Between Church and World: Anglican formation of Christian political identity

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Abstract

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Jennifer Leith

This dissertation is centred on the question of how Christian ethical and political formation takes place, with a particular focus on how this happens in the context of the Church of England. My central concern is with how one is formed by belonging to, and participating in, the polity of the church *and* the wider civic community.

I put forward the thesis that Christian formation inside and outside the church – their ecclesial and civic formation - cannot be disentangled from one another, and, moreover, that this is how ethical and political formation *should* happen. This argument stands in contrast to some of the most visible theological work in this area, which focuses on formation that takes place in the church – with this formation flowing out into ethical action in the world. Acknowledgement of the *mal*formation that can take place through the practices of the church tends to come in as an afterthought. In contrast, I pursue an account of formation that places the recognition of sin centre stage. This leads me to offer an account of the church as not only ethically formative, but also in constant need of being *formed* itself.

My account of formation also underlines the possibility of being formed *as a Christian* outside of the church. This understanding of how Christian formation takes place inside *and* outside the church stems from a recognition of the ways of the Spirit, bubbling up in each of our lives in unexpected ways – in both the church and civic life – to lead us deeper into God's abundance.

This is a project broadly within Anglican social and political theology, so my primary conversation partners are Anglican theologians: Rowan Williams, Dan Hardy, and Ben Quash.

Between Church and World

Anglican formation of Christian political identity

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This dissertation is the product of my own work, and the work of others has been properly acknowledged throughout

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For Peter

Introduction

The question I am answering

This dissertation is centred on the question of how Christian ethical and political formation takes place, with a particular focus on how this happens in the context of the Church of England. My central concern is with how one is formed by belonging to, and participating in, the polity of the church *and* the wider civic community.

I should briefly note here that throughout this thesis I will be talking about both ethical and political formation. So, what is the difference and relationship between these two types of formation? By 'ethical' formation, I mean formation for good action: action both in the church and out in the wider world. By 'political' formation, I mean formation that comes through participation in political relations: relations in which the negotiation of different needs and desires takes place between members of a community. Normatively, political relationships involve recognising the ways in which the flourishing of each is bound up with the flourishing of all, and so identifying shared goods to be pursued. So, we can see from these definitions that whilst these two kinds of formation are distinct, they also significantly overlap one another: ethical formation exceeds (but is inseparable from) the political.[1] In what follows, my focus is initially on ethical formation (in Chapters 1 and 2), with a concern with political formation coming to the fore from Part II onwards (Chapters 3 -9).

So, with these distinctions in mind, I put forward the thesis that Christian ethical and political formation must and *should* take place inside *and* outside the church. Our ecclesial and civic formation cannot be disentangled from one another, and, moreover, this is how ethical and political formation *should* happen.

[1] We should also note that these two terms are also not intended to be exhaustive of the ways in which Christians are formed to be Christians: for example, 'spiritual formation' will have ethical and political implications but is not oriented to action in quite the same way.

This argument stands in contrast to some of the most visible theological work in this area, which focuses on formation that takes place in the church, especially in worship – with this formation flowing out into ethical action in the world. Acknowledgement of problems with this account – that is, acknowledgment of the *mal*formation that can take place through the practices of the church – tends to come in as an afterthought. Whereas, I pursue an account of Christian formation that places the recognition of sin centre stage. This leads me to offer an account of the church as not only ethically formative, but also in constant need of being *formed* itself.

The dominant account (of formation in the church, for action in the world) also ignores or downplays the possibility of being formed *as a Christian* outside of the church. The Spirit is not contained within the church, so neither should we expect the formative processes of discipleship to be. My account of formation inside and outside the church thus stems from a recognition of the ways of the Spirit, bubbling up in each of our lives in unexpected ways – in both the church and civic life – to lead us deeper into God's abundance. The way we understand the Spirit to work therefore shapes our expectations of the kind of formation that can and should take place through membership of the church and the wider civic community.

To make this case, I draw on the work of ethicists, political theologians, and ecclesiologists. This is a project broadly within Anglican social and political theology ('AST' and 'APT', respectively), so my primary conversation partners are Anglican theologians: primarily, Rowan Williams, Dan Hardy, and Ben Quash. Yet, whilst this argument is advanced in engagement with these thinkers, the thesis I offer here draws together hints and suggestions from their work into a distinctive and coherent picture of ecclesial and civic vocation.

Why I think it is interesting

How I came to this topic

This research project grew out of my experience of working as a parliamentary researcher: first for an MP, and then as part of a team who resource the work of the Lords Spiritual. During this work I often encountered the rhetoric from Christian advocacy groups that the work of Christians in politics was an act of witness to the kingdom of Christ, or an act of sacrifice for the kingdom. However, this rhetoric did not really chime with the lived experience of the Christians I knew working in Westminster. Our day to day experience was less clear cut and much less dramatic than the noble descriptions of sacrifice and witness made out. The work involves, like any job, many mundane tasks, and many areas where there is no clear 'Christian' course of action. It is a much scrappier struggle for ethical integrity amidst

uncertainty and limited time. It is this kind of ethical tension that dominates, rather than clear moments of choice between a Christian course of action and a course that serves one's own interests. Additionally, I became aware, in an inchoate way, that this work was formative. It was not simply a matter of working out in political life an ethical formation that I had already received from the church. Rather, participation in political life was also forming me ethically too, in one direction or another.

So, this work gave rise to a cluster of questions around how we make sense of our identities as both Christians and political actors and how these can be held together, as well as how these are formed. Working as a parliamentary researcher in the Church of England's Mission and Public Affairs Division further developed these questions, and my interests in Anglican social theology. This work broadened my awareness of the continuum of ways in which Church, state, and citizenry come into contact and shape one another.[2]

These questions also took shape against the political backdrop of discussions of 'British values' and national identity. I found these discussions to be dominated by thin and often zero-sum understandings of civic belonging and loyalty, and so gave rise to my desire to find richer resources for thinking about what it is to be a citizen. A period spent working for the thinktank ResPublica (founded and led by Phillip Blond) led me to explore how far virtue ethics can help with questions of how one is formed as a citizen (around the locus of responses and alternatives to the government's counter-extremism policies). This involved thinking about how and where people are formed for public action: how do institutions shape their members? And why are not all members formed in the same ways, when they participate in the same practices? In the light of the church's shifting role in public life, I also had questions about how far *its* role involved seeking to shape the citizenry to be a particular type of people.[3]

Connected debates

This research sits at the intersection of political theology, ecclesiology, and ethics and is primarily addressed towards these fields. As such, my research question taps into a number of live debates in these fields.

[2] I will be using 'church' to mean the whole church, and 'Church' when designating the Church of England specifically.

[3] I began this research from the starting point that Anglican social and political theology should and does have something to say about the formation of citizens, against the current political and theological backdrop. I set out to think about the way the Church of England forms *all* citizens of England. However, as I began this research, I came to see that behind this lay an unresolved question about how *Christian* ethical and political formation takes place. This has implications for the wider citizenry, for if the practices of the church form its members ethically and politically then these practices therefore also have implications for civic life as a whole. However, the starting point had to be one step back from where I thought I could begin, with the question of how Christian political identity is formed.

In the field of theological ethics, there is widespread interest in the question of whether, and how, worship is ethically formative. This is a discussion that spans denominations and draws in other disciplines, including psychology and continental philosophy.[4] A broad consensus can be discerned in these discussions over formation: that Christian formation takes place through material practices, which should be understood with reference to the orientation of desire. I engage this scholarship further in Part I, in which I survey discussions of Christian ethical formation before exploring these themes in greater depth in the work of three prominent Anglican theologians. In engaging with ecclesiology, my focus is on the ways the different needs, desires, gifts, and challenges of members are negotiated in the common life of the church (including the different ways this common life is envisaged), and the ways that power is exercised in these negotiations. In other words, my interest here is with the political dimensions of church life.[5]

The question of the ethically formative nature of worship is bound up with questions about how we are to think about the church as a political body. Ethical formation is often understood as meaning being formed for belonging within the political community of the church. Christian identity is thus understood as a *political* identity, on its own terms. Related to this is a concern with demonstrating that the political nature of the church cannot be contained within the political conceptual categories of other disciplines. Rather, the political character of the church (and of theology) disrupts these categories. I address these questions more closely in Part II, surveying ways of thinking about the church as a political body and identifying some common concepts and patterns of thinking in this discussion.

This interest in ethical and political formation has also aligned with a revival of political and theological interest in civic values and character - often bearing the mark of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*.[6] Alongside this, there is a large field of scholarship reckoning with the changing position of the Church of England in national political life: asking, what kind of role should the Church play today in seeking

[4] See, for example, Joanna Collicutt's engagement with this question from a psychological perspective in *The Psychology of Christian Character Formation* (London: SCM Press, 2015) and Joshua Hordern's engagement with philosophical psychology in *Political Affections: Civic Participation and Moral Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). See also James K. A. Smith's engagement with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception in *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013).

[5] Therefore, I do not engage deeply with the fields of liturgical and ritual studies, as these do not tend to be oriented by the same concern for the political in describing and analysing ecclesial practices.

[6] Including the work of Bernd Wannenwetsch; Charles Mathewes; Eric Gregory; and Thomas Bushlack. See also the political theoretical work of Richard Sennett and David Brooks.

to shape citizens and civic life?[7] Rowan Williams and Justin Welby have both written on these questions – most fully in *Faith in the Public Square* and *Reimagining Britain*, respectively – and have sought to articulate what kinds of practices and ways of thinking the Church might be able to offer to national life.[8] I explore this field further in Part III, exploring the ways existing Anglican political theology speaks of the kinds of practices and conversations involved in Christians' civic engagement.

So, my guiding questions are set against a backdrop of current theological trends which I address in more detail in what follows.

My approach

Why focus on the Church of England?

As noted above, the ecclesial context which forms the focus of this project is that of the Church of England. I have chosen the Church of England as a central case study partly in order to have a particular context in which to ground this exploration - to situate it in particular practices and forms polity and so avoid abstract theorising about the church. The choice to focus on one particular church inevitably introduces limits to the scope of inquiry. Additionally, in drawing a circle around one particular church, I do not wish to create the impression that the Church of England can be studied in isolation. The identity of the Church of England does not exist in a vacuum: it only exists in relation to wider Anglican Communion and other churches in UK. This interrelatedness is a theme that will be discussed particularly with relation to the Church of England's involvement in the British Imperial project and, domestically, the relationship with other denominations expressed in the Test Acts.

But why choose *this* church as opposed to any other? In part, because it is the denomination to which I belong and for which I have worked: it is the church I know best and am most able to speak about. More substantively in terms of the aims of this project, the Church of England as a historically culturally dominant and constitutionally privileged church starkly displays many of the characteristic

[7] Including: Sean Oliver-Dee, 'Integration, Assimilation and Fundamental British Values: Invested Citizenship and 21st Century "Belonging"', *Cambridge Papers* 26, no. 3 (September 2017) and Julian Rivers, 'Fundamental British Values and the Virtues of Civic Loyalty', *Ethics in Brief* 21, no. 5 (Summer 2016) (initially drafted for the Church of England's Higher Education Development Group).

[8] Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012) and Justin Welby, *Reimagining Britain: Foundations for Hope* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018). These contributions have also coincided with a revival of interest in the loose body of thought that is Anglican social theology, with the publication of Malcolm Brown et al., *Anglican Social Theology: Renewing the Vision Today* (London: Church House Publishing, 2014) and Stephen Spencer, ed., *Theology Reforming Society: Revisiting Anglican Social Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2017).

malformations of Western Christianity. It has problems that are both distinctive and more widely illuminating of what the church's complicity in systems of oppression can look like. As well as offering a vantage point for recognising problems, I will also argue that the Church of England's particular social position can also offer distinctive resources for thinking constructively about what it is to belong to a national political community and to be formed ethically as a Christian through this membership.

In both negative and positive directions, then, reflecting on the Church of England can generate distinctive theological insights which can be generative for the wider church. Moreover, as I will go on to detail in the introduction to Part I, the issues under discussion are of interest ecumenically – there are established conversations going on in a wide range of denominations, and this project intersects and resonates with and draws on these discussions. This project has resonances with large range of churches and traditions - as can be seen in the ecumenical nature of the examples on which I draw. So, whilst focussed on the Church of England, this is not an argument *solely* about the Church of England, and the scope and significance of this work is not limited to the Church of England.

What is <u>Anglican</u> political theology?

In a similar vein, my central interlocutors are all identifiably working as Anglican theologians (as I will say more on this below), but their work has a resonance beyond the Church of England. My choice of central conversation partners has been motivated by seeking out those who are centrally concerned with a) questions of Christian formation; b) with participation in the polity of the church; and c) with participation in forms of political life in civil society and the state. Those I have chosen cover all of these areas, and in ways that make it possible to bring them into conversation with each other: that they are identifiably concerned with similar questions makes it possible to assess against each other their success in answering these questions.

This desire to foster a mutually intelligible conversation has meant that I have approached the field of Anglican social and political theology with a concern for the way that it works *as a field*: seeking to identify patterns of coherence and overlapping conversations in a diffuse canon of thought (as well as the points where these break down).[9] Identifying the shape of the field and entering into it on its own terms allows me to identify and challenge some of its prevailing assumptions by displaying the ways in which prevalent strands of Anglican social and political thought is at best limited and at worst destructive (I do this most fully in Chapters 1 and 6).

[9] For a fuller discussion of some of the central dynamics and tendencies of Anglican political theology, see Luke Bretherton's chapter on Anglicanism in *Christ and the Common Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019), pp.177-200.

This approach has, however, meant that the majority of my central interlocutors are white, anglophone men, who are ordained as priests in the Church of England. This places them in high positions of privilege on the matrices of gender; race and colonialism; and church hierarchy. Having these as central voices means, for example, that I engage fewer women as central interlocutors than I would wish. It is very far from my intention to imply that there are not significant female contributions to the questions I am seeking to answer in this thesis. To say this would be to ignore the ways in which the political is treated in a wide range of feminist, systematic, and pastoral theological writings.

So, this decision to focus on the discussion within the field in its current form means that I do not explore as fully as I would wish how the disciplinary boundaries of political theology should be challenged and redefined - through attending to alternative accounts of the nature of the political. Given more space, I would wish to draw out the multiple ways in which the nature of political action is implicitly understood in political theology, and to extend that through drawing more fully on the work of feminist theologians; theologians of colour, and from the majority world; and lay theologians, amongst others. Relatedly, I would also wish to have had the space to have spent more time exploring the multiple sites where Anglican theology is produced, and the interplay between these.

What can Anglican political theology offer?

Luke Bretherton has described a characteristic Anglican 'political rationality', or, put otherwise, a characteristic way of generating political judgments.[10] Bretherton draws on Samuel Taylor Coleridge to explain how this rationality combines an acceptance of creaturely finitude with attention to the particularity of our context:

> [H]umans can only know the truth about God and what it means to be a creature through finitude and risking negotiated historical relations with others (including nonhuman others). Through participation in the world around us, humans may discover and then make sense of who we are in relation to God and others. This requires attentiveness to and reception of a world we did not make and others we do not control yet with whom we must order our social, economic, and political relationships.[11]

[10] Luke Bretherton, 'Anglican Political Theology', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. William T. Cavanaugh and Peter Scott, Second edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2018), 164–77(p.164).

[11] Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life*, pp.185-186. This is rooted, Bretherton argues, in Coleridge's doctrine of creation:

> Coleridge 'saw creation as an open yet unfinished cosmos, the value of which is not objectively given but depends on the human capacity to participate in it via symbolic processes of meaning making. That is to say, the human self stands in an interpretative and constantly evolving relationship to creation. Thus, overly abstract kinds of reasoning render humans not only mere spectators but also spectral beings alienated from any actual form of life. By contrast,

So, 'Coleridge was alive to how we are always caught between continuity and change and so must learn to live and act as frail, time-bound creatures in need of shared forms of life that can adapt and innovate.'[12] In this thesis I am seeking resources for better understanding and shaping processes of political attentiveness and judgment in which Christians are *already involved* . Rather than treating civic identity as something optional or potential, I argue that Christians are unavoidably caught up in the political life of their wider communities and that this civic identity is therefore always already being enacted (for good or ill).[13] This means accepting that we also *already have* a Christian political identity.

Yet this does not mean simply accepting the political status quo: as Bretherton puts it, a foundational warrant of political theology is that '[i]f humans are to participate more lovingly and justly in forms of common life with each other, with nonhuman life, and with God, then the current social, political, and economic structures need to change.'[14] Combined with the focus on attention to contingency, this means that 'APT's political rationality is [or should be] focused not on blueprints for how to live but on proposing settlements for how the church, nation, and state might be properly related within existing historical conditions.'[15]

This 'focus on culture and history recognizes that contingency, and thence revisability, is a constitutive feature of all forms of life.'[16] Quash too suggests, in a Coleridgean vein, that this awareness of historical contingency is, or should be, a commitment of Anglican theology.[17] So, this attention to particularity – to concrete historical particulars will mean, as Bretherton argues, that 'any understanding of APT today necessitates an understanding of the ways in which the Church of England was never hermetically sealed within the bell jar of the British Isles, and then, at a certain point, exported elsewhere. It came to be within the interactions shaping the Atlantic world from the fifteenth century onward. This was the beginning of a world that saw the creation, destruction, and re-formation of whole cultures across the

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close attention to, participation in, and openhearted wonder about the world around us can generate imaginative visions for inhabiting creation in more nourishing, concrete, and profound ways. The world as it is can then be brought into conversation with and reimagined through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as narrated in Scripture.' *Christ and the Common Life*, pp.179 – 180.

Unfortunately, *Christ and the Common Life* came out too close to the submission of this thesis to be fully engaged throughout.

[12] Ibid., p.180.

[13] I am using 'civic' to connote the political community beyond the church, and 'citizenship' to describe political membership of this wider political community.

[14] Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life*., p.22.

