Just Church?

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How does Catholic Social Teaching fit into the mission of the Church of England? What is the Anglican legacy for the common good and how might it become a church *for* England?

In the first two lectures in this series, both Jenny Sinclair and Maurice Glasman quoted Pope Francis's comment that we are not living through an era of change so much as the change of an era. If that point needed to be rammed home, at least for this country, the death of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth and the inauguration of the reign of King Charles III – in the same week as we gained a new Prime Minister and administration – makes the point explicit. Most of us are still absorbing the implications of, what must be the most significant change in our consciousness of ourselves as a nation that we have ever experienced.

Both Jenny and Maurice spoke in depth about Catholic Social Teaching. CST does have something of a vogue at present, and not just among Catholics, as Maurice himself exemplifies. I am not an expert on CST – for that, I recommend you see the recent book on the subject by Prof. Anna Rowlands from Durham.[1] My purpose this evening is to explore how the social trends that are encouraging people to engage with Catholic Social Teaching might connect with the rather looser and less well-defined Anglican Tradition of social thought. I havered for a moment there over whether I should have said "Anglican Traditions". I shall say more about the plural nature of Anglicanism and what that in itself has to offer to our society and culture.

Please be clear that I am not offering an Anglican tradition of social theology as a kind of rival or alternative product to Catholic Social Teaching. In a chapter in a book I edited on the topic, Anna Rowlands described them as "fraternal traditions" – with commonalities and differences yet recognisably members of the same family.[2] By calling them fraternal traditions, she also had a double meaning in mind – that both sorts of social theology are predominantly done by men, although her own work as perhaps the leading exponent of CST today offers, perhaps, some redress.

Just as you don't have to be a Roman Catholic to appreciate, learn from and participate in Catholic Social Teaching, so the Anglican approach to social theology is – like the Church of England itself – not a rigidly defined approach accessible only to Anglicans. And here I am talking very much about the Church of England, recognising nevertheless that Anglicanism is a global Communion and that most Anglicans today are not English. But the Church of England retains a unique place in the Anglican Communion and the Anglican consciousness, and it is the link between the CofE and Englishness that I want to make the context for discussing social theology. Until now, reflection on the nature of being English has been the missing component in questions around the Constitution of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the future of the Union which King Charles now heads.

[1] Anna Rowlands, *Towards a Politics of Communion: Catholic Social Teaching in Dark Times*, Bloomsbury, 2021.
[2] Malcolm Brown (ed.) *Anglican Social Theology*, Church House Publishing, 2014

So how can we map the Anglican tradition of social theology? Theological traditions don't coincide very closely with denominational boundaries and, as you might expect, there are borrowings between traditions. Catholic Social Teaching is in there somewhere in the Anglican mix – witness the centrality of the common good in Anglican liturgy in the 20th Century – and there is a kind of parallel tradition in American Protestant churches, often known as the Social Gospel, whose evolution in various phases since the American Civil War was concisely plotted by the theologian Max Stackhouse.[3] A similar exercise was undertaken in the 1990s by the CofE theologian John Atherton, in his book *Social Christianity* which shows how traditions and lineages have borrowed from one another.[4] Most churches, in most eras, have tried to make theological sense of the culture and politics around them, and to work out how being a Christian and being a citizen play out together. That is what I mean by social theology. If we believe, as I think most Christians do, that our faith and our relationship with Jesus Christ touches every aspect of our lives, then the way we respond to the events around us should be a dialogue between our Christian faith and the facts of the world.

Nevertheless, Anglicanism does, I think, display some important characteristics of its own when it engages theologically with culture, society and political life. To some extent, the Church of England has exported aspects of this approach to other Provinces and cultures, but I believe that this theological tradition emerged from the experience of the English people (shared, of course, in some ways and at some times, by others) and that, because of this, it has a particular capacity to speak into the problems, dilemmas and divisions facing our country today.

One sense in which Pope Francis is absolutely right to talk of a shift into a new era is that the mechanisms that successive generations developed for dealing with human differences appear to be breaking down. If one mark of being a civilised society is that we try to resolve problems of difference, disagreement, scarcity and conflict through negotiation rather than violence, then the bulwarks around our civilization appear to have become somewhat flimsy. This seems to be happening in many parts of the world, and in each country it is being played out in a particular idiom. So, whilst we watch the fracturing of American democracy with a sort of terrified fascination, it is also possible to see something comparable happening here – but in a distinctively English way (and I mean English rather than British). I was working on this lecture the day that the then Chancellor issued his now-notorious "mini-budget". The details of the policies he unveiled were, I think, less interesting than his refusal to release the scrutiny of his figures by the Office for Budget Responsibility. Policies can be, and in this case already have mostly been, reversed: the abandoning of established checks and balances – indeed, the abandoning of the idea that one makes policy on the basis of evidence – will be much harder to reverse because it creates a precedent for politicians escaping scrutiny. But, in our English way, we erode our delicate checks and balances by stealth and negligence, without banners and baseball caps.

