward as it might at first appear. Grace Davie's sophisticated analysis, *Religion in Britain since 1945, Believing Without Belonging*, makes clear that 'the overall pattern of religious life is changing. For it appears that more and more people within British society want to believe but do not want to involve themselves in religious practice'.⁵³ Valerie Pitt dismisses such appeals to what she describes as 'folk religiousness', referring to the latter as 'a lie'.⁵⁴ The statistics suggest otherwise. Though it might be thought that the numbers of people with a 'loose' association with the Christian faith might have declined, the

⁴⁷ In private conversation.

⁴⁸ A Hastings 'The case for retaining Establishment' in T Modood, (ed), *Church State and Religious Minorities* (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1997), p 41.

⁴⁹ T Modood, 'Establishment, Multiculturalism and British Citizenship' in *The Political Quarterly* (1994), p 72.

⁵⁰ Z Badawi quoted by R Harries, *Church Times*, 24 May 2002.

⁵¹ J Sacks, *The Persistence of Faith* (London, Weidenfeld, 1991), p 68.

⁵² J Habgood, *Church and Nation in a Secular Age*, p 112.

⁵³ G Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945, Believing Without Belonging*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994), p 107.

⁵⁴ V Pitt, 'The Church by Law Established' in K Leech (ed), *Setting the Church of England Free: The Case for Disestablishment* (Croydon: the Jubilee Group, 2001), p 58.

recently published results of the 2001 Census show that 71.7 per cent of the population of the United Kingdom, or 42 million people, described themselves as Christian. In this situation, I would suggest, Establishment still makes a good deal of sense.

Establishment is good for the State because it is a reminder, as Robin Gill puts it, that 'British (and possibly Western) society is still dependent upon certain Judeo-Christian values which are fundamental to its *qualitative* survival . . . [and that] . . . despite the current numerical weakness of the Churches, these values are still axiomatic and . . . that their demise would change the very nature of British society'.⁵⁵ If it were true that the vast majority of British people were not Christian, then maybe the very nature of British society *should* be changed. But it is not. I would suggest that the Churches need to recover their nerve and refuse to be dictated to by a secularist agenda in a society which is not nearly as secularised as some would like to suggest. Daniel Hardy, commenting on the law as much as on the Church, points out that many fundamental institutions are now 'beleaguered and fearful'. He suggests that the result can be one of two things: 'one is that the institutions become over-cautious and self-protective, thereby losing their capacity to move us forward to the good. The other is to "go with the flow", uncritically following wherever the prevailing pressures lead them'.⁵⁶ It would seem to me that the Church in general and the Church of England in particular need to be more forthright and unapologetic about their role in public discourse. They can claim to speak for a significant majority of the inhabitants of this country.⁵⁷

There is a significant task for the Church here. Alistair McFadyen begins his excellent book *Bound to Sin* by noting the 'disappearance of sin from serious public discourse and its marginalization to the privatised sphere of (trivialised and titillating) personal morality'.⁵⁸ He sees this as symptomatic of what he terms the 'pragmatic atheism' of our culture: one which 'affirms the world's integrity and independence from any external, non-worldly reality so that it may be understood in its own terms, without immediate or explicit reference to God'.⁵⁹ In this situation 'God talk is redundant to the task of understanding and living in the world'.⁶⁰ The truth of his analysis

⁵⁵ R Gill, 'Church and Nation in a Secular Age' in *Theology* Vol. LXXXVIII (1984), p 24.

⁵⁶ D Hardy, *Finding The Church* (London: SCM Press, 2001), p 63.

⁵⁷ The Church should not, of course, be triumphalistic. Establishment must at all times remain open and hospitable. As Keith Ward declares: 'It is a good thing to have a religion established by law as long as most members of a state take religious questions seriously, as long as dissent is permitted, as long as the established religion is concerned to encourage constructive conversations with other religious communities, to permit diversity of interpretation within itself and to show a concern to formulate a broad value base for the state as a whole': K Ward, 'Is a Christian State a Contradiction?', p 16.