[15] Bretherton, 'Anglican Political Theology', p.166.

[16] Ibid., p.180.

[17] Ben Quash, *Found Theology: History, Imagination and the Holy Spirit* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), pp.1-2.

Atlantic basin.'[18] So, whilst the scope of this thesis is limited to the Church of England, not the wider Anglican Communion, a consideration of this wider context is necessary as part of attending to historical contingency.

So, the form of Anglican political theology being attempted in this thesis is deliberately non-triumphalist. There can be a tendency in Anglican theology towards a certain complacency and self-satisfaction with the Church of England's cultural position. This is often bound up with Anglican self-image as essentially bumbling and inoffensive – the Richard Curtis of denominations. Yet, this complacency is only possible because of the Church's historical dominance and influence, which is something that is deeply bound up with the oppression of other ethnic and denominational groups (such as minority dissenting traditions) and other forms of exclusion. Attempting to articulate a non-triumphalist APT will therefore also involve not romanticising Anglican pragmatism.

I should note here that this recommendation of greater discomfort and self-questioning is also contingent: it is directed towards a historically dominant church, and to those within it who hold positions of power. In urging greater receptivity towards the contributions of others, I have in mind these power dynamics. So, this emphasis is not intended to present self-questioning and receptivity as Christian virtues to be adopted in all situations. It is directed towards those in positions of greater power and privilege, rather than as a tool to demand ever-greater vulnerability from the already vulnerable.

For, as noted above, attention to contingency opens the door to the possibility of revision. So, paying attention to the inheritance of Anglicanism should lead to action: as Bretherton argues, '[a]ttentiveness and reception – characterised by a posture of listening or contemplation – are the precursor of shared speech and action and thence the coming into being of a common life.'[19] For this reason, my attention to ecclesial and civic practices is oriented throughout to how these might be enacted otherwise: how might Christian political formation happen better? And how might this feed into the formation of a citizenry better able to pursue common life?

What is achieved

In exploring how Christian political identity is formed in the context of the Church of England, we must begin with the broader question of how Christian identity is formed. More specifically, for Christians, where does formation for good action in the world happen and how does it happen?

[18] Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life*, p.186.

[19] Ibid., pp.185-186.

Part I is concerned with the location and flow of Christian ethical formation. In Chapter 1 I engage with Graham Ward and Sam Wells (as two expressions of a popular account of Christian ethical formation), who concentrate on formation inside the church and are weak on formation outside the church. This has to do with sin, as both fail to take it seriously enough as a formative force and think that that the church already has all the resources it needs to overcome it.

In Chapter 2, my engagement with Rowan Williams draws out a fuller account of ethical formation involving an ongoing awareness of the presence of sin in the Christian's life, and of the scope for ecclesial practices to distort as well as positively form identity. I also draw out a positive flipside to this, showing that the ongoing unsettling that happens as we become aware of our sin is reflective of the abundant dynamism of the life of the God, as disclosed to us through God's ways with the world which continually bring us to new understandings of what it means to live as a Christian. In this way, I end up pushing away from the idea that there is a ready-made, or easily available source of good formation available in the practices of the church.

Part II then asks: if we do not have such a picture of a basically finished church which is capable of providing the formation we need, what do we put in its place? How can we think about the church itself as a body needing to be formed (and to go on being formed), especially at the level of polity? So, instead of focusing on the political formation of individuals within the Body, the focus shifts here to the ongoing formation of the Body itself. In answering that question, I set out an ecclesiology: an account of the basic dynamics and structures that the church needs if it is to be formed in this way. I am imagining the church we need – but not in an idealistic way. Instead of looking at the sinfulness and brokenness of the church as an afterthought, or as a topic that comes as a caveat *after* the description of what the church should be, I place it right in the heart of my account.

So, Chapter 3 sets out some basic positive dynamics or parameters: the church is (or can be) a *polis* that is also an *oikos* (and vice versa); it is (or can be) marked by humble confidence and confident humility; its life does (or should) take place in gathering and scattering, intensity and extensity. That already paints (at a fairly high level of generality) a picture of a church in which we both say that the church is called into being by God *and* that the church is always learning, and that is never finished or complete. Indeed, we say the latter *because* we say the former.

Chapter 4 then turns directly to sin: this confident and humble, gathering and scattering church is, at multiple levels, marked by sin – including in the very ways it works as *oikos/polis*. That is, I show that sin is pervasive, and deep-rooted, not just in individual believers but in the practices and structures and relationships that constitute it, including in those elements of its life that are meant to help us identify, confess, and turn away from sin.

In Chapter 5 I then give my fullest description of the polity of the church, precisely as a response to what Chapter 4 has shown. I show that the polity the church needs is precisely a polity capable of going on identifying its own sin and repenting of it. The church needs to be structured so as to put it in the way of the convicting work of the Spirit, which will mean openness to receiving the distinctive gifts of every member.

From Parts I and II we see that the church is not sufficient for ethical and political formation, and that engagement with the world is necessary. So, in Part III, I ask what kind of engagement is that? That is, what position does this put Christians in vis-a-vis the world? And what conversations and exchanges are they engaged in as they are formed?

In Chapter 6 I show that Anglican theologians have tended to speak as if Christians are formed in the church, and that out of this flows the form of their participation in public life. This is related to the tendency to see the church's relationship with society as one in which the church *gives* what is needed for flourishing, and has nothing that it needs to *receive* in return. So, I show that the idea that Christian and ecclesial formation *can and should* happen through political engagement is not one that has received much attention in recent Anglican political thought.

In Chapter 7, therefore, I identify resources from theology and political theory for exploring an alternative at a conceptual level to these dominant Anglican accounts: making theological sense of a church that is continually engaged in civic life, and shaped by this constant participation, and making political sense of political life emerging through such engagement.

Chapter 8 continues this exploration, making it more concrete, by looking at engagement with civil society and the state. I make the argument that Christians are formed (as disciples, as church, as citizens) by their engagement with civil society *and* the state (which has tended to be overlooked as an arena for participation), as well as by their ecclesial liturgies and Christian practices: they are formed in the interaction of all these. So, the Christian's ethical and political vocation includes participating in the civic community (including state institutions) outside the gathered practices of the church, with the expectation that through this civic participation one will be formed *as a* Christian. I show that civic life is not only an arena for working out our Christian calling, but is also a site of the Spirit, where we can and should be formed as disciples.

I conclude by looking at some of the implications of these conclusions for the practices of the Church of England, at both a local and national level.

A note on attention

A central thread running through this argument is concerned with how we learn to attend (to God, to one another, and to ourselves), as a key driver of formation. In Part I we see that the practice of attention is understood by Graham Ward and Sam Wells as formative of Christian ethical identity. Their accounts tend to focus on the way that learning to attend to God and those around us is made possible by, and flows out of, participation in practices taught by the Church. The account of the formative nature of attention offered by Rowan Williams, in contrast, has a stronger emphasis on the way that receiving God's attention should reshape and disrupt the practices and identity we have. There is also a stronger emphasis here on the importance of receiving the attention of those around us, so as to come to see God and ourselves from new perspectives. Williams underlines this posture of openness (to receiving unexpected gifts through being the object of attention) as central to being formed for ethical action.

In Part II we see that learning to attend to one another in the polity of the Church involves sociality – being interrupted by one another in order to see more clearly how one is involved in holding others back from participative flourishing. In fact, we can understand this as a work of grace: being led into new findings of conviction by the Spirit. Learning to attend also involves recognising the gifts each brings to the body. This delight in munificence expresses our participation in the manifold life of God.

In Part III we see that learning to attend to the findings which the Spirit leads us to in the world is an important part of Christian ethical and political formation. So too is learning to see the Church and our Christian identity in the light of these findings, as we relate the given to the found and vice versa. This is all part of seeking to discern how the Spirit is at work in the wider political community (of which we are members) and the possibilities offered there for redemption.

Part I

The Formation of Christian Ethical Identity

Introduction

In exploring how Christian political identity is formed in the context of the Church of England, I have chosen to begin with the broader question of how Christian identity is formed - more specifically, with the question, 'where does formation for good action in the world happen for Christians, and how does it happen?'. In this chapter I am mainly concerned with the location and flow of formation of Christian character and ethical identity (and I will refer to 'formation for good action' in shorthand).

As noted in the introduction, I make this exploration in the context of an increasing concern in recent theology with Christian formation, particularly in ecclesial contexts. In particular, there is a growing sense that Christian formation has ethical and political implications baked into it. Whilst we cannot, of course, pinpoint a single moment out of which this concern has grown, movements in Catholic liturgical theology have undoubtedly been influential.[1] As noted in the Introduction, another significant Catholic voice has been that of the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, whose work is centrally concerned with the communal practices by which virtuous character can be formed.[2]

That ethical formation takes place through worship has become something of a truism in Protestant theology too over the past thirty or so years. In his discussion of the relationship between public worship and public work, Christian Scharen charts a retrieval of Thomistic understandings of learning through bodily practice that took place through the Protestant recovery of Aristotelian virtue ethics. This

[1] A central locus of these discussion has been the relationship between the relationship between justice and the liturgy. See, for example, Gerard Moore, 'Let Justice Find a Voice: Reflections on the Relationship between Worship and Justice', *Worship* 90 (May 2016): 206–24. See also Christian Scharen, *Public Worship and Public Work: Character and Commitment in Local Congregational Life*, Virgil Michel Series (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004), pp.20-26. For an Anglican perspective on this relationship, see Mark Earey, Ruth Meyers, and Carol Doran, eds., *Worship-Shaped Life: Liturgical Formation and the People of God* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2010).

[2] MacIntyre summarises this formative process thus: 'The flourishing of the virtues requires and in turn sustains a certain kind of community, necessarily a small-scale community, within which the goods of various practices are ordered'. Thomas D. D'Andrea, *Tradition, Rationality, and Virtue: The Thought of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2006), quoting the preface to the Polish edition of *After Virtue*.

retrieval bore MacIntyre's influence, but also developed through other streams of thought: Scharen identifies James Gustafson's work, informed by Thomas Aquinas and H.R. Niebuhr, on discerning the role of the church in forming persons as a particularly significant galvanising force here.[3]

The work of one of Gustafson's students, Stanley Hauerwas, on Christian character as inherently public and political *and* formed through liturgical practices, pre-eminently combines (and also departs from) these Catholic and Protestant trends and has perhaps more than any other contemporary theologian set the agenda for Western theological thought on this theme. Self-confessedly indebted to MacIntyre, Hauerwas understands Christian ethical formation to take place in a localised ecclesial context - in a community shaped by its own stories and traditions. [4] The church is also understood by Hauerwas to be a political body (an alternative *polis*), whose members therefore have a political identity that is distinctive from that of the surrounding culture.

Hauerwas' far-reaching influence can be clearly seen in, for example, James K. A. Smith's popular *Cultural Liturgies* series. Smith's concern is with how the character of 'worshipping creatures' is formed through the liturgy of the church, as well as through the 'cultural liturgies' of daily life.[5] Within contemporary Anglican theology, this kind of concern with formation has perhaps received most attention in the context of education.[6]

Yet, in spite of (or perhaps *because* of) the popularity of the term, there is, as Jeremy Worthen has noted, a lack of precision over what is meant by Christian formation.[7] The general (although by no means universal) enthusiasm around the utility of the concept of formation has often obscured the extent to which, in discussions about character, there is in fact underlying deep disagreement about how formation happens.[8] It is therefore necessary to begin my search for an account of formation of Christian

[3] Scharen, *Public Worship and Public Work*, pp.26-27.

[4] See, for example, Stanley Hauerwas, 'The Virtues of Alasdair MacIntyre', *First Things*, October 2007.

[5] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009) and *Imagining the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013).

[6] See, for example: Sue Groom, 'The Language of Formation in Official Church of England Documents', *Anglican Theological Review* 99, no. 2 (2017): 233–54; Jeff Astley, Leslie J. Francis, and Colin Crowder, *Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation: A Reader on Theology and Christian Education* (Leominster : Grand Rapids, Michigan: Gracewing : Eerdmans, 1996); Jeremy Worthen, *Responding to God's Call: Christian Formation Today* (Norfolk: Canterbury Press, 2012).

[7] Worthen, *Responding to God's Call: Christian Formation Today*, xi–xiv. This lack of clarity is probably not all that surprising, given that popularity and precision seldom get on well together.

[8] Those pushing back against a Hauerwasian account of Christian formation include: Nicholas M. Healy, *Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2014); Lauren Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice: On Wayward Gifts, Characteristic Damage, and Sin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018); Christian Scharen, *Public*

political identity by unpicking and bringing to light some of the foundational conflictual understandings around how Christian identity is formed. Through unearthing the argument that is going on in the crowded room of discussion about formation, I argue that, at heart, this discussion is about the location and flow of ethical formation: that is to say, where this formation happens, and what follows from it.

In Part I of the thesis, I engage with three figures who help to explore the general shape of the field within which my explorations on formation are going to proceed: namely, Sam Wells, Graham Ward, and Rowan Williams. A broad consensus can be discerned in these discussions over formation: that Christian ethical formation takes place through material practices, which should be understood with reference to the orientation of desire. This is grounded in a theological anthropology in which embodiment and relationality are taken to be essential to human, creaturely identity. There is also a shared sense that Christian identity is something that is both given to the Christian and worked out in their particular context. This duality is well expressed by Mark Oakley as the gift of our being, returned as our becoming.[9] Yet, there are also significant points at which these thinkers depart from one another, with differing emphases along the lines noted above: that is, over the location in which Christian formation takes place, and the flow of this ethical formation (whether the direction of travel is from church to world, or a more multidirectional picture).[10]

Worship and Public Work: Character and Commitment in Local Congregational Life, Virgil Michel Series (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004).

[9] 'If God's gift to us is our being, and our gift in return is our becoming…': In Oakley's introduction to Sarah Coakley, 'A Theology of Desire' (Lecture, 1 November 2015), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxkHBKM4hMQ [Accessed 09.09.19].

[10] This discussion of Christian identity has as its backdrop concerns over whether the one created as image bearer still bears the divine image, albeit marred, or whether the image has been erased. Understandings of the limits and possibilities of Christian formation derive from where boundary markers are laid in this discussion. Amongst the set of thinkers engaged in this chapter the discussion takes place within a fairly narrow space of consensus that rejects both natural perfectibility *and* the idea that the image of God has been entirely erased by human sin. The question therefore centres on how deeply the image is marred and what follows from this.

1

Ethical Formation in the Church

We turn now to explore how Sam Wells and Graham Ward each account for the way in which Christian ethical identity is formed.

1.I. Sam Wells

1.I.i. Wells' account of Christian ethical formation

I begin with Wells' account, which is reflective of a very popular and influential strand of thought on formation in Anglophone theological ethics. Wells can be read as perhaps the most prominent proponent of Hauerwasian ethics in the United Kingdom, yet his account of how Christians are formed for good action in the world is also explicitly situated in the context of the Church of England. This makes it a good place to start in seeking to understand how the influential North American account might play out in thinking rooted in British and Anglican contexts.[11]

It is worth saying a word here about the denominational positioning of my central conversation partners. My main interlocutors throughout this thesis are significant contemporary theologians who write about the church – sometimes the church as a whole and sometimes the Church of England and the Anglican Communion in particular – to support an argument that is centrally concerned with the Church of England (although, as we have already seen, not *only* concerned with the Church of England). The rationale for this is that each of these theologians can be understood as *Anglican* theologians in that a) they all explicitly write about the Church of England in their work and locate themselves within an ongoing conversation about Anglicanism; and b) given their positioning as ordained Anglican clergy we can fairly assume this ecclesial context to be their horizon of reference and imagination.

So, my claim that each is producing *Anglican* theology is not simply based on the fact that these central interlocutors are Church of England clergy. However, we should, of course, acknowledge that they are all also writing about the church and theology more widely, in dialogue with non-Anglican theologians

[11] It is worth noting that whilst much of Wells' work is framed by a concern with recasting understandings of the discipline of ethics, my interest is focused more narrowly around his account of the formation of Christian ethical identity.

and philosophers, and are read and referenced by non-Anglican theologians. They are part of a wider theological conversation, and their arguments draw on resources from, and seek to speak to, not only the Church of England but also the church more broadly.

The given grain of the universe: 'Being with'

In accounting for the Christian life, and indeed all human existence, Wells begins with 'being with' as the most basic and definitive quality. This is so, for Wells, because of the way the pattern of human relationships is rooted in our foundational 'being with' God. Wells locates this relationship between humanity and God in, as Karl Barth describes it, God's 'original choice never to be except to be for us in Christ'.[12] This is taken by Wells to describe 'the heart of God and the nature of God's purpose and destiny for us': that 'God's whole life and action and purpose are shaped to be with us'.[13] Wells further describes creation as driven by there being 'too much love in the Trinity for God to keep it to himself'.[14] So, we see that creature-creator companionship is, for Wells, rooted in the pattern of relationships in the Godhead: "with' describes the 'most fundamental thing about God', for the triune life is one of companionship and our own identity as 'God's companions' derives from this.[15]

This language of overflow out of the triune life brings to the fore another central feature of life in God's creation, for Wells: plenitude. His highlighting of abundance grows out of Wells' concern to correct what he sees as an emphasis on themes of scarcity in Christian ethics.[16] Against this emphasis, Wells argues that '[f]ollowing Jesus means learning to want the limitless things God gives us in Jesus.'[17] These abundant gifts are principally found in the church (as we will discuss in the next sub-section), and '[t]he Church is shaped, not by obeying a command, but by being the kind of people who can receive the gifts that derive from carrying out these practices.'[18] The sufficiency and abundance of the gifts of the sovereign God can be seen in Scripture, which 'signals the way God has given everything needed in the past'; the kingdom, denoting 'how God will give everything needed in the future'; and

[12] Samuel Wells, *God's Companions: Reimagining Christian Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p.1, referencing Karl Barth, *Table Talk*, ed. J.D. Goodsey (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1963), p.62.