It seems to me worth remembering that the Church of England, in more or less its current form, emerged from a period of history when people had been prepared to kill each other because their religious and political beliefs clashed. Although popular history suggests that the Church of England began with Henry VIII's marital troubles, Henry's breach with Rome set off a period of extreme division and instability. It was under the first Elizabeth that a religious settlement began to emerge in which the Church of England embraced those who believed in retaining some continuities with

[3] Max Stackhouse, "The Fifth Social Gospel and the Global Mission of the Church" in, (ed.) Christopher H. Evans, *The Social Gospel Today*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

[4] John Atherton, *Social Christianity: A Reader*, SPCK, 1994.

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Catholicism and those whose faith was framed more on the terms of the Reformation theologians. What mattered more, was place – this was the Church of England, the church of the nation rather than a church defined by a particular doctrine or named after a particular person's ideas. The nation gave the Church its provincial boundary: the parish gave the church its character. You worshipped with your neighbour even if you suspected him of believing something rather unlike your own beliefs.

Naturally, it took a while to settle down, and when Charles I destabilised the delicate balance, new divisions with a strong religious element led to the Civil War. But that, in time, led to a new settlement and a greater accommodation of religious plurality in the Toleration Act of 1689. The English had once again rejected killing one another on religious ground. Place – geography – had held Christians together through a period of extreme turbulence as the church in the West fragmented following the Reformation. Being the church of *England* – the church for the people of the nation – is inextricable from the parish system which guarantees that every citizen has a parish church and the ministry of the clergy if they wish to avail themselves of it. The experience of living out one's faith is essentially a local one grounded amongst one's neighbours and bound together by proximity.

Of course this model has frayed at the edges. As people became more mobile, so the tendency grew to worship with those one agreed with. Greater mobility coincided with a dominant consumer culture, so it is not surprising that many Anglicans travel out of their parishes to worship with those they agree with rather than those they live amongst. But the parish system has proved remarkably resilient, and as our culture starts to regret the extreme atomisation and individualism that has ripped so many social institutions apart, we can see how the geographical structure of the Church of England, and the idea of the parish as a way to hold fractious communities together at some level, has immense potential for an even more plural, divided and anxious future.

One of the slogans that the CofE sometimes uses about itself, which reflects its history and the Elizabethan Settlement, is that we are simultaneously "Catholic and Reformed". One could dwell for a long time on what that actually means, but my key point is that the Catholic approach to Social Teaching is part of our inherited tradition, although we haven't engaged with it in its modern form as if it were "ours". But many major concepts from CST (the Common Good, Subsidiarity and so on) are part of Anglicanism's inheritance shared with Roman Catholic church. And we also bring in, firstly, perspectives from the Reformed tradition, and secondly, centuries of experience of holding diverse traditions in tension – and that is where I want to focus here. Because the Anglican way of holding differences in tension is, I believe, theologically justifiable, integral to our ecclesiology and – most importantly – a model that could say much to our culture.

How, then, has the Church of England used this inheritance in its social engagement and social theology? To give a full genealogy of Anglican Social Thought would take a lecture series, but if we look simply at the last hundred years, there are two seminal texts. These are Archbishop William Temple's well-known work, *Christianity and Social Order*, published in 1942 as a small Penguin book which sold tens of thousands of copies, and the report of the Archbishops' Commission on Urban Priority Areas from 1985, better known as *Faith in the City*. The significance of these two publications can be measured very simply in the number of times bishops and others declare that "We need another *Faith in the City*" or "We should write something like Temple's book for today". Even though the context today is very different, those are two occasions in the Twentieth Century where the church made a significant impact on the way the country thought about itself.