⁵⁸ A McFadyen, *Bound to Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p 6.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p7. McFadyen follows with a sophisticated attempt to draw back the doctrine of sin into public discourse arguing that 'consciously relating the world to God (specifically, its pathologies through the language of sin) holds explanatory and symbolic power in relation to reality'. *Ibid.* p 12.

was underlined by a remark of Rowan Williams quoted in the national press recently: 'It is always such a relief to be in company where it doesn't sound stupid to mention God'. How strange it is that this should be the case in a country where 71.7 per cent of people proclaim themselves to be Christian. How has it happened? I think that part of the answer lies in the influence of the national media in which those with an avowedly secularist agenda are very prominent. With this in mind, I have found it instructive to compare the national press, which is always very keen to be critical of the Church, with that in each of the regions where I have ministered: the latter is invariably supportive.⁶¹ There are powerful voices which are not at all sympathetic to the Church making much noise at a national level. But the Church must hold its ground, and do so energetically. The appointment of Rowan Williams is very good news in this as in many other respects, not only because what he says always has so much to commend it, but because the media seem uncharacteristically willing to pay attention to him. Long may this last.

The point is that the State needs the Church. As I have suggested above, the State needs the Church to give it legitimacy. It also needs the Church to remind those who govern that 71 per cent of people call themselves Christian and would therefore, presumably, want the Christian faith to be given a voice at national level. But if it is clear that the State needs the Church, why does the Church need the State? John Habgood has written that the Church of England still has a crucial role in society and that to pursue disestablishment in the hope of thereby gaining some sort of freedom would be a symptom of and a recipe for decline.⁶² He has a point, I think. Equally, the Church of England needs to be reminded of its responsibility to the nation. There are elements in Establishment which remind the Church of its commitment to the world, to the nation, to the localities in which people live and to the nurturing of Christian values by which they might live.⁶³ But Establishment and all that goes with it is not just a reminder to the Church of its responsibilities to the nation. It is also an opportunity for the mission of the Church. As Tom Wright puts it:

⁶¹ Ben Quash makes a similar point: 'If you arrived from another planet and wanted a description of the truth of the nation's life, and you read the national papers to find such a description, little would indicate to you that the church played an important role in mission': B Quash, 'The Anglican Church as a Polity of Presence' in D Dormer et al (eds) *Anglicanism: the Answer to Modernity* (London: Continuum, 2003), p 49.

⁶² J Habgood, *Church and Nation in a Secular Age*, p 112. Adrian Hastings concurs but also suggests that it would simply be a waste of time and energy. Establishment is defensible on the grounds of 'being part of the wider symbolic culture of the nation which we would be fools to dismantle, and of requiring for its termination a quite excessive amount of time and energy': A Hastings, *Church and State* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1991), p 76.

⁶³ Conversely, as John Moses puts it: 'The abandonment of the establishment—not merely the legal form but the expectations which it properly sustains—could so easily lend support to sectarian pressures which encourage the church to withdraw into itself, nurturing its interior and institutional life to the exclusion of that wider ministry and mission which at its best the church has always attempted': J Moses, *A Broad and Living Way* (Norwich: The Canterbury Press, 1995), p 238.

It is fashionable in some quarters to sneer at “implicit religion” and the inarticulate faith which can’t say quite what it believes but which turns up at an Advent Carol Service because the enacted symbol of darkness and light remains powerful. I don’t sneer at it; I want to work with it and nurture it, to take any and every flickering spark of faith and help it, in its own time, to become a strong theology of the ascended Jesus, Lord and King of the whole world, the one to whom, as he said in Matthew 28, all authority in heaven and earth has been given.⁶⁴

At the local level: the ‘earthed’ Establishment

Such ‘implicit religion’ makes itself manifest, of course, at the local level, and it is to that which we now turn our attention. Wesley Carr differentiates between what he terms ‘high’ Establishment, by which he means what happens at national level, and an ‘earthed’ one. The latter is seen most particularly in the parish system, for it is the parish which is the essential building block of the Anglican Church by law Established, which is still maintained even in the face of diminished resources, both human and financial.⁶⁵ Just as I have argued that ‘high’ Establishment still has a place, so I would suggest that ‘earthed’ Establishment, its essential corollary, has much to offer to the Church and to the State. In the words of a Grubb Institute publication, the idea of a ‘parish Church’ does still make sense,

not necessarily as a description of what is actually happening in the majority of self-styled parish Churches, either urban, suburban or rural, but as an “idea in the mind” which embodies a rich vein of thought and action, theological and scriptural, social and psychological, informing the practice of religion and its relatedness to society and to human beings in need.⁶⁶

The witness of a Church to a community is a very complicated and rich one in the Anglican scheme of things, as has been ably demonstrated by anthropologist and theologian Timothy Jenkins. In a very thorough and fascinating study Jenkins enables us to see how crucially enmeshed in English everyday life religious practice remains.⁶⁷ To mix metaphors, the ‘high’ Establishment is just the icing on the cake: it is the submerged nine-tenths of the iceberg that is really important—but the former protects the latter.