[13] Samuel Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto: Being with God* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley, 2015), p.3.

[14] Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (London: SPCK, 2004), p.53.

[15] Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto*, p.3.

[16] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.6.

[17] Ibid., p.5.

[18] Ibid., p.83.

the Holy Spirit, who 'names the ways God brings his saving past and transforming future into a present characterized by memory and hope'.[19] He further argues that through seeing the creaturely limits we each have as a gift, rather than as a lack, the opportunity for creatively receiving from one another is opened up.

These emphases on plenitude and companionship combine in Wells' claim that following God means being God's companions: worshipping him, being his friends, and eating with him.[20] In the light of this account of abundant companionship as the grain of the universe, Wells understands human creaturely identity to have been marred by the impulse to turn away from God's abundance 'out of a sense of self-protection': a misplaced impulse to 'preservation of identity in the face of a tidal wave of glory.'[21] Nonetheless, there is an identifiable and pervasive pattern of companionship that describes our individual relationships with God; the relationship between God and the church; and relationships with one another in the church.[22]

Through the corporate ecclesial practices that express this companionship (worshipping God, being his friends, and eating with him), Wells argues, the Christian's ethical calling can be pursued. These practices shape their life to 'be with' the other.[23] For,

> [w]hat sustains human life is a pattern of practices – good ways to relate to one another, honed in community and developed by tradition, learned by apprenticeship and embodied in habit. The practices are fundamentally gifts of God. They are the ways his will to companionship is expressed in human life. They not only draw people closer to him but also foster their flourishing.[24]

So, for Wells, the basic material of human identity is understood as configured by God's commitment to 'being with' God's creatures. Wells sees this orientation towards companionship as reflected in, and retrieved through, the practices of the church.

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[19] Ibid., p.8.

[20] Wells, *Improvisation*, p.53.

[21] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.7.

[22] Yet we should note that there is a differentiation for Wells between the hold this pattern has on divine versus human agency: the possibility of being 'for' is what distinguishes divine agency from that of humans. Yet the ability to be 'for' is, for Wells, also based on a foundational being 'with'.

[23] Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto,* pp.123-228.

[24] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.2.

Storied community: How the relationship is received, and what gets in the way

Entering the practices of the church, and so into the story of Christ, marks a point of disjuncture between one's old worldly identity and one's new identity in Christ. This account of Christian formation through entering into a particular narrative is perhaps the strand of Wells' thought that most strongly bears the stamp of Hauerwas' influence.

Hauerwas famously argues that narrative is the form of God's relationship with his people: 'We are "storied people" because the God that sustains us is a "storied God" whom we come to know only by having our character formed in relation to God's character.[25] This storied relationship unfolds through the particular narratives of the people of God, and through the way Scripture as a whole tells of God's ways with the world.[26] Together these form a story that is enacted, week after week, in the practices of the church (and through participation in which, the Christian is incorporated into the story).

Through Hauerwas' insistence that the formation of character through story cannot be an isolated event but requires the existence of a corresponding storied society, the church's distinctive formative importance comes into focus.[27] As Wells notes, character arises out of narrative yet remains insufficient for understanding Christian identity without community.[28] The church thus emerges as the place where formation of character and narrative meet: '[t]he community is shaped by the Christian story, and in turn shapes the character of its members' by the performance of the story. The story is performed liturgically and through distinctive practices such as peace-making and disciplined forgiving.[29] So, by this account, the Christian's ethical vocation is not simply to decide ethical questions on a different rational basis from that used by the world, but to be formed as part of a different people – to learn to see and enact one's identity as a participant in a different story. Hauerwas' account of Christian formation can thus be summarised as the formation of character, by narrative, in community.

Wells draws deeply on this sense of Christian formation taking place through entering into the storied community of the church, writing that 'Christians find their character by becoming a character in God's

[25] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p.91.

[26] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, p.95. This being so, he argues that the church has been given the stories of Israel *and* Christ to tell.

[27] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, p.91.

[28] Samuel Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny: The Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998), p.41.

[29] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.68.

story.'[30] He understands the Christian's entry into this story as taking place through catechesis, described as 'the process by which the new believer is conformed to Christ in body, mind, and spirit and made ready to become a disciple' through discovering 'how the story and practices of the Church enable disciples to worship God, be his friends, and eat with him.'[31] Wells continues:

> The process of catechesis prepares new believers for the event of baptism. Baptism embraces the whole of God's story, from the water of creation to the fire of judgment. It enacts the crossing-over from slavery to freedom, darkness to light, death to life, despair to hope. It is the principal way in which those who turn to God are incorporated into Christ's body.[32]

So, through the transforming practices of the liberating story, the baptismal candidate is freed from the old self. This transformation into conformity with Christ continues through practices of 'study, fasting, reflection, direction, imitation of the saints'.[33] The disciple's integration into the body then continues through beginning to participate in the 'politics' of the church:

> The members of the body deliberate over the goods of their life and the gifts God has given them; through casuistry they establish the practicalities of witness in the particularities of service; through mission they seek to extend the goods of their fellowship into partnerships in all corners of the world, especially the most benighted ones, longing for the kingdom, looking for the work of the Spirit, and expecting to meet Christ in friend and stranger; through prayer they adore the God they have seen and heard, and implore him to reveal and rescue where witness and service fall short.[34]

All of this happens through *first* entering into the storied community of the church. The Christian receives here an identity that is opposed to the life they lived before – running counter to the old distorted identity formed by the world. Participation in the gathered practices of the storied community of character that is the church forms, for Wells, people capable of deliberation, witness, fellowship, prayer, and so forth. That is, it forms people capable of good action in both the church and the world.

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[30] Wells, *Improvisation*, p.57.

[31] Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), p.18. Wells goes on: 'This liberating story is accompanied by transforming practices, such as catechesis.' Ibid., p.18.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Such that the 'the disciple becomes part of Christ's body'. Ibid., pp.24 – 25.

[34] Ibid., pp.24 – 25.

What gets in the way

Whilst undoubtedly underlining the sufficiency of these storied practices for forming God's people, Wells also acknowledges that these practices will not mean that sin is no longer part of the life of the disciple. For Wells, sin 'is life that is based on a false story, a story that leads to worshipping something other than the God of Jesus Christ.' [35] This adherence to a false narrative leads one to fail to recognise the abundant gifts offered by God, and instead causes one to live according to a logic of scarcity. It is from this sense of scarcity, Wells argues, that violence flows: it is the enacted denial of the abundant peace which is the true grain of the universe.[36] So, whilst the church is called to be a community of peace, Wells acknowledges that the church has always confronted – 'or has been forced to confront' – 'the fact that its own practice has sometimes been worse than – or indistinguishable from – that of those forces in society that have taken God's freedom not yet to believe'.[37] Even in the church - the community gathered around the true story - there is no escape from the fallen human propensity to fall for false stories.

This means that recognition and repentance of sin are also part of the pattern of discipleship, and this is reflected, accordingly, in the way these practices are woven into the liturgical rhythms of the church. Confession takes place in a corporate setting, for Wells, so that no one can deceive themselves that they are not implicated in sin. For, self-deception 'is the narrative form sin takes in the mind of the disciple': 'the weaving together of plausible and groundless reasoning and pleading to tell a false story.' So, in confession, the congregation are 'confronted with the falseness of the stories they each tell themselves', which the act of confession exposes to the truth of the Gospel and so dismantles. Confession is thus oriented towards reconciliation and restoration of 'life and relationship'. [38]

Yet, despite all its failings and limitations, the church, for Wells, remains 'the place where all the practices that are the abundant gifts of God are still performed'.[39] He argues that 'the gifts God has given for redemption are ever new', and are still the only way by which the church can fulfil its calling 'to participate in the salvation and redemption of the world'.[40] So, whilst Wells does not present the church as unblemished, what has been received (the gifts given to the church) is still understood as more or less able to properly form Christians. This kind of confidence in the ethical formation possible

[35] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.142.

[36] Ibid., pp.18-19.

[37] Wells, *Improvisation*, p.19.

[38] Wells, *God's Companions*, pp.142-143.

[39] Ibid., p.10. Wells in fact argues that the flaws of the church make attention to it all the more necessary, as 'bypassing the Church leads only to some Gnostic fantasy of discipleship without sin'. Ibid.

[40] Wells,, *Improvisation*, p.19.

in the church is expressed in Wells' summary statement that, '[t]he Church's faith is that, in story, sacrament, and Spirit, God has given his people all that they need to live with him.'[41]

Not just narrative but dramatic improvisation

Wells builds on and extends his Hauerwasian account of the formative nature of life in the church, coming to see it as not only storied but also as dramatic: a story that is performed. He argues that a dramatic understanding of the community of faith, and so too of formation within this community, is necessary because ethical action involves the narrative text *and* 'its interpretation and systematic construal'. That is, ethical action involves the way it is embodied in, through being performed by, the community. Wells describes this dramatic performance of the narrative as 'a dynamic, spiralling process of constant repetition, transfer, and restoration of meaning, of things never being the same again and other things being rediscovered, ever new'.[42] Yet, even such an account of drama is not quite sufficient for Wells to settle on performance as the principal mode for understanding discipleship. This is because it is an account that gives the impression: a) that 'the script provides a comprehensive version of life'; b) that all of the church's narrative is contained in the Bible; c) that there is a golden era to be recreated; and d) that the world should not be deeply engaged with.[43] He therefore proposes improvisation as a discipline able to overcome these limitations.[44]

Wells draws on dramatic theory in defining improvisation as an imaginative practice that is oriented towards encountering new situations. He then transposes this concept into his theological ethics, accounting for Christian ethical formation as taking place both *for* and *through* improvisation. Wells draws this distinction on the basis of there being two stages in the moral life: the stage of 'the moral situation', requiring 'the ordinary imagination to respond from habit and instinct', and, prior to this, the stage of 'moral formation, requiring 'the creative imagination to form character through moral effort.'[45]

So, firstly, how does Wells understand moral formation *for* ethical improvisation to take place? Wells' basic argument is that improvisation involves having one's imagination formed to take the right things for granted – to find them obvious.[46] He is thus concerned with forming habits, as it is through these

[41] Ibid., p.78.

[42] Ibid., p.46.

[43] Ibid., pp.62 – 63.

[44] Ibid., p.77.

[45] Ibid., p.77. This maps onto his distinction between the practical imagination and the creative imagination. Ibid., p.104.

[46] Wells, *Improvisation*, p.82.

that Christians learn to take the right things for granted.[47] This depends on being part of a community 'that trusts the practices it has inherited and allows them to shape its unconscious'. [48] So, Wells sees improvisation as depending on a learned deep trust between the members of the church, and in the practices they have received.[49] As he puts it, '[b]eing obvious means trusting that the practices of discipleship, shaped by the Holy Spirit, are enough' to be equipped for whatever is brought one's way.[50]

This brings us to the question of how Christians are formed *through* improvisation. Wells argues that having been formed through reenacting the story of God in history in the church, discipleship involves the renarration of life's dilemmas in the light of the story that they have received: 'The story is told in order that it may be performed when the participants depart in peace.'[51] This language of ethical dilemmas could risk playing into the very logic of scarcity rejected by Wells. However, Wells makes clear that 'dilemmas' are not constitutive of ethical formation by returning to the language of abundance. The practices of moral formation have been undertaken in the Church in order to 'to be open to grace.'[52] For, 'the only given is God's story, the theo-drama, the Church's narrative: all else is potentially gift.'[53]

These gifts are identified through paying close attention to what one is handed: to the contingency, the specificity of it. The particular thing one is handed is then, in Wells' terms, 'overaccepted'. This 'overacceptance' names an attitude of consistently treating the actions of others as 'offers' to be 'accepted' (rather than 'blocked'). For Wells, saying 'yes' to the offers of grace encountered through deep engagement with the world leads to adventures, whereas saying 'no' (which can take the form of either passive or active blocking of offers) leads to security but also stagnation.[54] Wells goes on to state the 'the Church finds itself more often in the role of receiver [of offers of grace] than of giver.'[55] So, in addition to understanding ethical identity as flowing *from* formation in the church *out into* action in the world, Wells is introducing here a flow in the other direction.

[47] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.12.

[48] Wells, *Improvisation*, p.104.

[49] Ibid., p.68.

[50] Ibid., p.67.

[51] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.66.

[52] Wells, *Improvisation*, p.78. See also: Ibid., p.104.

[53] Ibid., p.125.

[54] Ibid., pp.103;108. Against this account of improvisation, then, sin is understood as 'the refusal to keep the story going… It is closing one's heart to grace.' Ibid., p.115.

[55] Ibid., p.128.

However, this is accompanied by Wells' argument that the Christian community should choose to actively 'receive' offers 'in the light of a larger story' which 'stretches from creation to eschaton'.[56] This shows us that improvisation is ultimately ordered towards renarrating the particular thing received in the terms of the larger story one already knows. This continuing story structures discernment: what is fitting within this story, which is already known, can be accepted and 'reincorporated'.[57] This manner of finding a way of (re-)telling the particular story one is offered to make it part of this larger story is described by Wells as 'a way of accepting without losing the initiative'.[58] So, it is still the practices found in the church that allow this improvisation out in the world to take place.

1.I.ii. Attention

Attention is an important word to dwell on in Wells' account of Christian formation. In talking about attention what I mean most basically is *looking closely*. The aspects of attention that are most relevant to our exploration of ethical formation here are how the object of the Christian's attention orients their action in the world, and how the process of learning to attend takes place. The different objects and directions of attention at play in my discussion are: God's attention within the Godhead; God's attention to us; our attention to God; and the attention we give to and receive from one another. Looking at the practice of attention more closely will help us to see more clearly both the insights and problems with Wells' account of Christian formation – an account that emphasises formation for good action as taking place through the known practices of the church.

We begin with Wells' account of abundance, and the way this shapes his understanding of attention. Wells makes the case that attending to God through contemplation, meditation, and stillness - practices born out of seeing time as a gift - enables the Christian to affirm that 'time in God's dispensation is not in short supply.' Wells explicitly relates this sense of plenitudinous time, and the contemplative practices that follow from it, to understandings of atonement: believing that 'God in Christ has reconciled the world to himself' already means the Christian can take time to contemplate (rather than keeping in constant action, fed by the assumption 'that the reconciliation must come from them'). Furthermore, '[s]ilence and stillness refine disciples' understandings of how God works and their role in his providence.'[59] So, accepting the abundant grain of the universe is fundamentally what allows for the possibility of taking time to attend wordlessly to God.

[56] Ibid., p.160.

[57] Wells, *Improvisation*, p.147.

[58] Ibid., pp.131-133.

[59] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.87.

This kind of attention is paradigmatically expressed in the practice of listening to Scripture, which is, for Wells, the definitive way that Christians learn to listen. Wells names true listening as 'taking in the whole communication of the speaker', and understands listening in this way to mean 'delaying judgement, withholding observation, reducing distraction, and sometimes ignoring interruption.' It requires, and trains the listener in, 'being sufficiently relaxed to allow the speaker to shape the conversation, yet sufficiently alert to take in every message the speaker is giving'.[60] There is a positive relationship, for Wells, between learning to attend to God in this way and to one another: 'When Christians listen for God's word in Scripture, they learn to listen for God's word in every conversation.' This is so, because, in habitually naming the presence of God, Christians also 'become aware of the presence of one another'. There is a quality of inter-personal attention that flows from this, for as we attend to God's ways in the world as one of 'being with' then we become able to correctly see one another as gifts of God, especially the most obviously needy amongst us'. This includes becoming aware of 'those who are not gathering together', and those gifts the *ekklesia* are not receiving.[61]

I have so far highlighted Wells' emphasis on learning to attend as a process that takes place through regular participation in the practices of the storied community of the church, and out of which follows ethical action. Whilst this is certainly the most strongly emphasised element in Wells' account, there are other strands present too. For instance, learning to attend to one another is also bound up, for Wells, with the process of coming to recognise sin. As he puts it, 'members [of the church] must positively seek to discover the ways in which they have wronged one another, never being surprised that misunderstanding and hurt occur, but seeing each instance as a prelude to reconciliation, grace, and deeper relationship.' Wells further argues in this vein that making confession together involves explicitly asking "have I wronged you in any way?", and expecting the answer to be 'yes'.[62] There is an acknowledgment here that sin will persist in the church, despite it being the context for formation of character out of which ethical action flows.

A further complexifying facet gleams in Wells' statement that, '[i]f disciples are to listen to God they must learn to be attentive in other relationships too', and so 'life becomes a ministry of listening (and watching) for revelation' amidst the unexpected events of life.[63] The suggestion here is that we learn to attend to God through also attending to other people, rather than the flow being all from attention to

[60] Ibid., p.164.

[61] Wells, *Improvisation*, p.82. Wells' concern here is with how attending to those who are absent will fuel pastoral care and evangelism. So, there is no indication here that Wells has in view systematic processes of exclusion as driving some of the absences from the gathering.

[62] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.88.

[63] Ibid., p.87.

God to attention to people. This sense of how attention plays out in encounters outside the set practices of the church is most strongly drawn out in Wells' account of being formed *through* improvisation, in which attention is understood as 'relaxed awareness' (or *disponibilité*).[64] In this state of awareness, he argues, 'the actor senses no need to impose on the outside world or on the imagination; there is openness to both giving and receiving' gifts in every new ethical situation.[65] The gifts received come 'direct from God', 'from the fellowship of faith', and 'from strangers'.[66] Significantly, Wells argues that 'there is no hierarchy of gifts – all are essential to the character of the Church, and the reception of each is a preparation for the reception of others.'[67] It is on the basis of this expectation of receiving gifts outside the church that Wells argues for each new celebration of the eucharist beginning 'with a sense of what has been discovered, where God has been met in the time since the last gathering.'[68] So, Christian ethical formation also comes through learning to recognise and receive gifts from outside the church, and so learning to better attend to God.[69]

Yet, whilst there is space here for surprise, there is nonetheless still an expectation that the surprise will not shake the framing narrative. We see this in Wells' account of overacceptance, in which, as we saw above, finding a way of (re-)telling the story you are offered to make it part of the larger story of God's ways with the world is described as 'accepting without losing the initiative'.[70] So, there is an overarching confidence that one already knows the shape of the story of God and God's people, if not all the particulars of events. Moreover, being able to discover God's abundance in unexpected ways *outside of* the church depends, for Wells, on having been formed in the right way *in* the church: 'these [Christian and liturgical] practices are gifts to the Church not only in themselves, but also in that the Church, in seeking to be the kind of community that can perform these practices well, discovers the abundant grace of God in unexpected ways.'[71] So, regular participation in corporate ecclesial practices and private practices of prayer mean that Christians 'can trust themselves to be obvious', having had their imaginations formed in the habits of the Christian story and therefore being able to take the right

[64] Wells, *Improvisation*, p.80.