Both came out of moments of crisis and deep anxiety about the future. When Temple was writing in the early 1940s, the tide of War had not yet turned in the Allies' favour. Yet Temple's short treatise on why the church had the right to comment on political and social affairs was a best-seller. It represented a huge act of faith by addressing the question, "What sort of a country do we want to be when this War is over?" Having outlined a set of principles based on Christian theology, he added an Appendix which set out a set of aims for post-War reconstruction which formed a template for the Beveridge Report and the programme of the Attlee government after 1945. Importantly, Temple put the detail into an Appendix. He was very clear that his role as a churchman was to lay out principles drawn from theology. How those principles were turned into practice was, to a great extent beyond his remit. When the church spoke, it should find a balance between banal platitudes ("We all ought to love one another more") and detailing such specific policies that we would be in danger of claiming a divine mandate for, say, the precise level of Income Tax. This approach became known as "Middle Axioms", although Temple never used the term, and informed the Church of England's engagement with social issues for several decades.

It is, in some ways, our own version of Catholic Social Teaching, adapted for a church that is deeply pluralistic - doctrinally, politically and in terms of practice - in a way that the Roman church really is not. It establishes broad principles from Christian theology, but leaves a lot of room for variation in how those principles are applied. It recognises that the church is neither a supreme moral authority which sits in judgement over governments, nor a body that holds within itself the sum of human wisdom. In particular, it recognises the authority of specialist knowledge as diverse disciplines have developed in the modern age. And so, where Temple's text touched on matters of economic policy, he worked with Maynard Keynes to draw on the wisdom of secular economics, recognising that Christian theology gave him no special locus from which to opine about the economy. Temple's methodology was to convene gatherings of experts in many fields to discuss together the questions of the day. He did this formally, such as in the great Malvern Conference of 1941, and informally through his networks of friendship with people like Tawney, Beveridge, and Keynes – and, indeed, people in the Arts like Dorothy L Sayers and T S Eliot. The place of theology was to be one partner in a wide-ranging and multi-disciplinary conversation, not to be the dominant voice. It may not come as a great surprise that, over the years, the theological voice around the table became rather timid. Other disciplines – economics, the natural sciences, political theory and so on – had a confidence in the later Twentieth Century that Christian theology lacked. The result, as time went on was epitomised in the rather apologetic theological appendices attached to various church reports on social issues, where the bulk of the report was just a rehearsal of the views of others. But, at its best, Temple's approach was what one might call "evidence-based ethics" – considering all the evidence from different sources and seeking to understand that evidence through the prism of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You can see something of this in *Faith in the City* from 1985. This report was occasioned by the urban riots in Brixton, Toxteth and elsewhere as the policies of the Thatcher government cut deep into the lives of the poorest communities, not least those of ethnic minorities. Clergy in those areas persuaded Archbishop Robert Runcie of the seriousness of the situation in inner city areas and the result was a Commission, very much on the lines of a Royal Commission, where a team of the great and good toured the trouble spots to meet the people, analyse the issues and report back. The theological chapter of *Faith in the City* was, paradoxically, very poorly integrated with the main report and yet was probably one cause of the report's success. Whoever wrote the theological chapter was much enamoured of Latin American Liberation Theology, and that provided the Tory

government with the attack line, that the report "was pure Marxist Theology" – which it definitely wasn't, but which gave the media a field day and ensured the report's notoriety and greatly enhanced its sales.

Looking back after over 35 years, *Faith in the City* comes across as rather limp. It seemed to work on the assumption that the terrible state of the inner cities had happened because the government was unaware of how its policies had landed. The idea that Thatcherism might see itself as a moral programme rather than just an economic one, rather passed the Commission by.

Both William Temple and *Faith in the City* were, in different ways, associated with the two administrations since the War which have utterly changed the way British people understand themselves and their society – Attlee's administration of 1945, which founded the NHS and the Welfare State, and Thatcher's of 1979 which upended the post-War consensus and taught us that you can't have everything you want to make a good society unless you know how it is going to be paid for (she taught us a lot more than that, of course). We still live with the ideologies of those two administrations and the political debate has hardly shifted from an argument between an Attlee and a Thatcher.

Temple and his book helped shape the thinking behind, and the public mood around, the Attlee government's programme. *Faith in the City* inadvertently, but possibly accurately, set the Church of England up as a significant focus for the arguments against the impact of Thatcherism. So the church made an impact at two of the most salient moments in our national story since the War, but in very different ways. And in both cases, the approach was one of setting down fundamental principles, informed by Christian theology, and then working outwards from principles to practice. Both drew extensively on expertise from other disciplines. Both risked theology becoming overshadowed in the process. But if one measure of Christian social engagement is that we make a difference to the way people think – a kind of public apologetics – then both were highly successful.