⁶⁴ N T Wright, *God and Caesar, Then and Now*.

⁶⁵ The parish is, of course, by no means a peculiarly Anglican phenomenon. As Hooker explains: ‘Evaristus, Bishop in the See of Rome about the year 112 began to assign precincts unto every Church or title which the Christians held, and to appoint unto each presbyter a certain compass whereof himself should take charge alone. The commodiousness of this invention caused all parts of Christendom to follow it and at length our own Churches became divided in like manner. Churches were not defined then as now they are; first be the bounds of each State, and then within each State by more particular precincts, will at length we descend into several congregations termed parishes with far narrower restraints than this name at first used’: R Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book 5: 80:2.

⁶⁶ G Ecclestone (ed), *The Parish Church* (London: Mowbray, 1988), p 5.

⁶⁷ T Jenkins, *Religion in English Everyday Life: An Ethnographic Approach*. (Oxford:

Wesley Carr suggests that ‘the parish, not the congregation, just about endures as the basic organisational unit of Church life. Incumbents are still appointed to the cure of souls, not just to the supervision of a congregation, even if few seem able or willing to tell the difference’.⁶⁸ This last throw-away comment on the part of Carr contains within it, it seems to me, one of the main reasons why this ‘earthed’ Establishment needs the protection of law as it exists under the present arrangements, or something developed from them. I am not suggesting that the exact status quo should be maintained. There is an urgent need, for example, for the changing of parochial boundaries and arrangements to be rendered much more straightforward than is currently the case, as has been proposed. But the principle of the parish needs to be protected.

‘Parish’ versus ‘associational’

The model of the parish stands over and against quite a different conception and tradition which is gaining ground in the Church of England, that of the ‘associational’ Church.⁶⁹ All interest in this model is guided by a desire for Church growth and, though members of the local community will be welcomed to such a Church, the effectiveness of its ministry will be assessed largely by their willingness to attend and to join. Parish boundaries are seen as an impediment to mission. The theological impetus for such an approach is to be found in an interpretation of the New Testament along the lines advocated by people like John Howard Yoder and the ‘parish’ by that of people like Tom Wright, both of whom we looked at above. In most cases, of course, the reality is a mixture of the two. People are bound to cross parish boundaries to find a Church to their liking, but this does not negate the principle that every place should have a parish Church serving it. What we really need is both approaches. The problem is that the associational or congregational model has gained the ascendancy in this country and in the face of it the traditional openness of the Church of England needs to be safeguarded. Putting everything in the hands of the General Synod is no way of ensuring such a thing. As John Habgood writes, on the rare occasions when there are tensions between Church and Parliament, ‘the key issue is always whether a relatively small elected body of Church activists is competent to speak for the inarticulate religious life of the nation’.⁷⁰ Nor is putting the appointment of diocesan bishops into the hands of local churchpeople, who are quite likely to have rather limited horizons concerning what their bishop should be doing. On the Ely List, an Ely diocesan chat-shop, one correspondent applauded the appointment of Tom Wright to the See of Durham but added that ‘it is time those in the pews and on the electoral rolls of a diocese be allowed to vote for who is to lead them’. As another correspondent replied: ‘I do sympathise with these and other arguments for a democratic process. However my concerns with

Berghahn Books, 1999).

⁶⁸ W Carr, ‘A Developing Establishment’, in *Theology*, Vol. CII, (1999), p 4.

⁶⁹ This terminology derives from the Grubb Institute. See G Ecclestone (ed), *The Parish Church*.