[65] Ibid., p.80.

[66] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.83.

[67] Ibid., p.83.

[68] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.222.

[69] Ibid., p.83.

[70] Wells, *Improvisation*, pp.131;133.

[71] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.83

things for granted.[72] On this basis, Wells argues that the local church is to be a 'community of imagination' for wider society.[73]

So, despite the space created for surprise and reception from the world as part of Christian ethical formation, there is still an expectation that the work of God will be clearly recognisable, based on the traditioned practices of the church through which the Christian has learnt how to attend. These practices form the Christian's ability to attend, which in turn secures the continuing future of ecclesial practices. All of this depends on, and expresses, a dynamic of harmonious unfolding of abundance: there is an assurance that we have been given all that we need – including all that we need to be formed as those who are able to recognise God's gifts. The church, for Wells, shows Christians what to attend to and gives them all they need to learn to attend properly.

1.I.iii. Summary and some questions

For Wells, Christian ethical formation takes place inside the church and works upon the individual. From this location, good action flows out into the world. We have seen that Wells understands ethical formation to take place within a storied community of character, and that this is set within a creation in which the grain is one of abundance. The coalescing of these two threads (character and plenitude) is expressed in one of Wells' central formulations: 'God gives his people everything they need to worship him, to be his friends, and to eat with him'.[74] This articulates Wells' sense that formation takes place principally in the church's worship, in which God gives the church 'all it needs to continue to be [Christ's] body in the world'.[75]

There is a marked disjuncture, for Wells, between the true identity disclosed through the story told by ecclesial practices and that which follows from the false stories of the world. Of baptism, for example, he writes that it is in this practice that a person's 'true identity' is 'discovered', and where the old identity, which was destined for death, is stripped away.[76] This is also reflected in Wells' description of catechesis as 'the process by which the Church invites the Holy Spirit to form the character of its

[72] Wells, *Improvisation*, pp.81 - 82. However, whilst this element of encounter outside the church is present, the overriding emphasis is on learning to attend is part of being formed *for* improvising ethical action out in the world: 'The community of disciples that has been formed in the habits of the Christian story has all its attention on the surprises God will bring.' - Ibid., p.67.

[73] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.7.

[74] Ibid., p.1.

[75] Wells, *Improvisation*, p.80.

[76] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.67.

catechumens and to prepare them for baptism.'[77] The implication is that this is where the catechumen's formative encounter with the Holy Spirit begins: in a practice of discipleship within the church, out of which flows good action in the church and the world.

Wells has confidence, then, that once one has entered into the body of Christ, one will receive from the church all the gifts necessary to be formed well as a disciple: that is, to be able to tell the story of Christ and to keep the story going amidst the surprises of life. This is borne out in Wells' use of the language of 'incorporating' to describe the dynamic by which disciples respond to a new ethical situation in the light of the story they have received through participation in the practices of the church.[78] This language connotes a preconceived whole, of which the form is already known. This therefore raises the question about the extent to which this process involves, for Wells, learning to tell the big story differently.

We have noted that Wells recognises sin as an ongoing presence in the life of the Christian, and of the church, so he should not be read as guaranteeing perfect formation for the one who participates in the practices of the church. Yet, it is nonetheless fair to say that his emphasis is on the possibilities for the 'story of evil' to be overcome by the church's story, and the reconciliation that flows from this.[79] Just as the church is not free of sin, nor is the world devoid of virtue. There is some space in Wells' account for the disciples to encounter gifts from God outside of the church, discovering 'the abundant grace of God in unexpected ways.'[80] Through learning to see the practices of the church as gifts, the Christian's imagination is reconfigured and the church comes to see that '[w]e are not the answer to the prayers of "the despised and rejected of the world", but that they are the answer to ours. Wells continues: 'Do not assume others will see Jesus' face in you: go, and expect to see Jesus' face in them.'[81]

Yet, a question remains here: is this the face one already knows – or do others teach us to see more of the face, or to see it differently? It does seem that it is, for Wells, a face one already knows: which one has been reliably taught to recognise by the church. So, whilst Wells does not solely identify the church as the site of Christian formation, his emphasis is nonetheless firmly on how 'the action of God embodied in the practices of the church' 'constitutes everything his people need to follow him'.[82] He

[77] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.64.

[78] Wells, *Improvisation*, p.69.

[79] Wells, *Improvisation*, p.113. See also *God's Companions*, p.142.

[80] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.83

[81] Wells, *Nazareth Manifesto*, p.96.

[82] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.5.

describes ‘a seamless flow of offering and receiving love and mercy in the Church’.[83] In this flow, ‘worship makes disciples faithful, and … faithful disciples renew worship.’[84]

[83] Ibid., p.11.

[84] Ibid., p.11.

1.II. Graham Ward

We now turn to Graham Ward. Where Wells' thought is closely bound up with of a distinctively Hauerwasian way of approaching the question of how Christian ethical identity is formed, Ward is associated with another influential school, or 'shared sensibility', of thought: that of Radical Orthodoxy.[85] As noted above, whilst Ward can be identified as an Anglican theologian in certain senses, he also is also part of a wider theological conversation. He draws on resources from, and addresses, not only the Church of England but also the church more broadly.

1.II.i. Ward's account of Christian ethical formation

Creaturely identity as oriented by *eros* to peace and plenitude

Ward conceives of Christian identity as erotic, in the sense that he understands *eros* (parsed as desire) to lie at the heart of human identity. [86] Following from this, formation of ethical identity is principally understood in terms of how desire is ordered or disordered. Desire, as created, is oriented by the fundamental grain of creation, and, in a similar vein to Wells, the plenitudinous life and grace of God is understood as that which sets the grain (structuring creaturely being and relationships).[87] Being caught up in participation in this outward flowing ('ek-static'), self-transcendent divine life means that creaturely relationships should also display these characteristics.[88] So, for Ward, '[d]iscipleship is participation in God's own self-expression, rooted in the economy of God's grace towards creation.'[89] This means that the disciple's love and desire are both created and sustained by God, as well as oriented to the divine.

[85] Graham Ward, 'Radical Orthodoxy: Its Ecumenical Vision', *Acta Theologica* 37, no. Suppl. 25 (2017): 29–42. I will, however, as with Wells, be engaging with Ward's thought on formation in its own right, and not as representative of a wider school of thought.

[86] Ward's theological project hinges on recovering the centrality of *eros* and desire for theological reflection, 'by first unhooking it from its reduction to sexual desire and then reconceiving the ecclesial community as a community of desire.' James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Milton Keynes: Baker Academic: Paternoster Press, 2004) , p.126.

[87] Graham Ward, *Christ and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p.79.

[88] Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, pp.187-188.

[89] Ward, *Politics of Discipleship*, p.276.

However, Ward's consistent emphasis on embodiment means that this understanding of discipleship as imitating self-transcending love should not be misunderstood as a call to escape the bounds of finite materiality.[90] Indeed, he sees the diverse matter of creation as displaying, not detracting from, a further foundational ordering of creation: that of peace. Again, as for Wells, the difference manifested by divine plenitude is harmonious and so the created grain of harmonious difference is, for Ward, set ultimately by the triune life of God.[91] The created nature of humans is therefore oriented to charity, not power.[92]

Overall, then, by Ward's account, life in this economy of peace and plenitude forms the basic material of Christian ethical identity, and desire that is ordered in line with this foundational metaphysical reality is properly ordered desire.

The distortion of *eros*

It is with this understanding in mind of human identity as it was created to be that Ward attends to the understandings of what it is to be human that are implicit in the modern city. His attention to modern urban life is focused on the modern city's ailments, and the way these reveal underlying commitments about the purpose of human life and society. These intertwined ailments include: consumption; geographic segregation; atomism and disembodiment; dematerialisation and depoliticisation; globalisation; and secularisation. Ward sees all of these as stemming from 'enormous cultural fragmentation', with the loss of unifying traditioned practices and so too of cultural imaginaries, and compounded by 'the economic, the political and the cultural promotion of social atomism'.[93]

So, for Ward, the social, political, and economic trends shaping the modern city are also systematically shaping urban dwellers' desires. As Al Barrett summarises:

> [I]n the city 'certain forms of desire' are both 'promoted and patrolled'; 'variants on the theme-park' cities have been 'reorganised as sites for consumption' and 'entertainment', the 'ruthless pursuit of the present'; desire 'dismembers' the social, 'atomising' us into 'monadic consumers'; and the costs of consumption – human, social, environmental – are not just

[90] Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, pp.189-195.

[91] Ibid., pp.195-197.

[92] Ibid., pp.187-188.

[93] Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000) , pp.238-239; 259-260.

> concealed, rather, our 'desire to be ignorant' of them is actively cultivated, as 'secular desire ... preys on others for its own satisfaction'.[94]

The chief lever in promoting this atomism is capitalism, and it is here that we see most clearly what distorted desire looks like for Ward. He argues that money has become both the instrument and object of modern desire. So, the subject of a capitalist system becomes enveloped in a self-perpetuating economy, with the inner logic of wealth ultimately oriented to self-worship. In this way, the postmodern capitalist city facilitates desire that seeks the 'prolongation of desiring itself', rather than actually seeking consummation.[95] Desire in the postmodern city can ultimately '*never* be satisfied': it 'can never come to an end – or the market would cease.' Rather, '[d]esire here operates because we always sense, or are made to sense privation; and we are always attempting to fill that lack or find compensations for unfulfillment.'[96]

We have seen, then, how desire works in Ward's modern city, and the way it expresses, for Ward, modernity's understanding of the essentially competitive and individually oriented nature of social relationships.[97] Understanding violence and not peace as the grain of the universe, in this way, malforms people and their relationships.

The reorientation of imagination and desire in the community of *caritas*

As members of the postmodern city, Christians are not immune from having their desires distorted in these ways. Against this distorted desire, which is constituted by continually unfulfilled lack (despite reifying 'the object of desire *as object*, as graspable'), Ward describes how Christian desire should be re-formed in accordance with the metaphysics of plenitude and harmony outlined above.[98] For the Christian, being located within an economy of abundance, of 'giftedness', means that the object of

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[94] Al Barrett, 'Interrupting the Church's Flow: Engaging Graham Ward and Romand Coles in a Radically Receptive Political Theology in the Urban Margins' (Doctoral thesis, The Queen's Foundation, Birmingham and VU University, Amsterdam, 2017), https://research.vu.nl/en/publications/interrupting-the-churchs-flow-engaging-graham-ward-and-romand-col, p.70; referencing, *Cities of God*, pp.75, 76, 56, 59-60; *The Politics of Discipleship*, pp.83, 96; *Christ and Culture*, pp.79, 263-6.

[95] Ward, *Politics of Discipleship*, p.267. See also: *Christ and Culture*, pp.79, 263 -6.

[96] Ward, *Cities of God*, p.76. We should note here Christianity's role in this distortion of desire: global capitalism's comprehensiveness is parasitic, Ward argues, on 'the global logic of Christianity, which forever saw other nations beyond its borders that lacked the gospel'. It is therefore no accident that postmodern desire is a parodic distortion of Christian desire. *Cities of God*, pp.90-1, 96.

[97] Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, pp.187-188.

[98] Barrett, 'Interrupting the Church's Flow' (thesis), p.71.

desire 'can never be made an end in itself', but rather is 'located in a network of relation, invested both with past association and future potential'. It therefore 'takes on a certain density of significance, a rich materiality that cannot be exhausted, cannot be possessed'. Ward distinguishes this kind of desire from the grasping, consumptive desire formed in the postmodern city, arguing that in the Christian economy 'the object desired is to be enjoyed as gifted; rather than simply used, exploited, consumed.'[99] Christian desire 'is a desire not to consume the other, but to let the other be in the perfection they are called to grow into'.[100]

The site where this reformation of Christian desire takes place is the church (and, as desire drives formation for Ward, this is also where the Christian life as a whole is re-oriented). The church is an 'alternative erotic community' to the postmodern city.[101] Here, Ward proclaims, is the 'body' that the postmodern city is lacking – a body that can truly participate in, and 'make space' for, the economy of abundance, and so one which fosters 'what is most necessary for our well-being and cosmic flourishing'.[102] As desire is connected to embodiment, to be reformative of desire the ecclesial community must have embodied practices: 'Christian thinking' and principles are insufficient, but rather 'Word and sacrament are means of grace for the alternative formation that is the necessary condition for this community of love to take shape as a colony of the 'heavenly commonwealth; whose Lord is not Caesar but Christ'.'[103]

The pre-eminent embodied practice of the church is the eucharist, and it around this that Ward's account of proper ethical formation centres. Christians experience 'the formation of that Christ- likeness which is ours truly insofar as we occupy this place *en Christoi*', and so have their desires reoriented 'to that which exceeds what we think we know about ourselves and the world we live in'.[104] For Ward, the Christian life is 'an ever-deepening participation in God – the source of life in abundance, resurrection life', and the entry to this life is through the eucharist.[105]

Desires and relationships are thus reconfigured *within* the ecclesial community, in which '[b]ecoming one flesh is the mark of participation itself'.[106] The Christian desire that is formed through participation

[99] Ward, *Cities of God*, pp.172 – 173. Ward is drawing on the Augustinian distinction between *uti* - 'use' - and *frui* - 'enjoyment'.

[100] Ibid., p.76.

[101] Ward, *Christ and Culture*, p.266.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, pp.238-239.

[104] Ward, *Cities of God*, p.173.

[105] Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship*, p.184; Ward, *Cities of God*, p.77; Ward, *Christ and Culture*, pp.145, 82.

[106] Ward, *Cities of God*, p.154.

in the embodied practice of the eucharist is inherently communally structured.[107] As Ward argues, 'our loving as it participates within God's loving is always reaching beyond and forgetting itself, but, in that very activity, loving itself most truly'. This communal structure of desire is further reflected in the conceptualisation of discipleship as rooted in 'the law of love'.[108] The formation of Christian desire therefore leads to the formation of communities of desire (which in turn continue to form properly desiring members).

In eucharistic terms, this communal overflow is, for Ward, the outward-reaching 'logic of the fracture': 'both celebrating the intimacy of oneness and taking that celebration out into the world: "we *break* this bread to *share*".' So, '[i]n the breaking, the fracturing, the extension beyond a concern with one's own wholeness, is a sharing that will constitute our own true wholeness.'[109] We can say, then, that Ward's understanding of growing into conformity with Christ involves *others* mediating Christ to us.[110] For, '[a]lthough theologically we understand our participation in Christ through the sacraments, the only Jesus we can identify […] is the Jesus created for us by those who followed him.'[111] So, it is from the creations of previous Christian generations we draw and continue to construct our Christologies and patterns of imitation, such that '[d]iscipleship could be described as learning […] how to represent aright.'[112] Our representation of Christ, too, will shape the Christology received by those who come after us. There is a contingency, then, to the Christ we receive, and so too to the way we understand what it is to imitate him.

We should also note that, whilst Ward is clear that the church is the context of this formation, 'in all its concrete locatedness and eschatological significance', this is not straightforwardly set in opposition to the formation offered by the world.[113] Ward's eschatological ecclesiology carries within it an understanding of the relationship between church and the world that moves beyond a construal of the two as opposed realms of activity. Rather, the church is the 'public and material manifestation of that which transcends the world'.[114] As such, it is implicated in both reflection and critique, being *within* the world whilst also seeking to address the world through actions and speech from a point *beyond* it.

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[107] Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, p.246-247.

[108] Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship*, p.272.

[109] Ward, *Cities of God*, p.174.

[110] This is filled out by his discussion of theology of signification and social semiotics. Interpretation, as intrinsic to the Christian and theological task, is explained by Ward in terms of entering the narrative of the gospel from a perspective other than one's own. Ward, *Cities of God*, pp.5-14.

[111] Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship*, pp.277-278.

[112] Ward, *Christ and Culture*, pp.41-42.

[113] Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship*, p.184.

[114] Ibid., p.24.

By this construal, the church 'names an unfinished project' and the world 'names a certain conception of global living constituted from a specific standpoint.'[115] In keeping with this, whilst he identifies the church as the body of Christian action, Ward locates Christian action within the Spirit's divine action in the world, not just within ecclesial practices.[116]

Ward also finds resources for shaping the Christian's imagination in secular art and literature. This complexifies the account above of the malformative postmodern city. The ways in which Ward's work is receptive to the insights of the world outside the church is perhaps most fully exemplified in *How the Light Gets In: Ethical Life I*, in which Ward calls for, and seeks to model, an 'engaged systematics'. This is an approach to theology that starts with 'the human condition as we understand and recognize it through and in our social engagements.' In one instance of this methodology, Ward draws on Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess* and Daniel Myrick's and Eduardo Sánchez's *The Blair Witch Project* to illuminate this 'lost and alienated' human condition.[117]

Additionally, this picture should be nuanced through noting that Christian ethical formation does not only take place in the corporate liturgical practices of the church for Ward. Personal prayer plays an important role too, particularly in reshaping the Christian's imagination (as we will explore further below). Nonetheless, these practices are *learnt from* the church. So, it is fair to say that for Ward, as with Wells, there is a strong emphasis on how formation for ethical action in the world happens through participation in the community of *caritas*, and, conversely, on how participation in the practices of the world leads to distorted desire.