The trouble is, people often want success to be reproducible in other times and contexts. Temple's assumptions about the equal role of theology around the table with other disciplines is harder to justify today. Nor is the nation experiencing a wave of consensual purpose as it was in wartime. The 1980s were a time of deep social division, but the individualism of Thatcherite philosophy had not yet become the common cultural assumption it has become today. *Faith in the City* could draw on a deep unease at the breakdown of consensus which has been overtaken by social and cultural fragmentation on a scale we never imagined then.

Now this is where I want to bring in the Anglican inheritance. The Church of England may claim to be Catholic and Reformed, but it never sought to reconcile those traditions into a single way of being and believing. At its best, Anglicanism has allowed the best of those traditions – and indeed the best of the liberal tradition – to moderate and deepen each other. At different times in our life as a church, one or other tradition has been in the ascendant: the evangelical revival, the Oxford Movement, the burgeoning of liberal theology after the War and its eclipse by new forms of evangelicalism – but we have never sought, as a church, to close the question and become a church of one tradition only. That is not to say that many Anglicans wouldn't welcome such a monochrome church – and the way our internal debates on human sexuality are playing out demonstrate how different viewpoints have, at the extremes, tried to define their opponents in terms of unforgivable heresy. Even though that polarisation would undermine the Anglican settlement that has given us our character for so long.

The question for the Church of England is whether that trend toward angry polarisation is deepening as part of a wider move into so-called culture wars, or whether the foundations of the Elizabethan Settlement, emphasising neighbourliness rather than doctrine, as the factor binding us together, is strong enough not only to save the church but to inform the way our society approaches strongly held differences. Where Temple and *Faith in the City* assumed the existence of consensus – one to celebrate it and one to lament it erosion – our crying need now is to recover the simple basics that bind people and communities together in a common endeavour. That means, I believe, recovering the Anglican spirit that sought, not to vanquish, but to be hospitable to extreme degrees of difference. It means understanding how that was possible because the binding factor was the nation and the parish – the space in which we find immediate neighbours. And it means recognising that the discomforts of difference are best approached, not by constantly seeking victory over the others but by accepting that each tradition sheds a unique light on the nature of a God who is ineffably greater than our imaginations can comprehend.

So, to give just one example, evangelical theology stresses the distinctiveness of Christian ethics from those of the world. Christians should not be afraid to stand out or to be unpopular if they are living the truth as revealed in scripture. The liberal Christian tradition helps balance that by stressing that God is in the world before us – what Wesley called the Prevenient Grace of God – and we make a serious error if we believe that we alone carry the presence of the Holy Spirit into the secular realm. Rather, the works of the Spirit are for us to discern, often in unlikely, and unchurchy, places. Evangelicals stress the individual in his or her relationship to Christ. Catholic Anglicans stress the way in which we become human only in relationships with our neighbours, including the unseen others. One could go on. Each is, of course, right in that each points to truths about God-in-Christ and our relationship to God. And, at its best, Anglicanism has recognised the need for the church to hold together these truths which are so difficult to practice simultaneously, but are no less true for that. As John Atherton pointed out, the CofE has swung through the last century from stressing a theology of Atonement – the need to call people to salvation through the life of the faithful in the church – to a theology of Incarnation, stressing the presence of the holy in the everyday.[5] Both Atonement and Incarnation are central Christian doctrines and to emphasise one to the exclusion of the other is to get theology seriously wrong. Anglicanism holds different emphases together through its distinct internal traditions. And it is in trying to get along with each other in this exasperating coalition that is the Anglican church, that we discover more that is true about God than if we were sealed in our own doctrinal tribes.

And I want to add one more dimension which may be a peculiarity of Anglicanism as it has evolved through the centuries, and which it shares, though in a different form, with Roman Catholicism. That is the fact that we are both a very local church and a global church. Perhaps more local than Roman Catholicism, in that our focus on the nation and on geography often transcends our internationalism. But we cannot ignore the fact that the global Anglican Communion makes the Church of England look very small indeed. This has profound consequences for the current tensions on sexuality. If one were to take a poll of the CofE, I strongly suspect there would be a majority (though how big I don't know) in favour of same-sex marriage. But take that poll across the Communion and a very different answer is likely. That is why this ethical question is not one that can resolved by a simple ballot. Yet who would argue that we are wrong to try to balance the local and the global despite the difficulty?