⁷⁰ J Habgood, *Church and Nation in a Secular Age*, p 103.

any form of process that is representative of local congregations is that I am not convinced that congregations represent the Church. Perhaps rather they are more accidental to the Churches' mission, and the ministry of the Bishop'. The point is that bishops are called not *just* to lead those in the pews every Sunday, important though the latter must remain. At a more local level, I would have similar hesitations about giving congregations the whip hand in the appointment of their incumbent. That is not to say that I am of the opinion that mission does not matter—quite the reverse. The fact is that too much congregational influence over the appointment of incumbents can be an encumbrance to mission: there is at least the possibility that a congregation will want a pastor who will expend all his or her energy on caring for the existing congregation rather than engaging with the local community and allowing those within it to engage with the gospel. Talking with Free Church ministers about the restraints imposed on them by the fact that they are appointed and paid by their congregations makes me ever more convinced of the advantages of Anglican polity.

Establishment a damper on the Church's mission?

Carr is clear that 'high' Establishment cannot exist for long without 'earthed' Establishment: 'no amount of wisdom from the bishops in the House of Lords will save them from extinction if they do not perform with their clergy and the people in the parishes of their dioceses'.⁷¹ Personally I do not feel the presence or not of bishops in the House of Lords is a vital issue, but Carr's general point remains. He is unsure as to whether 'earthed' Establishment can survive apart from 'high'. On this point, Colin Buchanan, veteran opponent of Establishment, speaks of disestablishment producing a 'reinvigorated and in principle "national" Church, which holds a missionary responsibility for the transformation of society in the name and into the likeness of Jesus Christ . . . in critical intimacy with the organs of the State'.⁷² What such critical intimacy would entail as far as 'high' Establishment is concerned he does not elucidate, but the effects of what he has in mind for 'earthed' Establishment would be disastrous. He lets slip that 'we have a great need in England today to find the Church and mark it off; and we have an equal need to find the world, and chart where it is also'.⁷³ And what would this mean? He gives an example. In suggesting that the Church needs to know whether the baptised are 'for us or against us', Buchanan even goes so far as to say that 'ideally, even in the twilight hours of Christendom, we should be prepared to deregister people and tell them that they are self-excommunicate'.⁷⁴ My own experience of being a parish priest on Tyneside demonstrates how destructive a policy much less radical can be. Contrary to what Canon Law demands, the previous incumbent of the parish had implemented a very strict baptism policy. Admittedly, his insistence that the parents of children to be baptised

⁷¹ W Carr, 'A Developing Establishment', in *Theology*, Vol. CII, (1999), p 4.

⁷² C Buchanan, *Cut the Connection. Disestablishment and the Church of England* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1994), p 79.

⁷³ C Buchanan, *op cit*, p 183.

⁷⁴ C Buchanan, *op cit*, p 183.

should be regular and committed churchgoers did produce some new Christians. But the effects on the Church's relationship to the community and therefore its long-term mission were very destructive. The Church was seen as dismissing, rather than affirming and building upon, the faith of those asking for baptism for their children. There may be good theological arguments for restricting baptism to the committed, but the pastoral and evangelistic effects of enforcing such an approach are disastrous. The availability of the occasional offices is a vital part of Establishment and a great opportunity for the gospel. As Grace Davie writes: 'In terms of everyday effectiveness (or otherwise) parochial questions are probably more significant than the high-profile aspects of Establishment . . . It is in the parishes that the multiplicity of links are made with large numbers of English people; at an individual level through the occasional offices and at a civic level through the marking of community events'.⁷⁵

It is so easy to take for granted all that surrounds the 'earthed' Establishment and the diverse benefits and opportunities it bestows upon the Church of England. In my own ministry I have experienced various aspects of such benefits. For several years I worked in chaplaincy, latterly at Harrow School. The opportunities afforded to the Church and the gospel through chaplaincy in particular and education in general are enormous. Though formal 'chaplaincy' is nowadays increasingly confined to the independent sector and universities, the influence of the Church upon education in maintained schools is certainly not. A quarter of young people attend Church of England primary schools and all at primary and secondary schools of any type are obliged by law to be present at a 'wholly or mainly' Christian act of Collective Worship every morning. There are questions to be asked about what might properly constitute 'collective worship' and it is well known, too, that many schools flout the law. However, in each of the places where I have ministered I have been welcome to preach the Christian gospel at maintained primary and secondary schools alike. The provision of the law is a great opportunity for the mission of the Church—one which, in the Diocese of Ely, we have attempted to make more use of by training lay people to conduct acts of Collective Worship.