1.II.ii. Attention

Attention again plays an important conceptual role in this account of ethical formation.

Ward understands his work as an attempt to read the signs of the times, in the mode of Christian *Kulturkritik*.[118] Through his work Ward also seeks to enable his readers to learn to better interpret their environs, seeing this interpretation as deeply bound up with Christian action and self-understanding. Ward's attention to the cultural dynamics of the city is thus undertaken with the aim of uncovering its

[115] Ibid., p.27.

[116] Ward defines Christian action as 'a praxis that participates in a divine *poiēsis* that has soteriological and eschatological import.' Ward, *Politics of Discipleship*, p.201.

[117] Graham Ward, *How the Light Gets In: Ethical Life I*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.147.

[118] Graham Ward, '"Radical Orthodoxy and/as Cultural Politics"', in *Radical Orthodoxy? A Catholic Enquiry*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2000), p.104.

cultural imaginary: 'the dominant discourses and activities whereby people living in the city make sense of their experience; the imagined possibilities that shape their moral, political, and religious beliefs.'[119] So, Ward's first concern is with equipping the Christian to interpret the world around them, in order to discern whether participation in its practices is disordering or correctly ordering their desires.[120] Ward, in a similar way to Wells, sees Christian formation as involving Christians participating in the struggle to see how they are still wedded to the distorted ways of seeing that are characteristic of the late modern city, in order to throw off these worldly ways of seeing.

However, Ward is also concerned with the need to learn to see how the church's own imagination and desires have become distorted. He does this, for example, through his discussion of the rise of capitalism and secularisation in predominantly Christian nation states, tracing Christian depoliticisation through Enlightenment responses to wars of religion and capitalism.[121] Ward notes that the most secularist, capitalised, and (possibly) depoliticised countries are those that are also dominated by the Christian tradition. Western Christians, Ward argues, need to wake up and realise the idolatrous danger of continuing down this path of separating religion and politics.

On the back of this unearthing through attention to distortion, then, Ward attempts 'to develop a Christian theological imaginary that might modify and transform aspects of that civic imaginary that is so antithetical to Christian living today.'[122] When we read the 'signs of the times', then, we are to read them 'through the grammar of the Christian faith'. That grammar, for Ward, is fundamentally eucharistic, as this is the place where the 'analogical worldview' is received.[123] This is so because the analogical worldview is *performed* through the eucharist.[124] Ward's understands different kinds of 'bodies' – 'physical, social, political, [and] ecclesial' – as participating in the (eucharistic) body of Christ, and made 'heavy with meaning' through that participation: '[w]ithin it [the body of Christ] all other bodies are situated and given their significance'.[125] So, we learn to see the world in a true light through participation in the eucharist: it is here that we learn to perceive more of the fullness of meaning

[119] Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship*, p.17.

[120] This sense of interpretation as a Christian task forms part of a wider concern with social semiotics, and the extent to which signs are made transparent or opaque. See Ward, *Cities of God*, p.8.

[121] Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship*, pp.265-6.

[122] Ibid., p.17.

[123] Ward, *Cities of God*, p.5. This not only runs in Ward's thought at the level of formation - he understands the healing of distorted desire to take place through participation in Christ – but also at a level of theological methodology.

[124] Ibid., p.9.

[125] Ibid., p.113.

that the world has. It is here that the Christian not only learns to leave behind the old ways of seeing, but also receives new sight, becoming able to correctly attend.

If the eucharist is where the 'analogical world view' (through which we see how things participate in Christ) is received, then prayer, for Ward, is where the Christian learns to attend both to God and to the world. In prayer, he argues, we open ourselves 'to the infinity of what is God', with prayer expressing the way that following Christ requires 'wait[ing] to receive' our understanding of 'what it is to be a Christian', to discover 'what it is [we] say when [we] say "Christ"'; we are 'continually being opened up' precisely as we engage in 'acts of following'.[126] We are also opened up to the world in prayer: it leads the Christian into a 'deep inhabitation of the world, its flesh and its spirit, that stirs a contemplation and a reading of the signs of the times that is more profound than we can ever apprehend or appreciate.' This 'deep inhabitation' is marked by continual listening, as, in prayer, we pay attention to '[t]he world's events', and they 'pass through us and change us'. At the same time, in prayer we listen to our own yearning for communion with Christ ('the reaching out of our desire'), and, through this desire, we also listen, at least in part, to 'the yearning in the heart of Christ to heal and transform'.[127] Ward understands personal prayer, then, to be a richly layered attentive process, and one which, in pointing their attention in all of these directions, changes the Christian.

Beyond teaching us *how* to attend, prayer also teaches *what we should expect to see*. This is so because, for Ward, prayer's concern is always with ushering in the kingdom of God, participating in the 'eschatological remainder' through practices of hope.[128] So, attention for Ward involves attending to the new things that will come into being. We see then that Ward is not concerned with interpretation for its own sake. Rather, he believes that Christians must learn to attend to what is distorted *in order that* 'they will be better equipped to recognise the nature of discipleship demanded of them and to see what it is they have to contest'.[129] In sum, Ward understands the process of learning to attend as not only seeking to interpret the world, but also to change it: to bring it into alignment with the community of *caritas* that is pointed to, and made present, through the practices of church.[130] We can say, then, that, for Ward as for Wells, the fundamental practices by which the Christian learns how to attend and what to attend to are learnt in the church.

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[126] Ward, *Cities of God*, pp.259, 95.

[127] Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship*, pp.280 – 281.

[128] Ibid., p.283. The Christian (the 'layperson' particularly, Ward suggests) 'is continually called upon to pray for discernment; and allow the world within which they engage to permeate those prayers, that it might be redeemed'. – Ibid.

[129] Ibid., p.33.

[130] Ibid., pp.16 -17. In this way, Ward's sense of the necessity of encounter in changing the cultural imaginary is in a similar vein to the contingency in Wells' account of improvisational response.

1.II.iii. Summary and some questions

We have seen that, for Ward, formation for good action in the world happens through having one's desires reordered through participation in the church (the concrete manifestation of the community of *caritas*). Life in the world, explored through the cultural practices of the postmodern city, meanwhile, distorts desires, leading to relationships of consumption and utility rather than mutual delight. Formation for ethical action therefore involves learning to see how the practices in which one is involved are distorting of desire.

Ward locates the source of healing this distortion in the church, with the learning of attention and the reconfiguring of the imagination happening principally through the eucharist and in personal prayer. Participating in the community of *caritas* realigns one's desires with the peace and plenitude by which creation is ordered. Attending to God (and to our desire for God) leads also, for Ward, to the development of our ability to attend to what is around us. The reconfigured imagination also has a role to play here, in apprehending the new identity that could be disclosed through healing. The ability to redescribe the world – to offer and enact a vision of how things could be otherwise - also flows from having one's imagination reconfigured by attending to the ontology of peace.

So, the transformation of distortion into the capacity for ethical action comes through imaginatively received ecclesial practices. The flow of transformation comes *from* the church *to* the world. Again, this account leaves us with questions around the presence of sin in the church (and the way this forms the Christian), and the possibility of being formed outside of the church for good action.

1.III. Some shared problems

We have seen, then, that there is strong commonality between Wells' and Ward's accounts of Christian ethical formation. This commonality centres on their shared concern with the way Christian identity is received through, and inseparable from, ecclesial praxis. The emphasis falls on the ways that Christian formation challenges, opposes, and overthrows that existing material which has been received from the world around. Both understand members of late modern society to be ethically formed in a way that is incompatible with formation by the Spirit in the church. In both, then, there is a sense that the reception of Christian identity (through participation in ecclesial practices) requires a repudiation of the practices by which people are formed outside of the church, in the world. The church, by this account, returns the Christian to the eternal way of life for which we were made, aligning the disciple's desires once again with grain of the universe. In drawing out these shared patterns of thought, I should note that this summary is more representative of Wells' thought than it is of Ward's more nuanced position. Nonetheless, this sketched outline can be recognised in the work of both.

I have shown that, within this shared confidence in the ethically formative power of ecclesial practices, attention is an important concept for both Ward and Wells. It is understood by both as a practice powering formation, both in terms of the objects to which the Christian attends and in the processes by which they learn to attend. For both, however, it is the practices of the church that form the Christian's ability to attend, reordering their desires and reconfiguring the imagination towards hope. The assurance that, as Christians, we have been given all that we need, includes all that we need to be formed as those who are able to recognise God's gifts. This, in turn, allows for the continuing future of the church's formative practices.

1.III.i. Critique

In exploring these accounts, some reservations and questions have emerged. I will now expand these questions into a fuller critique of some tendencies common to both Ward and Wells. These will be grouped as follows: firstly, both offer only a minimal account of the ongoing presence of sin in the life of the disciple; secondly, both strongly assume the reliability of the practices through which discipleship takes place; and thirdly, discipleship is only really accounted for within the church, with a mainly negative account given of formation in the world.

Minimal account of sin

Personal sin

We have seen in both Ward and Wells' work an emphasis on the potential for discipleship to be a process that restores the image of God that has been marred in humans. This positivity is bound up with a fairly minimal account of the ongoing presence of sin in the life of the Christian. This can be seen, for example, in Wells' contention that, '[t]he Church does not simply accept the story of evil. It has a story of its own. The Church's story begins before evil began and ends after evil has ended… this story does not accept evil – it overaccepts it'.[131] His statement that the Israelites acknowledged that, 'in every generation many – *perhaps most* – were reluctant to perceive the treasures that had been offered' is also telling.[132] Wells stops short here of seeing ongoing failures of perception as an endemic feature of the ongoing experience of being God's people. In Ward, this tendency takes the form of discussing the Christian's distorted desire as something that is the result of having been captured by problematic cultural and socio-economic trends. So, again, the struggle with sin is not presented as an intrinsic part of discipleship, but rather as a feature that crops up in relation to specific cultural phenomena.

The corollary of this minimal focus on sin is that practices of confession and forgiveness receive relatively little attention in Ward and Wells' accounts of ethical formation. Where they are discussed, the focus is on the way these practices facilitate restoration and healing of distorted desires and relationships.[133] Restoration and transformation is, of course, what these practices should be oriented towards, but bringing this ultimate goal into the conversation too early risks obscuring a fuller recognition of sin. There is an expectation here that sin will be easy to identify.

We should note that, whilst sin is not expected to be a pervasive presence in the Christian's life, it is nonetheless expected to be present. As Wells puts it, 'members [of the Church] must positively seek to discover the ways in which they have wronged one another, never being surprised that misunderstanding and hurt occur, but seeing each instance a prelude to reconciliation, grace, and deeper relationship.'[134] There is an expectation here of ongoing discovery of sin that might not be immediately evident to the sinner, who must ask others, 'Have I wronged you in any way?', with the expectation

[131] Wells, *Improvisation*, p.113.

[132] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.18. Emphasis mine.

[133] We see this, for example, in Wells' account of the role of confession in the liturgy: 'it is not a given, it is not something that must be accepted with resignation, as the tragedy of the human condition. It is a later, secondary interruption of an original, restorable relationship.' *God's Companions*, p.142.

[134] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.88.

that the answer will be 'Yes'.[135] Wells also expects the liturgical practice of confession to involve being confronted with the false stories with which we deceive ourselves.[136]

However, the initiative in the first case is with the one asking: there is little scope in this account for an awareness of sin to break into the Christian's life at times and in ways that they are not expecting. There is also a suggestion that the ways in which one is oriented away from the Source of life can be fully recognised, and that the Christian can come to see themselves truthfully: that true, critical attention towards oneself can be achieved.[137] The tendency to move quickly to reconciliation also shuts off the possibility of deepening recognition of sin, on the one side, and lament by those wronged, on the other side.

Social sin

Furthermore, where sin is discussed, for Wells (but not for Ward) it tends to be at the level of interpersonal relationships, and not at a social or structural level. This is perhaps most starkly displayed in Wells' claim that '[s]tatus is a seesaw': that is, status is something that is performed in any given interaction (not a prior state of affairs), and is therefore always fluid. This means that class, race, gender and so forth are not really addressed by Wells as pervasive matrices of oppression, which insidiously shape the power relations in any interaction.[138]

The same problem is evident in Wells' account of being formed for improvisation. In presenting improvisation as depending on a learned deep trust between the members of the church, Wells overlooks how the ongoing presence of domination and oppression in relationships, including in the church, can meant that there are times when self-protection and the suspension of trust are needed.[139] This oversight is also present in Wells' account of account of 'overacceptance': he shows little awareness of the dangers of 'offers' being oppressive rather than gracious, nor offers an account of how one might discern whether what is being offered is truly a gift. A striking example of this is his use of the example of the 'blocking' attempted by the Native Americans of North America against their colonisers, and their subsequent suffering. This is contrasted against the Native Americans of South America, who did not violently resist and instead 'overaccepted' the offer of colonialism.[140]

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[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid., p.143.

[137] See, for example Wells, *God's Companions*, pp.70-71.

[138] Wells, *Improvisation*, p.88.

[139] Wells, *Improvisation*, p.68.

[140] Wells, *Improvisation*, p.109.

Overall, there is little sense conveyed of how sin is a formative presence within the Christian disciple, and in their relationships with others. As Medi Volpe puts it, 'without strong attention to sin's hindrance of our spiritual growth, and the need for formation as we do grow, ideas about what constitutes "Christian identity" are just that: ideas.'[141]

Assumed reliability of formative ecclesial and Christian practices

Ecclesial sin

This failure to deeply engage with the formative implications of social (or structural) sin is particularly evident when it comes to the institution of the church.

We should note here that both Ward and Wells do acknowledge that the church is not a perfect body. Ward, for instance, says that when the church speaks it must be with an awareness that 'its own voice is never pure, never innocent.'[142] We have seen that Wells, too, does question the goodness of what is received from the church, arguing that that the church is 'mired in sin, complicit in evil, shamed by its silence on injustice, and exposed as a clumsy, flawed, all-too-human failure to embody the gracious Gospel of Christ: in short, an earthen vessel.'[143] He sees the liberation movements as having brought the church to the realisation that 'history is written by the winners, whereas the faith of Mary's Magnificat proclaims the God who is on the side of losers. And the losers in Church history have tended to be the same people who have been the losers in society as a whole.'[144]

However, whilst present in the work of both, these concerns do not consistently shape either's account of formation through the practices of the church. So, Ward continues, after his acknowledgment of the church's inevitable complicity, to cast the church's role as 'announcing to the postmodern city its own vision of universal justice, peace and beauty, and … criticis[ing] the structural injustices, violences and uglinesses which resist and hinder the reception of that vision.'[145] The specific injustices discussed,

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[141] Medi Volpe, 'The Theologian', *A Theologian in the Family* (blog), accessed 5 September 2019, https://atheologianinthefamily.net/the-theologian/.

[142] Ward, *Cities of God*, p.70.

[143] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.10. See also for discussion of sin in the Church: *God's Companions*, pp.113 – 124; *Improvisation*, p.19.

[144] Wells, *Improvisation*, p.144.

[145] Ward, *Cities of God*, p.70.

then, are 'out there' in the world. There is not much sense here that the church's complicity in injustice could deeply shape and in fact compromise its ability to perceive structural injustice (and so too compromise its ability to form those of capable of perceiving and contending with injustice).

Wells' response also fails to address the depths of the concerns he cites. His belief that offering an 'uninhibited account of how the saving mercy of God inhabits the practices of the Church and shapes the Church's understanding of every pressing issue that it may encounter' necessitates, for him, setting aside 'misgivings' about the ongoing presence of sin in the church. This leads Wells to dismiss 'the hermeneutics of suspicion' by which 'every claim involving the word God is not only coercive but also a respectable mask behind which power elites maintain their sometimes subtle but invariable merciless structures of oppression.' Along with his fleeting appraisal of the value of 'subversive ethics' (by which he means those arising from liberation movements in the church), this displays a failure to properly engage with the power dynamics at play in the life of the church. [146]

We will explore this further in the following chapter, but it is worth noting for now the contrast that Wells, in particular, sets up between acknowledging the church's deep flaws and attending to God's gifts. He not only fails to properly engage with experiences of suffering in the church, but also shuts down the possibility that being brought to a new awareness of its role in oppression could in fact be a gift to the church – one that it desperately needs to receive.

Confidence in current practices

This failure to account for sin in the church is part of a wider confidence that what the Christian receives through participation the church could *in principle* guarantee good formation. Ward and Wells both know that good formation does not always happen (perhaps even that it does not *often* happen). However, they do both imply that the received practices of the church are *in principle* able to offer proper ethical formation.[147] Where oppression in the church is acknowledged, then, there is a sense that this has arisen because of a departure from the practices of true Christian tradition. What is therefore needed, according to Ward and Wells, is a retrieval of the true practices of formation. By this argument, the church already knows what is necessary for good formation, even if this is sometimes forgotten or badly executed.

[146] Wells, *God's Companions*, pp.2-4.

[147] This is in keeping with the long-standing historical understanding in the Church of England that liturgy is good because of being essentially God-given, not human-made. This renders it superior to the world 'outside' for formational purposes. This can help us to understand Anglican preoccupations with the 'authorised' form(s) of liturgy.

Offering what is already known as reparative praxis therefore fails to properly acknowledge the ongoing reality of sin and malformation in the church, including through the church mirroring and being part of the oppressive power relations of the world (a danger to which the Established church is perhaps particularly liable to fall prey).[148] Wells and Ward are aware of the dangers of abuse of power and oppression yet they fail to offer practices that force the Christian, in their ecclesial community, to continually confront and challenge the presence of sin in their own lives (particularly in ecclesial power structures). Neither discuss at any length the practices that could reveal blind spots and structure the life of the church away from such abuses.