[5] John Atherton, *Public Theology for Changing Times*, SPCK, 2000.

My point is not one about sexuality but about the tension between localism and internationalism. Maurice Glasman's lecture touched on Brexit. There has been some (in my view) irresponsible academic work which suggests that the bishops of the CofE supported Remain whilst the people in the pews supported Leave. It was poor work because the definition of a church member was anyone who self-identified as CofE (which is a useful category if used correctly) but which does not correlate very well with those who regularly attend and with whom the leadership might expect to be more aligned. And, as for the bishops, our own research – including confidential conversations --- revealed the voting intentions of only a dozen out of well over a hundred bishops. Of that dozen, I think only two said they voted leave. But the ninety or so who "preferred not to say" preferred not to say for a simple reason – their diocese was divided: between city and countryside, or between suburbs and inner cities. None of them saw any driving theological or practical reason to intervene publicly and align the church with one faction over the other.

And, once again, the "both/and" aspects of Anglicanism are in play here. We believe (do we not?) in a universal gospel for every human being. We are global Christians for whom our citizenship with others in heaven plays out in being citizens of the world. But (to touch on another not-very helpful binary) that does not make us "citizens of nowhere", for we are deeply committed to the nation and, most of all, to the parish – to the neighbours among whom we live out our lives.

One of the most influential books on spirituality which I read as an ordinand was Harry Williams's *Tensions* which captured at a spiritual level precisely the both/and aspects of faith which I am suggesting Anglicanism handles rather well.[6] Fundamentally, of course, "both/and" is a key motif in Christian theology – Jesus is both God and Man. Salvation is both now and not yet. We live with the gift of the Holy Spirit but until the eschaton sin persists in and around us. This is not some wishy-washy aberration – this is what it means to pursue a faith in a God who is bigger than we can imagine.

So where might that leave us in terms of social theology and the Church of England?

As the bishops suggested in their Pastoral Letter for the 2015 General Election, there is a desperate need for a fresh political vision which seeks to be a corrective to the weaknesses of the Attlee and Thatcher ideologies and the damage they have done to our relationships.[7] Picking up a theme from some of the earlier lectures, this must mean addressing the way both state socialism and market capitalism have eroded the bonds between human beings. It is worth remembering that, as well as his famous report on Social Security, William Beveridge wrote a second report called *Voluntary Action*. He understood – as, perhaps, most politicians of the Left do not – that a Welfare State will always fall short of the capacity to address human ills and suffering if the state alone is responsible for people's well being. Strong local bonds – neighbourliness, intermediate associations which are much smaller than the state and bigger than the nuclear family, are essential if state welfare is not to be swamped by human need. Beveridge saw that such informal voluntary provision couldn't be taken for granted but had to be deliberately nurtured, celebrated and sustained.

All three of our main political parties ultimately draw their thinking from the same well – that of individualistic, atomised liberalism. Maurice Glasman spoke eloquently of the failings of that philosophical tradition and why it won't cut it for today's challenges. We urgently need a new polity

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[6] H. A. Williams, *Tensions: Necessary Conflicts in Life and Love*, Mitchell Beazley, 1976.

[7] *Who is my Neighbour? A Letter from the House of Bishops to the People and Parishes of the Church of England for the General Election 2015*. The Church of England, 2015. Also at: www.churchofengland.org/GeneralElection2015.

which starts from the centrality of communities and neighbourhoods as the contexts in which people flourish and learn to be good human beings. Catholic and Anglican Social thought have much to say in the creation and shaping of such a polity.

But an important Christian insight is that, when you are most certain you are right, you are most certain to be wrong in some respects. We should beware of identifying an enemy and believing that, if only that enemy can be overcome, all will be well. There is, not least within the Anglican social tradition, a liberal strand which also contributes significant Christian insights to our task of living ethically in a fallen world. It reminds us, most of all, that each one of us is loved by God and therefore equal before God. It reminds us that the local and familial is not the last word about our relationships but that we are a global people too. Human sin persists this side of the eschaton, and for all that people need strong community bonds to flourish, communities can become toxic – suspicious and intolerant of the stranger or the dissident or the person who does anything differently. Whatever the failings of liberalism as the dominant ideology of this country, we should not lightly abandon its insights where they are a corrective to the weaknesses of other traditions when they forget that human ideas are always contingent. And, although most secularists might well be ideological liberals, it does not follow that all liberalism is irredeemably secular.