I have already made reference to the parish of which I was incumbent on Tyneside. It was the one in which Swan Hunter shipyard falls and during my time there the yard went into the hands of the receivers. It was a desperate time for the town and the area. It was the Church that was able to gather people together and be a focus for the community in a way that no other organisation or institution could. At the time both management and workforce looked to the Church: in a special service one lesson was read by the Chief Shop Steward and the other by the Chief Executive of Swan Hunter. Christian liturgy was the natural manner of expressing the pain, needs and hope of the community. Other Christian denominations were involved, as befits 'hospitable' Establishment such as the Anglican Establishment is, but it was the Church of England that was expected to, and did, take the lead. It might be added, incidentally, that as the Vicar of

⁷⁵ G Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945, Believing Without Belonging*, p 142.

the parish I was one of the very few professional people living within its boundaries. The Church maintains a presence in every community in the country and is thereby able to respond to the needs of these communities. This presence cuts across all other social divides in a most remarkable manner. As Vicar of St Luke's Church, Wallsend, I was as welcome in the homes of some of the poorest people in our country as I was in the homes of members of the Government whilst Chaplain at Harrow School. This service to each of the communities of the nation is a direct result of earthed Establishment. It affords the Church a wonderful opportunity.

I have recently had another forceful reminder of such opportunities. When Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman went missing and were later discovered to have been brutally murdered, the people of Soham, not noted for churchgoing any more than most average English towns, looked to the Church and to its Vicar for pastoral care and sustenance. The Established Church did what it has historically felt its duty to be, to care for all members of the community whether or not they are regular churchgoers (and the manner in which that task was carried out was, once again, hospitable to other denominations). There was no watering down of the Christian faith in the process. The Service of Thanksgiving, which we hosted at Ely Cathedral simply because St Andrew's, Soham, was too small to deal with the thousands from the community who wanted to come, was one in which the gospel was clearly preached and prayed and sung—and it was broadcast across the nation and across the world.

The advantages of Establishment to Church and State

After twenty years working as a priest in such diverse ministries as Chaplain at Harrow School and Vicar of a parish right in the heart of inner-city Tyneside and after over seven years working at a cathedral, I concur with and applaud the words of Tom Wright: 'Out there in the country where it counts, the Church of England is still looked to by all sorts of people, from Lord Lieutenants to town councillors to groups of gypsies, not only to preach the gospel and minister the sacraments but to be the honest broker, to hold the ring, to provide stability and focus and, yes, hope'.⁷⁶

Peter Sedgwick refers to the Advisory Board of Ministry's report *Ordination in the Church's Ministry* of 1991 in suggesting that one of the tasks of Anglican polity today is the promotion of a common life in society. That report is unhappy with the promotion of the Church as a community. It should, rather, be a 'network which crystallises in public worship and action. An overstated view of ecclesial identity will preclude the engagement with society which . . . is characteristic of Anglican polity. The Church needs a distinctive language by which it interprets culture, without making that language inaccessible to public reference'.⁷⁷ Cathedrals have a great deal to offer in this area. One example will suffice. My colleague at Derby Cathedral, Canon Tony Chesterman, wrote

⁷⁶ N T Wright, *God and Caesar, Then and Now*.

⁷⁷ P Sedgwick, 'On Anglican Polity', p 210.

recently of what had happened when he was confronted with the brief to draft an adult education policy. He was determined that he must listen to what God had to say from the perspective of the world in which God is active in mission:

I wrote to all the “secular” adult education agencies in and around Derby to ask them what the cathedral could best do to complement their own provision; somewhat to my surprise the vast majority accepted the invitation. We shared passions and priorities, joys and sorrows within adult education and then I asked the “bottom line” question: “In relation to adult education what can we do at the cathedral that you can’t do?” What happened next was hard to describe. It was one of those occasions when God spoke but it wasn’t clear as to whose voice had been used. It seemed like a corporate voice which said “Help us understand the spirituality of the City of Derby—because if you at the cathedral can’t, who can?” By this time a Cathedral Working Party had been formed, and this question was fed into the formulation of the policy document. I continue to meet with the group of adult educators, and as we debate what we mean by spirituality we have asked the prior question “What does it mean to be human?” This is the question that has now been taken back to the various institutions. We will see what emerges and what other surprises God has in store for us!