This is part of a wider sense in these accounts of the church being closed to the development of new practices. For example, whilst Wells discusses innovation in the local congregations that feature in his work, this is not sufficient to counter the overwhelming sense of the practices of the church as fixed and already sufficient for forming disciples. Wells argues that having been formed through reenacting the story, discipleship involves the renarration of life's dilemmas in the light of the story of God in history that the disciples have received.[149] So, whilst discontinuity is present in Wells' account of improvisation, there is a clear expectation that what is encountered can be slotted into the story that is already known. Wells draws an analogy with understanding a tree cross-section in the context of the overall tree. So, the particularity that is encountered can be subsumed back into a static, preformed image. The direction of attention here is from what has been received (in the practices of the church) down to the particularity of our lives, with the puzzling and awkward fitting back into what is already known. From this we see that the narrative practices that have formed the habits that make possible improvisation are not themselves open to disruption.

For both, then, we can see a failure to seriously acknowledge the reality of sin's sustained presence in the formative practices of the church, which goes along with a trust that the practices received from the church are more or less reliable means of formation.

Mainly negative account of formation in the world

Alongside these tendencies runs a minimal account of the potential for formation for good action as a Christian *outside of* the practices of the church. Here we see the other side of the disjuncture we have observed between formation in the church and in the world: not only is the church the site of good formation, but world is site of distortion and malformation.

[148] I will go on to analyse this malformation in more depth in Part II, in ways that fill out my concerns here.

[149] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.66.

That this should be the case is not immediately obvious, as both Ward and Walls insist on the importance of engagement with the world, rooting this in the doctrines of creation and incarnation.[150] For Ward, this affirmation of material creation most strikingly takes the form of his engagement with the biological sciences. He argues, for example, that our understanding of the nature of ethical life 'can be deepened by molecular biology, epigenetics, and an investigation into sensing itself'.[151] Nonetheless, whilst Ward insists on the need for theology to respond 'positively and also critically to the postmodern city', the emphasis is on the negative. This is part of a wider ambivalence in Ward's understanding of the church in relation to the world, as Barrett has discussed:

> At times [Ward] describes a very 'concrete' ecclesial body, within which self-centred and divine desires are 'commingled', 'humble' in its judgments and 'open-ended' in its narrative. At other times, Ward's ecclesiology is more ambitious, describing an 'erotic community' which 'transgresses' institutional boundaries and 'incorporates' its 'others' in its expansiveness. At Ward's most confident, he comes close to identifying the concrete church with the 'heavenly city', and thus putting 'church' and 'world' into stark opposition. […] And although the Church is but one 'erotic community' among many others in the world – it participates within a particular 'economy of desire' – it is unique because it locates itself not, as we have seen, within the 'pathological', 'sado- masochistic' postmodern 'economy of lack', but within the abundant economy of '*Christian* desire'.[152]

Moreover, '[p]erforming the eucharist is, for Ward, to 'engender', 'embody', 'incarnate' 'the body of Christ', 'the true body'. This true body is the 'space' within which 'all ... other bodies become true only in their participation'.[153] This all combines to throw into doubt the extent to which the church, for Ward, is truly open to the challenges and gifts brought by other bodies.

This ambivalence about the world having any goodness to offer the church can also be seen in Wells' work. For all the talk of receptivity towards gifts, the overall message is that companionship with God is something contained in the church.[154] We see this expressed in the account of the practices of clothing

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[150] Ward, *Cities of God*, pp.69-70.

[151] Ward, *How the Light Gets In,* p.295. In this vein, Ward also undertakes a sustained engagement with biology as illuminating creation's teleology. Ibid., pp.291-3.

[152] Barrett, 'Interrupting the Church's Flow', p.17. Barrett further argues that it is this ambivalent description of the church itself that renders precarious the extent to which Ward's church is open to the challenge of its 'others' Ibid., p.28.

[153] Ward, *Cities of God*, pp.93-4

[154] Wells, *God's Companions*, p.9.

after baptism, which are understood as 'the moments when the new Christian receives what the church constantly rediscovers – that God gives his people everything they need to follow him, and that following him is expressed in answering the call to worship him, to be his friends, and to eat with him.'[155] The implication is that it is in the church that encounter with the Holy Spirit begins and positive ethical formation follows.

This is mirrored in a conversely negative account of the kind of formation that happens in the world. We can see this in Wells' discussion of catechesis. Wells describes the child catechumen as 'a mass of unformed urges and skills and ideas and desires', which need to be shaped into 'membership of the body of Christ'. The adult catechumen, meanwhile, is described as having 'already made commitments and developed dispositions and formed habits and fostered relationships that reflect the partial and fallen nature of a life spent, like Jacob, wrestling for identity with the angel of God.' This means, Wells argues, that for the adult 'the role of catechesis is to lead the catechumen to repentance, to recognizing the lies and deceit wrapped up in a story that seeks to airbrush God out, and to bring about not just formation but transformation, not so much life but new life, not so much nurture but death and resurrection.'[156] Wells does see the 'honest scrutiny' brought to bear upon ecclesial practices by the catechumen as a gift to the church.[157] However, it is a gift in the sense of prompting *rediscovery* of things the church knew but has forgotten. Such a rediscovery of what was already known is not the same as coming to see something new.

So, we can say that by this account, before entering into membership of the church, identity is at best unformed and, more likely, fallen. It seems that the longer one has been part of the world but not of the church, the fewer gifts one has. The closedness to reception of the new within the church, identified above, can also be seen in the way the church's relationship with the world is understood.

Summary of critique

Again, we have seen that Wells is more straightforwardly representative of the position I have critiqued here. However, we have seen here examples from the work of both Ward and Wells which display there is a strong sense of Christian formation as a return to the created order, made possible through

[155] Ibid., p.82.

[156] Ibid., p.65. We should note that these urges, skills, ideas, and desires are described as 'gifts'. Wells continues: 'Thus the child and the adult are a gift to one another in catechesis, for together they represent the perseverance of formation and the necessity of transformation, both of which constitute Christian character.'

[157] Ibid., p.64.

participation in the practices of the church. A process of ongoing perfecting is implied in this, with habituation confirming and strengthening what has already been received from the church. There is a fixed, achieved goodness to the ecclesial practices by which Christian identity is formed (with this a particular accent of Wells' thought). The material which is challenged or overthrown tends, in contrast, to have been formed by the world. We have also seen how this kind of trust in the formative practices of the Church means that the ongoing presence of sin in the life of the Christian and of the ecclesial community goes largely unacknowledged. Where sin is discussed, it is generally at an interpersonal level and not at a structural level. The possibility – let alone the inevitability – of malformation through participation in ecclesial practices receives little attention and the supposition that the practices of the church are sources of positive formation is never seriously doubted.

We can summarise these dynamics as a closedness to recognising disruption in formation – whether this is a disruptive recognition of sin in previously unapprehended ways, or a disclosure from an unexpected direction (such as from someone who is not a Christian) of a new facet of participation in the life of God. The problem, therefore, is not just a tendency to downplay Christian malformation, and to suggest the possibility of perfectibility through participation in the practices of the church. Rather, this is part of a wider dynamic of 'interiority'. By 'interiority' I mean a tendency to understand the practices of formation as somewhat self-contained. In the first instance, this means that sin (and power) becomes internalised, in a way that overlooks the way that sin is something that not only lives within each of us but also *between* us. Systemic sin and malformation cannot, therefore, be adequately accounted for, as societal and political realities are present only in internalised forms. Bound up with this is a failure to deeply acknowledge the human capacity for misrecognition and self-deception.

Sin becoming internalised means that the project for reforming desires is also conducted internally. We can see this in Ward's claim that 'it is *only in prayer* that the discipline of listening is developed'(i.e. not through listening to other people).[158] Ward is not wrong that we learn to listen through prayer, but the problem is that prayer is isolated as *the* engine for the reconstruction of desire in a way that ultimately pulls away from the ordinary mess of social interaction. As sin does not have a strong reality between humans, there is therefore no urgent need for arrangements that force the church, as the form of the corporate Christian life, to acknowledge pervasive patterns of sin.

There is, rather, an overconfidence in the Christian tradition and its ability to bring about proper formation. The received practices of the Christian tradition are understood as reliably leading to positive formation, if undertaken seriously and consistently enough by the individual Christian. Seeing already

[158] Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship*, p.280. So, it seems that there is a danger that prayer gets reduced to effectively operating as a laboratory of the imagination, and does not disrupt the settled pattern of ecclesial life.

extant practices as the solution means that the problem ends up being misdiagnosed: it must be the kind of disordering capable of being identified and rectified by these practices – rather than through governance, accountability, and so forth. So, this approach will not lead to structures being constructed and strengthened in the church that inculcate habits to trip us up and confront us with our sin. For Wells and Ward, such 'tripping-up' practices are not seen as something that must be habituated as part of love for one another. In overlooking the way that sin lives between people as well as within, Wells' and Ward's projects thus risk supporting forms of improper conservatism, by which patterns of oppression and violence are retained in the church.

The problem with this approach to formation can be otherwise understood as an unwillingness to recognise the perspectives of all others as a gift. To illustrate this, we return to Barrett's critique of Ward. Barrett argues that attention to reception 'is fundamentally, for Ward, an attention to my reception of that which *God* gives, not to my reception of the gifts of another human person.' So, whilst Ward affirms that '[h]uman beings *are* gifts to each other in an endless economy of God's grace whereby we are given in order to give', this is not carried through. For, 'whenever Ward talks not of giving, but of *receiving*, it is to *God* that are we to be receptive, in order to give to others: '[t]he question is not "How can we love?" but more "How can we *accept* such love?" ... Only to the extent to which we can receive God's unconditional love for us will we be able to pass it on, pass it forward'.'[159]

This failure to treat the perspectives of others as a gift leaves the received practices of the church generally undisturbed: Ward and Wells are not alert to the ongoing presence of sin in the trusted practices of the church because they are not particularly well attuned to the voices of those oppressed by these practices. There is therefore not a strong role for community in this in a way that challenges or disrupts received practices. Nor is there an expectation that others may even reveal, and fulfil, a lack of which we were not even previously aware. Christian formation is not expected to take place through this kind of receptivity.

We turn, then, to Rowan Williams in search of an account of discipleship in which the recognising and receiving the giftedness of others is intrinsic to the process of being formed for good action.

[159] Barrett, 'Interrupting the Church's Flow', p.72.

2

Negotiating Ethical Formation

Chapter 1 explored two sophisticated Anglican iterations of a dominant account of Christian formation, in which Christian identity is understood as something that is received in the church, and out of which flows good action in the world. Yet, we have also seen how these accounts of formation also pose problems. Against these problems, then, Rowan Williams' account of Christian formation is introduced as containing certain corrective elements, rather than as a second easily identifiable account of Christian formation. Williams shares many of the same theological commitments as Ward and Wells (not least in all being ordained priests in the Church of England), yet the structure of his account of formation differs significantly in that, for Williams, the flow of ethical formation is not straightforwardly from church to world, nor from liturgical practices to the individual Christian. We should note that, as with Ward and Wells, whilst Williams' work engages with Anglican theologians and with questions particular to Anglicanism, it is not limited to this horizon. His engagement is famously wide-ranging, with conversation partners spanning denominations and disciplines, and his work has resonance far beyond Anglicanism.

2.I. Williams' account of Christian ethical formation

So, we turn now to Williams' account of Christian ethical formation. Whilst Williams' theological output is famously wide-ranging and not easily thematised, the account of formation that I outline here, drawn from his work, is one that foregrounds the contingency of Christian identity. The core of this contingency is Williams' insistence on the radical disruption brought by the figure of Christ for our ethical identity. As Volpe puts it, '[Williams'] account [of Christian identity] rests on the fulcrum of his theological anthropology, which in turn centres on an understanding of Christian discipleship formed in response to the dynamics of incarnation.'[1] And the incarnation is perhaps primarily understood by Williams as a breaking in – a disruption of what went before. We see this, for example, in the final verse of his poem, 'Advent Calendar':

He will come, will come,

[1] Volpe, *Rethinking Christian Identity*, p.53.

will come like crying in the night,
like blood, like breaking,
as the earth writhes to toss him free.
He will come like child.[2]

Williams' account of the dynamics of the incarnation can be seen in the discipleship in the following ways: a) discipleship as the ongoing, but never achieved process of finite creatures being drawn into Christ; b) discipleship as being broken again and again at the foot of the cross, faced with the judgement and radical alterity of Christ; and c) discipleship as an eschatological identity held by God.

Ethical formation as ongoing, but never achieved growth in conformity to Christ

The ongoing, never finished, growth of finite creatures

Williams' account of Christian identity is more strongly contextualised within a fuller compass of Christian tradition than those we explored in Chapter 1.[3] As Volpe highlights, it is conducted in continuity with and faithfulness to what is inherited: an understanding of God preserved in the traditional Christian sources of the Bible, the creeds, and the interpretations of these that have been given by the theologians through the centuries.[4] Yet, for Williams, whilst formation is rightly shaped by the inherited tradition, it always also remains provisional.[5]

This sense of provisionality is grounded in an affirmation of ongoing formation as belonging to the structure of creation: 'Creation, then, is the realm in which good or beauty or stability, the condition in which everything is most freely and harmoniously itself in balance with everything else, is being sought and being formed'.[6] This is quite a radical point, in relation to significant swathes of the tradition: the good of creation is not simply given (and then fallen away from and regained), but is rather always ahead, not yet fully given. This means that we have not yet received all that we are being given. It is this account of creation that also fills out the 'locatedness' noted above as marking Christian identity:

[2] Rowan Williams, *The Poems of Rowan Williams* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2014), p.15

[3] For example, in engagement with the desert fathers and Orthodox theology, amongst many other strands of the Christian traditions.

[4] *Rethinking Christian Identity*, p.8.

[5] This provisionality should not therefore be misunderstood as undisciplined. In this way, his sense of the negotiated nature of identity is rooted in the place from which the negotiation takes place. The 'place' where this negotiation takes place is 'in Christ'.

[6] Rowan Williams, 'Good for Nothing? Augustine on Creation', *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994), 9-24 (pp.17-18).

'It is out of our particularly located embodied finitude that we negotiate and grow into our identity […]. And we must learn to start where we are, as moving, material beings'.[7] So we see that, for Williams, the negotiated and unfinished nature of our identity is proper to our nature as embodied creatures, who are always working out our identity in a particular place. [8]

This embodiment also has implications for the role of social relations in Williams' account of Christian ethical formation. The limitations of any one person's perspective are positively assessed by Williams in what Jonathan Chaplin calls 'embodied Personalism': in the web of relations in which we each stand, our identity is constituted by being *here* and not *there.*[9] Williams contends that 'what we are *are* our limits, that we are here not there, now not then, took this decision, not that, to bring us here and now.'[10] From this acknowledgement of finite limitation follows both the acceptance of the other, but also the acceptance of the impossibility of full self-knowledge through introspection. Rather, for Williams, we require the perspective of others to know ourselves.

I turn now to highlight two main ways in which this sense of provisionality and ongoing negotiation of identity can be seen in Williams' work: namely, in being drawn into conformity with Christ's self-dispossession, and in practices of taking time and making sense. I then offer Williams' account of artistic work as offering one mode of holding these strands together.

Being drawn into conformity with Christ's self-dispossession

For Williams, ongoing Christian ethical growth takes the particular form of union with Christ, and is oriented towards ever greater union through growing into conformity to Christ.[11] For Williams, Christian identity is thus at heart a growing realisation and glad acceptance that 'now it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me'; it is a growing into a relationship of dependence by which one's identity rests not upon self but upon God.[12] This dependence is reflected in a love that 'does not seek

[7] Ibid. p.18.

[8] Negotiation is understood here as a process that responds to contingency and also puts one in a contingent state - where one cannot predict in advance what one will look like at the end of the process of negotiation.

[9] Jonathan Chaplin, 'Person, Society and State in the Thought of Rowan Williams' (Lecture, 23 November 2012), https://www.vhi.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/resources-folder/papers-files/paper%20chaplin/view [Accessed 11.9.19].

[10] Rowan Williams, 'The Suspicion of Suspicion: Wittgenstein and Bonhoeffer', in *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 186–202 (p.186).

[11] As Volpe puts it, for Williams '[t]he Christian life is lived in Christ, indeed *as* Christ, by virtue of our having been joined to his body at baptism.' *Rethinking Christian Identity*, p.7. See also: Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St John of the Cross* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979), p.52.

[12] Volpe, *Rethinking Christian Identity*, p.59.

its own', the hallmark of Christian identity being the display of 'an entirely costly *disponibilité*' that imitates Christ's complete availability to others.[13] If, as Williams asserts, 'to be restored in the image of God is consistently to follow the pattern of God's life as revealed in Jesus', then costly discipleship is inherent to bearing the divine image.[14]

Central to being drawn into conformity with Christ, is then, for Williams, the enactment of practices of dispossession. These flow from Christ's self-dispossessing identification with humanity. Williams is uncompromising in his insistence that 'God identifies himself for us not in identifying with humanity in the heights of our proud achievements, but in identifying with dehumanised humanity in the depths of our weakness, condemnation, misery and despair.'[15] Therefore, '[t]o find the cross the final point of intersection between Jesus' story and ours, and to encounter God's love in his solidarity with us *there*, we have to abandon all our pretensions to goodness and success and see ourselves as those with whom Jesus in his godforsakenness was identified.' This growth into identification with Christ, who first identified with us, is powered by the ongoing presence of Christ with us: 'the self-emptying, sacrificial solidarity of the God who is with us as the crucified Jesus reaches us, changes and transforms us.'[16]

Taking time and making sense

As we noted above, affirming that Christian identity as finitely bounded through being embodied has implications for our social relations. In addition to his positive descriptions of the mutual dependence necessitated by embodiment, Williams also talks about finitude rendering social relations always

[13] Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, p.14. This language of *disponibilité* can also be found in Wells' account of Christian formation, particularly in relation to the practices of ethical improvisation. However, in Wells' usage, there are limits to this availability which are known in advance, as it is only possible to receive that which can be fitted back into the overarching story of God's people – a story that has been learnt from the church. In Williams' case, however, this availability seems to be more genuinely open-ended: Christians are to imitate Christ in his availability, whom we can never fully know. As Williams goes on in this passage: 'The end of the believer's life is knowledge *in* conformity to God. Knowledge of God is not a subject's conceptual grasp of an object, it is sharing what God is.' Ibid., p.14. So, it is only by imitating Christ's availability that we can come to know Him, and we cannot say in advance what this knowledge of God will entail. Williams understanding of how we know God therefore always retains the capacity to disrupt the seemingly settled certainties of the Christian life. Availability to God and others by this rendition leads the Christian on a path that cannot be foreknown.