I do not doubt, though, that at this juncture in our history, the touch on the tiller needs to be in the direction of a new communitarianism. I am with Maurice on that. And I very gently want to suggest that it is the ability of Anglican social theology to stay in touch with the liberal Christian tradition, as well as its catholic and evangelical traditions, that might give it a real capacity to inform a new political settlement for today's Britain. I do not want to sound hubristic. I maintain, with Anna Rowlands, that CST and AST are fraternal traditions and that our world and our culture would be much enhanced if more notice was taken of those ethical traditions in shaping the directions of our future.

I am not pessimistic, although in the short term, I believe our nation faces a crisis that is as much existential as economic. We are in danger of losing the virtue of holding together warring traditions in ways that seek to engender mutual respect. But I take heart from two things. One is the fact that the antipathy to religion that seemed to be in the ascendancy a few years ago is shifting to something much more subtle. To give a personal example: in 2007, I was on a panel at the Natural History Museum discussing whether science and religion could co-exist. And the predominantly young audience ignored me but attacked the scientist on the panel because he refused to say that science had proved all religions wrong. Unadulterated Richard Dawkins. Then, a few years ago, I was on another panel at Imperial College debating the ethics of Artificial Intelligence. I made some basic points from Christian ethics, and the audience wanted to talk over and over about what I had said. As a direct result, I now teach ethics to PhD students studying AI at Bath University. Not one student has objected that, as a believer, I have nothing to say to science. The academics I work with, similarly, hold no contempt for religion – they understand that the questions raised by their research are of such magnitude that what passed for ethics for many years – a sort of tick-box exercise to ensure everyone was happy – is quite inadequate and that the great ethical traditions of the world have much to say that is relevant to the dilemmas raised by advanced technologies today.

And I am not pessimistic because the peculiar qualities of the Church of England have an attraction to a goodly number of people who do not subscribe to the tenets of the Christian faith. A contemporary example would be the journalist Simon Jenkins who is a passionate advocate of the importance of the parish church as a signifier of local identities. A 20th Century example might be

George Orwell who professed no religious belief but showed, in much of his writing, a warm and informed affection with and for the CofE. Orwell was especially interesting because his wasn't just a nostalgic yearning for a time when the church was at the centre of some mythical local community. In the 1930s and 40s he argued that the rise of totalitarian regimes across Europe was made possible by the loss of popular belief in life after death. Without that belief in the ultimate justice of God, all perceived wrongs and humiliations had to be resolved in one's own lifetime – a vulnerability that could so easily be manipulated and exploited by populist demagogues. The problem, as Orwell saw it, was that belief in life after death was simply impossible for modern humanity – but no one had found anything to put in its place to fend off the lust for power and domination.

But, as long as there are people who understand and value the Church of England's social function, the possibility remains that belief in the tenets of the Christian tradition can be rediscovered. Because we don't believe on the basis of rational propositions but because we are exposed to something beyond ourselves that captivates our attention. It may just be that the CofE's role as social "glue" is part of the process of reclaiming the people for Christ. This is absolutely not to substitute good works for the task of evangelisation but to recognise that people come to belief by many routes and classic evangelism is only one of them. As long as people who worry about social fragmentation continue to see the church's potential as a medium of unity in a fragmenting society, they are exposed to "catching" a faith that could replace the individualism, short termism and lust for power that characterises our social and political existence. In that sense, the social, civil and established roles of the church lead, not away from, but towards its transcendent religious teachings.

Much more could be said on this theme and much of what I have said is not a knock-down thesis but imaginative speculation about how Anglicanism's birth as something of an antidote to division and theologically sanctioned murder might be an inheritance that others can share, appreciate and gain from.

Sometime next year, Charles III will be crowned. It remains to be seen how the religious content of that ceremony will be expressed – given that it is the Church acting in God's name which anoints and legitimises the monarch. It will be an event of huge symbolic significance and, therefore, undoubtedly a potential source of conflict and friction. But the bigger question is surely about the reign which follows. The First and Second Elizabeths presided over a nation experiencing huge change, and provided a unifying focus which enabled the people to survive and flourish despite differences. Charles I squandered a lot of that distinctively Anglican inheritance, whilst Charles II helped to restore the tolerant and capacious way of being the church that the CofE, at its best, has tried to perpetuate. Nominal determinism can only get you so far – but much will turn on how our new King lives out his vocation so that the Church of which he is Governor can live out its vocation of being a church for all the people.

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