Tony Chesterman’s experience is a good example of the manner in which the Church’s ministry is still welcomed in a supposedly secular world. It is an example of the manner in which Establishment, in the words of George Carey, ‘helps to underwrite the commitment of a national Church to serve the entire community and to give form and substance to some of its deepest needs and aspirations’.⁷⁸

Timothy Jenkins has characterised the above sort of ministry of the Church as ‘chaplaincy’. He points out that much of the Anglican Church’s work, at every level (up to the national) is performed in this chaplaincy style.⁷⁹ The problem those who would promote a more associational or congregational view of what the Church would find in this is that it does not place sufficient emphasis on the building up of Christian communities of faith. But this should not be seen as an ‘either/or’ option. Such chaplaincy should go hand in hand with the nurture of vibrant Christian communities. As Jenkins himself writes: ‘In a society where, for the moment, fewer people feel licensed or committed or compelled to come to Church “chaplaincy” will continue to be enormously important to fulfilling the Church’s calling. But it must also be said that this work cannot be done without worshipping congregations underwriting it. Both forms are vital and depend upon each other’.⁸⁰ Further, we might say, the delicate balance between them is protected by Establishment.

⁷⁸ G Carey, *Holding Together: Church and Nation in the Twenty-First Century*.

⁷⁹ T Jenkins, ‘Anglicanism: The Only Answer to Modernity’ in D Dormer et al (eds) *Anglicanism: the Answer to Modernity*, p 200.

⁸⁰ T Jenkins, *Ibid*, p 200.

That balance has certainly been manifest in my own ministry. St Luke's Church in Wallsend had a vibrant worshipping life and it was this life that enabled it to minister meaningfully and effectively in the community at a time of appalling need.⁸¹ At the same time, its engagement with the community fed its worshipping life and prevented it from sailing away into an otherworldly pietism. Similarly, cathedrals are empty shells unless they have an exemplary Christian community at their heart, underpinning all their work in the communities they seek to serve.

A tiny amount of the above ministry would be possible without the buildings (ancient and modern) of which the Established Church is custodian. Their importance in the Church's witness should not be underestimated. I am greatly in favour of more help being given by the State for the maintenance of the Church buildings for which the Church of England has responsibility, in recognition of the fact that they are the entire nation's heritage. However, I emphatically do not see them as the drain on mission that some do. I have written elsewhere of the importance of place in the Christian scheme of things⁸² and the manner in which Christian places of worship can function sacramentally. The 'sacramental' presence of a church building in the midst of a community can speak to that community of the things of God and nourish its faith. It can proclaim to the 'secular' world in which it stands that God is present and active in this world. This is a much richer way of looking at the potential of church buildings than is generally offered. Operating sacramentally, church buildings can speak of a sacred geography which roots the people of God in their Christian story, reinforces and strengthens them in their prophetic witness in the present and beckons them towards their destination by reminding them that their citizenship is in heaven. As a result, Christians should cherish their holy places. To do so could, I believe, have a significant impact upon the lives of professing Christians in terms of strengthening their witness whilst at the same time speaking to a society which has lost all sense of roots, place and destination. The Church of England has, in the buildings of which it has custody, an enormous asset to be used for the mission of the Church and the good of all.

CONCLUSION

In the above paper I have tried to provide a commentary on currents of theological thinking about the place of the sacred in society. In doing so, I have suggested that, though there are those who question its propriety, there is a noble theological tradition of active and positive engagement between Church and State which derives from the New Testament. I have looked at the situation in this country at both a national and local level and concluded that the Establishment of the Church by law remains both

⁸¹ I have written about the complex relationship which exists between the Christian faith, the life of a congregation and the community in which it is set in J Inge, 'It's a Pantomime: Reflections on Parish Ministry' in *Theology* Vol. XCVIII (1995), pp 122-127.

⁸² J Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2003).

theologically justifiable and a distinct advantage to both Church and State. It is important to the State because, in a country where 71 per cent of people profess themselves to be Christian (and in which it cannot be taken for granted that secularisation will increase), it gives the State legitimacy, reminds it of its obligation to acknowledge God and Christian truth, and ensures that Christian influence for the maintenance of a just and peaceful society remains strong, for the good of all. Indeed, the Church should be more forthright and less equivocal about making its voice heard in public discourse. Establishment is important for the Church since it reminds the latter that it has a responsibility to the whole nation and not just those who regularly attend its churches. It also protects and enables the mission and ministry of the Church throughout the parishes of this land. No doubt the exact form of Establishment will continue to develop as it has done in the past, but as it stands at present it is, to my mind, undoubtedly a good thing in which to rejoice.