[14] Ibid., p.128. See also: Volpe, *Rethinking Christian Identity*, p.57.

[15] Rowan Williams and Richard Bauckham, 'Jesus: God with Us', in *Stepping Stones: Joint Essays on Anglican Catholic and Evangelical Unity*, ed. Christina Baxter (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), 21–41(p.35).

[16] Ibid., p.36. Barrett discerns, in this preoccupation with the 'decentring', 'dislocation', 'displacement' and 'dispossession' of the individual and collective ecclesial ego, a contrast with 'an easy 'incarnationalism' to which Anglo-Catholic theology … can sometimes fall prey.' 'Interrupting the Church's Flow' (thesis), p.53. Barrett goes on: 'This 'decentring' combines (among other things) a profound contemplation of the created world, the monastic (and profoundly relational) wisdom of the Desert Fathers, and a Barthian openness to the judgment of Christ.'

inherently obscured and occluded. Yet, he also makes clear that, '[m]y obscurity to myself, yours to me, and mine to you, are not *puzzles*, waiting for fruitful suspicion to discover the real script […]'. Rather, this obscurity to ourselves and to one another is proper to our creaturely finitude and should result in 'the inescapability of taking time' in our social relations.[17]

It follows, therefore, that the task of discerning the meaning of our identity and place in the world is often explored by Williams through the metaphor of conversation – an image that reveals that this process of discernment is understood to be intrinsically social. Yet, this image should not be understood as detracting from contemplation of God; rather, for Williams, these social practices of discernment in fact lead into deeper knowledge of God and of the world. As Volpe draws out, 'taking time' in our social relations is understood as practised in an attitude of patient listening that is conducive to, and leads into, 'making sense'. [18] The process of 'making sense' is also characterised by patience because it must be true to the demands of what one is engaging.[19] When God is the 'object' one is engaging, the forms of contemplation demanded, for Williams, go beyond language and the usual ways we try to make sense of the world.

As Williams reminds us through a reading of King Lear, patience is also required to not seek explanation, but rather to make sense *amidst* the untidy fallenness of the world.[20] The finite limits of human existence also mean that a search for certain types of ultimate meaning should be eschewed, as 'we can only judge our belief and action according to our finite and fallible powers of observation and reasoning.'[21] Nonetheless, he is clear that we are called to continue in the attempt to try and 'make sense'. Such 'making sense' implies a radical loss of security, and means making judgements that are,

[17] Williams, 'The Suspicion of Suspicion', p.199.

[18] As Volpe puts it, for Williams, the aim is not to reach a single correct interpretation but to be receptive in a way that recognises that, '[w]e are always already formed by precisely that which we are trying to understand and articulate.' Medi Volpe, '"Taking Time" and "Making Sense": Rowan Williams on the Habits of Theological Imagination', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15, no. 3 (2013): 354–60., p.350.

[19] This sense of responsiveness to the demands of the engaged object comes out in Williams' engagement with the poet David Jones' sense of the 'Gratuity Ness' of art. Jones posits this 'Gratuity Ness' as the essence of art: 'the half-apprehended consonance of impressions out of which an artwork grows has to be realised in the process of actually creating significant forms which, in the process of their embodiment, in stone, words, or pigment, uncover other resonances, so that what finally emerges is more than just a setting down of what was first grasped'. So, this obedience to the artwork's unfolding logic blossoms into a more truthful revelation of the world as it is. Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (London: Continuum, 2005), p.61.

[20] Rowan Williams, *The Tragic Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). See also: Rowan Williams, 'Resurrection and Peace: More on New Testament Ethics', in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p.273.

[21] Volpe, *Rethinking Christian Identity*, pp.7-8.

necessarily, provisional and risky.[22] The riskiness of the venture of identity formation comes through in Williams' work on language, in which he recognises the insufficiency and limits of representation, and yet also its unfinished nature. The claim that there can be 'no last words' affirms the necessity of going on speaking, even whilst acknowledging that the task of representation will never be complete. Nonetheless, the voices of all are needed if we are to deepen our knowledge of ourselves and our place in the world.[23]

Self-dispossession of the artist: The continuing attempt to make meaning

We can understand how these ways of understanding ethical formation through dispossession and taking time to make sense interweave by turning our attention to Williams' account of the work of the artist.

Williams affirms both the unachievable nature of the task of representation, but also the importance and dignity of the artist's task of signification. So, in artistic work something about the gift of creation is contingently disclosed through the work of this particular person, in this particular place. Williams further argues that obedience to the demands of the artwork requires a self-dispossession in order for the artist to move away from 'describing the world simply in terms of how it relates to me', which is 'an inadequate or actively untruthful perspective'.[24] Just as we saw in Williams' wider rendition of the task of inhabiting and representing the world, the making of art must put away 'imitation, ideological imperialism, moralising and explaining'. Rather, for the true artist there is simply 'the impulse to make and remake, to share an apprehension of how things are by the very act of utterance'.[25] This attempt to apprehend and describe the world other than simply in terms of how it relates to oneself illustrates for us what is meant by dispossession.

The artist, for Williams, also mediates grace. In 'ironically, desperately, or prayerfully' struggling 'to speak of such breadth as he has perceived', the artist teaches us 'how to praise the elusive possibility of God, the future we can never quite succeed in naming.'[26] In the remaking of the artist's speech, she is the 'beginning of a new world', a sign of hope. Art thus points to the self-dispossessing love of God

[22] Volpe, "Taking time" and "making sense".

[23] Rowan Williams, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

[24] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, p.154.

[25] Rowan Williams, 'Poetic and Religious Imagination', *Theology* 80 (1977): 178–87 (pp.178;182).

[26] Ibid., pp.185- 186.

from which our 'human vocation to *caritas*' is derived.[27] In uncovering God's generative love in this way, the artist leads others to participate more deeply in the life of God.

So, in offering this account of the work of the artist, Williams shows what it might mean to learn and practice an attention that is decentring and always provisional in contexts that do not 'belong' to the church. For Williams, grace can be mediated through the process of artistic work, and he is willing and able to recognise sacramental dynamics outside of the church. In this, he departs from Ward and Wells' more ecclesially circumscribed account of formation, and of the learning of attention in particular.[28] This also illuminates how the Christian is shaped by, as well as shaping, others; for example, in being led, in the contemplation of an artwork, more fully into the life of God.

The judgement and radical alterity of Christ

Divine alterity and opacity, and the impossibility of true representation

The always incompleteness of the disciple's task of 'making sense' of their identity also derives from the necessity of continual openness to the judgement of Christ, who stands apart, utterly other.[29] Here an understanding of what it is to follow Christ must recognise his untameable alterity. For, whilst union with Christ is the first and last word on Christian identity, 'His solidarity is no uncritical endorsement of lives and attitudes opposed to God's love: it includes his confrontation and critical dialogue with the religious and political leaders of the nation and his prophetic woes on the cities that rejected his message.'[30] So, Christ's gaze of judgement destabilises settled traditions and their stable practices.

His account of the opacity and complete alterity of God reveals a further dimension to Williams' insistence on the insufficiency of language.[31] Whilst Williams, like Ward and Wells, endorses non-discursive prayer, this is in part explicitly because of the resistance of *apophasis* to falsely consoling images of the divine.[32] It is fair to say that he displays a more anguished understanding of apophatic

[27] Williams, *Grace and Necessity*, p.166.

[28] For example, both explore the training of attention principally through practices of prayer, which are taught by the church.

[29] See, for example: Rowan Williams, 'Different Christs?', in *Open to Judgement* (London: DLT, 2002), 105–11.

[30] Williams and Bauckham, 'Jesus: God with Us', p.35.

[31] This is in keeping with Williams' wider apophatic understanding of theological speech – for example, in Rowan Williams, 'Theological Integrity', *New Blackfriars* 72 (1995): 140–51.

[32] See, for example: 'Forget you have a self to be shielded, reinforced, consoled and lied to: hear the bitter truth that the cross enunciates, and accept the pain and disorientation of that enlightenment, in the trust that you are not hated and

contemplation than either Ward or Wells, and of how this develops our ability to attend. God's complete opaqueness of not only renders difficult theological speech, but also entirely removes the possibility of complacency in our Christian ethical identity. In repeatedly returning in brokenness to the foot of the cross we learn to attend both to what we are and to what we are called to be, with both senses of self fully rooted in dependence. As Williams puts it: 'Real dependence on God's grace, real apprehension of God's free action to make us righteous in his eyes, is more evident in the unconsoled endurance of inner turmoil and darkness than in bland confidence that all has been achieved, since the sense of inner darkness turns our attention away from what our minds can register, contain, and be confident of, towards the utterly mysterious love of God.'[33]

So, whilst Ward and Wells also affirm the way that Christian identity is held by the divine gaze (which in turn makes possible our attention to one another), this is more to the fore in the thought of Williams. The priority of divine attention breaking in and unsettling comfortable stability strongly shapes Williams' conception of Christian formation. The features of identity formation to the fore here are open-endedness and uncertainty, risk, and ongoing negotiation – in the world, as well as in the church.

Self-deception

We have seen, then, that Williams is concerned with failure to acknowledge the ongoing struggle against self-deception in the Christian life. Williams' sense of the clouded nature of self-knowledge extends even to one's own desires and motivations. He argues that we do not know even the shape of our own desires very well, and we will misread our desires until we are confronted with the desires of others. This emphasis on the ongoing dangers of self-deception is very different from the argument for the need to trust in oneself advanced by Wells, in his account of formation through improvisation. If part of the Christian life is the impossibility of ever being sure that one is not deceived by oneself, this will also inevitably generate uncertainty about the formative potential of practices received through the Christian tradition (both individually and corporately), rendering these more open to revision than is allowed for by Ward or Wells.

So, whilst Williams values the formative potential of prayer (particularly contemplative prayer), he also understands desires to be shaped not just when we wrestle with them in the unconsoled difficulty of our wordless prayer but also through social encounter. The opacity of others thus also acts as a check on

abandoned…'. Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002), p.54.

[33] Rowan Williams, Kenneth Stevenson, and Geoffrey Rowell, eds., *Love's Redeeming Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) , p. 8.

false images of ourselves and leads us to continually renegotiate our sense of who we are. Yet this is not a picture of negotiation that starts from clear and fixed positions; rather, we discover who we are through ongoing interaction. Here, Williams can serve too as a corrective to Ward's more strongly individuated account of learning to attend through personal prayer, in that, unlike Ward, his awareness of our capacity for self-deception results in making other people intrinsic to learning to attend – to God, ourselves, and to others. This contrasts with the accounts of the previous chapter, in which social relations are generally understood as something *flowing out of* having first learned to attend to God.

A forgiven and eschatological identity held by God

Receiving our identity through penitence and forgiveness

For Williams, the 'difficult question' of Christ means that rhythms of self-inspection and penitence are intrinsic to Christian ethical formation.[34] Yet, these are to be understood as ingredients in the ordinary shape of a life; that is to say, whilst central to the tone of Williams' work, penitence is not understood to be a thing in itself outside of a whole life. Unlike the relatively linear accounts of Christian formation we saw in Chapter 1 (charting a gradual progression towards becoming better formed), for Williams there is a pattern of 'reversal and renewal' in the ethical development of the disciple.[35] This pattern is set by the Christian story, which the lives of disciples then echo.[36] In this way, we are offered a corrective to the tendency seen in Chapter 1 to overlook the centrality of the practices of penitence and forgiveness in Christian formation. For Williams, the rupture of coming to a renewed awareness of one's sinfulness, and the reweaving that follows, are intrinsic to discipleship. So, this is not a linear, harmonious kind of formation.

As well as the forms of loss and fragmentation that ensue from divine judgement, there is also joy and unity - for only God can tell us our story of justification. In this way, we find our identity in the forgiveness at the foot of the cross. Williams echoes Bonhoeffer:

> I have been ''heard'' by God, and I have been given words – of praise and penitence and thanks – that direct me away from the question of how I shall ''know myself''. I have been given time to learn what to say, with the help of the language of praise; because this is a language in which

[34] David Newton, 'The Demanding Call and the Difficult Question: Stanley Hauerwas and Rowan Williams in Conversation', *Theology* 119, no. 4 (2016): 268–75.

[35] Volpe, *Rethinking Christian Identity*, p.59.

[36] Rowan Williams, 'Beginning with the Incarnation', in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 79–92(p.83).

> my finitude and limit are affirmed at the same time as my freedom and value, I may better learn from this how to speak to others without assuming their refusal, giving time to them and inviting them to give it to me.[37]

The unifying gaze of love and authenticity not essence

The kind of ambiguity and provisionality that we have seen carries with it, as Volpe observes, 'a kind of eschatological reserve.' This can be seen in Williams' sense of 'the incompleteness of selves': 'We glimpse fragments of ourselves; only God sees the whole picture, and the way all the pieces fit together.'[38] The gaze of judgement is therefore not only what shatters all premature attempts to unify and finalise the self, but also what holds our identity together, as Williams explores in 'Nobody Knows Who I Am Till The Judgement Morning'.[39] Holding together the always incomplete, provisional, and continually rebroken aspects of Christian identity is Williams' sense of eschatological identity. For, whilst not fully knowable this side of eternity, we nonetheless do have a coherent ethical identity that is held by God.

For Williams, then, authenticity of identity is not about the discovery and expression of a 'true' self:

> You have an identity not because you invented one, or because you have a little hard core of selfhood that is unchanged, but because you have a witness of who you are. What you don't understand or see, the bits of yourself you can't pull together in a convincing story, are all held in a single gaze of love. You don't have to work out and finalise who you are, and have been; you don't have to settle the absolute truth of your history or story. In the eyes of the presence that never goes away, all that you have been and are is still present and real; it is held together in that unifying gaze […] the divine observer, the divine witness.[40]

Volpe thus sees in Williams' description of the habits of the Christian life an account that balances the idea that identity is always under construction with a sense that a 'narrative of identity [is] possible despite the inherent ambiguity of that construction.' [41] This is the flipside of the radical loss of security that is implied by the practice of making sense, in that '[u]nderstanding oneself as finite and incomplete

[37] Williams, 'The Suspicion of Suspicion', p.199.

[38] Volpe, *Rethinking Christian Identity*, p.7.

[39] Williams, *On Christian Theology*, pp.276-289.

[40] Rowan Williams, *Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian Life* (London: SPCK, 2016), p.29.

[41] Volpe, *Rethinking Christian Identity*, p.53.

means depending upon God for one's sense of wholeness.' [42] Certainty about coherence of Christian identity is not achieved in analysis, but in trust and hope.

This allows us to see that, whilst proper to our creaturely, dependent identity, the finitude of our perspective is not the whole story of our identity, which is held by God. From this follows the opacity of Christian identity - both of ourselves to ourselves, and of others to ourselves. The resistance of identity to analysis in terms of essence goes along with the way hearing one's story from God enables self-dispossession. Preeminently, hearing our story from Christ is what marks us as disciples – those who, by the Spirit within us, are being drawn into conformity with Christ.[43] Self-dispossession is thus both required for entry into this journey towards conformity, and is made possible by the confident assurance of one's story being held secure.

Summary

We have seen two main strands in Williams' account of formation that contrast with the accounts offered by Ward and Wells. In relation to the struggle against malformation, sin is understood as an ongoing and disruptive presence in the life of the Christian. This therefore requires practices that continually disrupt our settled understandings of our Christian identity. So, he has a stronger awareness of the ongoing need to grapple with sin as part of discipleship – and therefore more strongly emphasises penitence and forgiveness as central formative practices. Furthermore, all ecclesial practices are seen as themselves fallible, and in ongoing need of challenge, disruption, and reform. More explicit for Williams than for Ward and Wells is the sense that our trust should be in the calling we receive from the one who calls us, rather than primarily in the practices we have already received (although these point to the source of Christian ethical vocation). This leads Williams to emphasise those practices which disrupt a deceptive sense of Christian formation as something secure and harmoniously unfolding.

More positively, the social contingency of Christian ethical formation is drawn out by Williams, with this understanding of discipleship affirming a significant role for how those around us can direct and shape us. So, the flow of formation for good action is not simply from church, to disciple, to world, but is more dynamic than this. For, the positive side of holding formative practices open to challenge, disruption, and reform, is the sense that the ongoing work of God in the life of the Christian is more richly disclosed when the practices are negotiated and worked out in contingent social settings. In this way we see the abundance of the divine life in which we participate made. So, his strong affirmation of

[42] Volpe. *Rethinking Christian Identity*, p.58.

[43] Williams, 'Word and Spirit', *On Christian Theology*.

the ongoing need for disruption and challenge imparts a different quality to Williams' sense of how ethical formation takes through participation in ecclesial practices: practices that are understood to be positively formative are so because of the way they are, in their structure, held open to being disturbed by God.

2.II. Attention

Practices of attention are again central to this understanding of how Christian formation for good action takes place. We have already observed that Williams emphasises the fundamental importance of disciples recognising that they are the object of a creator's redeeming and loving attention.[44] Whilst the reception of this continually unfolding divine attention is what holds creatures in being (and makes possible our attention to creation), we have also seen that we should not fail to acknowledge the difficulty of receiving divine attention. So, whilst Ward and Wells also agree that this divine attention is prior to all else, Williams places a much stronger emphasis on the way the divine gaze is disruptive of the Christian life. This means that the impulse to understand formation as a somewhat self-contained process is thwarted right away by not being allowed to forget that discipleship (indeed creaturely life itself) depends on remaining open to the divine gaze within which we are always held.

In remaining open to God, contemplative prayer is an important practice for Williams. The kind of suspension of self involved is captured well in his image of the moment in which one catches sight of a kingfisher, and every other thought, concern, and awareness of one's own agenda melts away.[45] For Williams, discipleship is characterised by an anticipatory 'soul posture', which always expects that God will be at work in the world and therefore seeks to train oneself to be able to recognise (often surprising) divine action. So, this vertical attention to God leads into horizontal attention to others: there is a dependent relationship between attention to God and to the things of the world for Williams, as there is for Ward and Wells. One learns to attend to others through attending to God.

2.II.i. Being attended to by others

However, Williams' emphasis on the way discipleship involves learning to see the other not in relation to one's own needs, but to celebrate the other as gift, marks a point departure from Ward and Wells. Wells and Ward at times say similar things about one another's giftedness, yet Williams is distinctive in emphasising that this giftedness means that we need to be receiving the attention of others – and to value the insights this brings – in ways that disrupt our prior sense of identity. The anticipatory soul posture means expecting God to be forming each of us through those around us.

[44] Indeed, '[t]he indispensable feature of this way of being is an openness or attentiveness to God, such that "the creator can pour his life into the finite self and so find his image there."' Volpe, *Rethinking Christian Identity*, p.57, citing Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, p.131.

[45] Williams, *Being Disciples*, pp.4-5.

This goes along with Williams' underlining that it is out of being attended to – learning to be objects of attention – that the process of learning to attend also grows. This is expressed in his picture of sexual relationship in 'The Body's Grace', drawing on Thomas Nagel. Mike Higton summarises Nagel's description of the way, for Romeo and Juliet, sexual desire spirals into complexity:

> He begins with Romeo regarding Juliet with sexual desire, and being aware that he does so; Romeo is aware, to some extent, of this as something taking place in *his* body, and also (very) aware of *her* body. Juliet, it so happens, also regards Romeo with similar sexual desire, and is aware that she does so. … [T]hings start to get interesting when Romeo notices Juliet's desire. Noticing this sharpens his own desire for her, yes, but it also makes him aware of *himself* as the object of her desire, and of her as a subject with her own desires, not just as an object of his desire. In Nagel's story, Juliet now notices Romeo's desire for her, and she too finds her desire for him sharpened, and in the same way becomes more aware of him as a subject and herself as object. And Nagel argues that things get still more complex: Romeo might see that Juliet not only desires him, but that she has seen (and been aroused by) his desire for her – and this itself might further feed his own desire; and similarly Juliet might be aroused not just by Romeo's desire for her, but by the very fact of *his* arousal at *her* desire for him... [46]

So, there is a dynamic here of noticing what the other person is feeling; coming to recognise what one is feeling oneself; and this being mirrored back to the other through the lens of one's own feelings. And the practice powering this spiralling into desire is that of learning to let the other attend to oneself. It is this that drives the refractive uncurling of desire, leading 'into vulnerability and mutuality'.[47] So, learning to be receive the attention of others is an important part of being ethically formed, making possible action that seeks others' good.

Disciples also need to stay open to receiving attention because there is never room for complacency that one is attending as one ought.[48] This is in keeping with his sense of Christian identity as something that cannot be 'achieved' or fixed. Williams' emphasis on our capacity for self-deception and therefore our continual need of the attention of others, can be also read as a corrective to Ward and Wells' sense of learning to attend as primarily an internalised process. Here we see a stronger emphasis on formation as involving an ongoing struggle to discover how one is still wedded to bad ways of seeing and learn what true attention involves.

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[46] Mike Higton, 'The Ecclesial Body's Grace: Obedience and Faithfulness in Rowan Williams' Ecclesiology', *Ecclesiology* 7 (2011): 7–28(p.14), referencing Thomas Nagel's 'Sexual Perversion', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 66: 1. (1969), 5-17.

[47] Higton, 'The Ecclesial Body's Grace', p.21.

[48] Volpe, *Rethinking Christian Identity*, p.57.

For Williams, being attended to by others also makes us aware of divine attention: there is a sense in which we mediate God's attention to one another. Jessica Martin expresses a similar sense in relating her experience of attending a support group for the relatives of addicts, in which attention is given to one another and together to common sorrow:

> Nothing dramatic has happened, but the space left by our collective silences still there, light filtering though cloud cover in a big sky. Held in the large space made somehow between my hands is every intractable situation I have encountered that day, and will encounter (the same ones, and new ones) tomorrow and the next day. I am not being required to solve anything, or to perform great feats of faith or marathons of nagging the divine with this or that trouble. But, just for today, I have been given the strength to hold them all towards the unsettling compassion of the Person I let myself encounter from time to time, who stands waiting in the silences, still knowing griefs, still carrying sorrows, stilling tempests, sanctifying the moment.[49]

We can see, then, that an important and distinctive strand in Williams' account of discipleship emphasises that we not only learn to attend but that we also learn to let others attend to us.

2.II.ii. Attending to others

A further corollary of this is that we should expect to participate, by the practice of attention, in God's ways in the world. We see this expressed in Scharen's framing of the basic mandate of discipleship (and of theological endeavour) as being 'joined to God's mission of loving and healing the world.' This involves working at the disciplined craft of attention, so as to seek to 'understand the complexity of this beautiful and broken world', and to recognise God's healing ways within it.[50] As God works in and through the particularities of each situation, attention is demanded to those particularities. Moreover, paying attention to the world as the arena of God's mission involves seeing possibilities for being joined into that mission.

Attention should shape, then, both the one attending and the one being attended to. As Tim Jenkins argues, the act of seeking to comprehend others 'cannot be a kind of passive act leaving one or both

[49] Jessica Martin, 'Attention', in *Praying for England: Priestly Presence in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Samuel Wells and Sarah Coakley (London: Continuum, 2008), 107–24(pp.123-124).

[50] Christian Scharen, *Fieldwork in Theology: Exploring the Social Context of God's Work in the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), p.5.

sides unchanged'.[51] So, coming to understand our being as contingently dependent on being open to disruption by God means, for Williams, that we should carry this openness to contingent disruption into our social relations. This is expressed in who one pays attention to and how one expects to be surprised – with this possibility of being surprised requiring a certain quality of attention.

There is a tendency for this socially disruptive flow of attention from others to oneself to be overlooked in Ward and Wells' accounts, yet it actually discloses something crucial about the way God's action in the world is understood. The quality of attention I have been arguing for holds within it the expectation that God's ongoing work to continue to form Christians for good action happens also through those around us. For, it is central to the rediscovery of self involved in formation that we learn to see in new ways how we are already situated within a community, into which we may enter more deeply.[52] There is an abundance disclosed through this kind of attention: an 'ever-more' that flows out of the life of the Godhead.[53]

[51] Timothy Jenkins, 'Fieldwork and the Perception of Everyday Life', *Man* 29, no. 2 (1994): 433–55(p.445). A further dimension of the way we are changed through the practice of attention can be seen in Stuart Jesson's constructive engagement with Simone Weil's account of attention, in 'Compassion, Consolation, and the Sharing of Attention', in *Simone Weil and Continental Philosophy*, ed. A. Rebecca Rozelle-Stone (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 121–42. Jesson makes the argument that attention is closely related to empathy: so, through attending to the same object as another person, I come to be able to enter more fully into their situation, and so to appreciate anew both the gifts and the difficulties of their life. In the sharing of attention, consolation is generated and the troubling situation is seen in a subtly different light, refracted through the other's attention to it. Here, both of those doing the attending are changed by the encounter. This wider, social understanding of attention also gives scope to speak of attending together, not only as something that is done between individuals (attending to one another) but also as something that communities do together, as we will explore further in Chapter 5.

[52] These aspects of the practice of attention can be expressed through contrasting reflection and refraction. We attend through reflecting back to the other how we have seen God at work in their life, so that they might continue to grow into the person they are called to be. And in receiving attention, we allow our sense of who we are, and who we might be, to be disrupted. As we saw in Williams' account of the shaping of identity through language, we also attend to the other by processing their words: taking time to make sense. This necessitates allowing them to disrupt and reshape our preformed thinking. We can also understand this refractive mode of attention in expressing the connections we see to other horizons of thought, with the hope that this refraction of the other's thinking allows her to find herself anew.

[53] Ben Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.179. referencing Hans Urs von Balthasar's use of the phrase in *Theodramatik* vol. IV.

Conclusion to Part I

Both Ward and Wells can be fairly represented as emphasising the way in which formation for good action happens in the church. Wells' writing in particular is marked by a confidence that we have been given all that we need to be Christians – to become who we are called to be as God's people. In Ward too, there is a sense of Christian formation as the confirming, strengthening, and deepening of one's original creaturely identity, against the distorted formation offered by the postmodern city. This ecclesial ethical formation challenges and overthrows, therefore, the existing formation that one that has received from the world.

However, in exploring these accounts certain problems have come into view. Firstly, these models of formation do not acknowledge the depths of the ongoing reality of sin in the life of the Christian and the need, therefore, for that which is seen as fixed to be always disrupted. This, in turn, encourages practices that do not necessarily trip us up and confront us with our sin. I have argued that, in overlapping ways, Ward and Wells are both using models of formation that are not disturbed and driven by the voices of others. These accounts of formation do not consistently display a high regard for the perspectives of others, and this also accounts for the positive formational role of social relationships and communal identity going under-considered.

In engagement with Williams, we have seen the need to account for ethical formation as not simply taking place through practices which have already been fully received by the Church (which are *in principle* able to offer proper ethical formation). Rather, I have argued that ethical formation must be understood as involving ongoing awareness of the presence of sin in the Christian's life, and of the scope for ecclesial practices to distort as well as positively form identity. This is what living in relation to Christ requires. We might talk about this as a confidence in what we are called to be, rather than principally in the concrete practices of formation that have been received. There is also a positive flipside to this: it is an ongoing unsettling that is reflective of the abundant dynamism of the life of the God, as disclosed to us through God's ways with the world which continually bring us to new findings of what it means to live as a Christian.

Through engaging with these variegated accounts of formation, the concept of attention has emerged as central for understanding the practices that power the formation of Christian ethical identity. The accounts offered by Ward and Wells tend to focus on the way that learning to attend to God and those around us is made possible by, and flows out of, participation in practices taught by the church. The

account offered of the formative nature of attention offered by Williams, in contrast, has a stronger emphasis on the way that receiving God's attention and the attention of those around us should reshape and disrupt our practices and identity. Williams underlines this posture of openness to the attention of others as central to being formed for ethical action. We live in, and through, an unceasing divine attention to the existing materials of one's own life, and the life of each and every other, in the world – to each of our specific histories, our particularities, our existing capacities and possibilities. So, our learning to attend is as those who are recipients of this attention, who must learn to share in this attentiveness (both to ourselves and to others).

So, whilst Wells and Ward ground their accounts of attention in prayer and suggest social implications of this, Williams draws out this latter dimension more fully, embedding social contingency all the way down, rather than turning to the social as flowing out of a pure, individuated practice of attention. An awareness of these differing emphases regarding attention will become important in the following chapters for consideration of the practices by which we structure life together in the polity of the church and in the wider political community. For, these prescribed practices can lead to a commitment to continual acknowledgement and confrontation of structures of violence – or, conversely, to an unintended continuing support for these oppressive and violent practices.

In Part I, then, we have been thinking about formation for good action. We now turn, in Part II, to consider how the church is not only a body that forms but is also itself always being formed.

Part II

Formation of Ecclesial Polity

Introduction

From Part I we have seen that there is a lot of talk about the ethical and political formation of Christians in the church. However, there is not much talk about the church *as a political body*. Moreover, what there is tends to overlook the contested, negotiated nature of the church's political life. In other words, it tends to overlook that the polity of the church is itself *being formed*, as well as *forming*. We have seen that we need such a vision of the church because accounts of a basically finished church do not richly account for Christian formation. So, here our questions are: how can we think about the church itself as a body needing to be formed (and to go on being formed), especially at the level of polity? So, instead of focusing on the political formation of individuals within the Body, my focus shifted here to the ongoing formation of the Body itself. For, if the church is politically formative, it will be so through the ways in which it inhabits this complex space.

Discussion of the church as political, and as politically formative, is often conducted at a high level of abstraction. Against this tendency, a central claim here is that in talking about the church as political we need to pay attention to the *form* of polity taken. This means, amongst other things, attending to the way liturgical texts are actually enacted and also the non-liturgical practices by which the life in ecclesial polity is governed and functions. For, to speak of ecclesial polity is to express a concern with *how* the life and identity – the calling - of the church is enacted. As Peter Sedgwick puts it, it is in the church that 'God's love that is Christ takes form in the present and is mediated to humanity, but such formation is structured through the polity of the Church.'[1] As Dan Hardy puts is, '[w]hat the church mediates – through the mutual consent of its people – is the being and purposes of God, not in some vaguely personal or spiritual way but through its very institutions.' Attention to the life operative through these institutions is therefore imperative.[2] Donald McFadyen likewise states that, whilst polity

[1] Peter Sedgwick, 'On Anglican Polity', in *Essentials of Christian Community*, ed. David Ford and Dennis Stamps (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), pp.211-212.

[2] Daniel W. Hardy, *Finding the Church: The Dynamic Truth of Anglicanism* (London: SCM Press, 2001), p.158. Hardy also writes of the churches of the Anglican Communion, that '[t]heir polity 'orders' or organizes their response to this calling to 'mediate God's life and purposes in the realities of differing situations throughout the world'. Ibid.

is almost invisible within a society, this is precisely because of its pervasiveness: for, 'a society's life takes place within and through its polity.'[3]

So, we must attend, then, to the way the life of church is worked out through its polity, and particularly to the way negotiation happens amidst deep difference for the sake of its common life. This is with a view to accounting for the ways those who belong to this polity and participate in its common life shape the body. The concern of polity is, as McFadyen puts it, with 'the *structures and the distribution of responsibilities in a society*. In other words, how things are and are done: who does what, where and when.'[4] So, I will be spending time in the next few chapters considering the way inclusion and exclusion from responsibilities shapes the polity and its members.[5]

Structure of Part II

In the context of my wider concern with the ways the Church of England in particular forms Christian political identity, it is in Chapter 3 that I begin to address Anglican polity specifically. I do so by setting out some basic dynamics or tensions that shape (or *should* shape) the polity of the Church of England.

The church needs to go on being formed in part because, as we saw in Part I, there is ongoing struggle within it with sin. We have seen the need, therefore, to better account for how malformation occurs through the structures and practices of the church. In Chapter 4, then, I look more closely at the way the polity and practices of the church are (mis-)shaped by sin.

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[3] Donald McFadyen, 'Towards a Practical Ecclesiology for the Church of England' (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2005), p.138 (Italics original).

[4] Ibid.

[5] It is worth noting here that recent Anglican discussions of ecclesiology have tended to be approached through the lens of mission. In this debate, there are strong questions about the nature of the relationship and boundary of the church and wider world. Yet this debate is not concerned in any neat way with answering the same questions that I am asking. 'Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context' (Mission and Public Affairs Council, 2004) has a really strong sense of contrast between church and world (with the world principally understood as mission field) but without sense of church as counter society– it is almost apolitical regarding the church. Where the church is in view, it tends to be about the church as the means to individual salvation. Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank's, *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expression* (London: SCM Press, 2010) meanwhile (as Gittoes, Green, and Heard put it), 'affirms the nature of the Church as given – and reasserts the value of the parish as a given locality over what is chosen within the Fresh Expressions movement. However, there is a risk that the Church's liturgical practices are seen as predetermined and sufficient, leaving the scope of engagement with God's ways in the world limited.' *Generous Ecclesiology,* p.7. Whilst these debates have some overlap with my concerns in this thesis, they are not particularly illuminating of my guiding concerns.

Having seen that there are no guaranteed ways of properly forming church polity and its members, I argue in Chapter 5 that there are nonetheless postures, processes, forms of polity, which can put us in a position of openness toward the ongoing discovery of sin. There are things we can do as members of the church to wait upon the work of the Holy Spirit, and to be oriented to what the Spirit has so far shown. I explore here the kinds of ecclesial practices which foster the recognition and confession of the ongoing, disruptive, and structural presence of sin in the polity of the church, and which allow for the reception of gifts from unexpected people and places.

3

The Form of Church Polity

In this chapter, I identify three central tensions that characterise the negotiation of life in the ecclesial polity, and so help us to think through the shape into which this political body should be formed. The first set of tensions is drawn from Scriptural descriptions of the early church, whilst the second and third set are more particular to theological descriptions of Anglican polity.[6]

[6] I have ended up using 'polity' as a way of speaking of the corporate social and political identity of the church, and in a way that lends itself later on to discussion of other forms of polity. However, I readily acknowledge that this is not a neutral way of speaking of the way the life of the church is enacted and regulated, and risks downplaying the kinship/*oikos* shape of ecclesial identity. Nonetheless, my use of the term 'polity' is intended to include both of these, and other, descriptions of the community of the church.

3.I. The church as both *oikos* and *polis*

In order to help with disambiguating speech about the church as political, we will briefly look at the language used to describe the political character of the nascent church in the New Testament. In particular, it is worth pausing to note how the language of *polis* is intrinsically tied to that of *oikos* when used to describe the community of the church, in such a way that both are reconceptualised. In the new creation of the church, these previously unreconciled 'linguistic worlds' are combined.[7] As Bernd Wannenwetsch stresses, this is a deliberate combining, not simply an incidental placement next to one another. These are not just alternative pictures of the church – rather, both are united and in so doing, fundamentally transformed. So, worship makes Christians 'fellow citizens in the household of faith'.[8] Luke Bretherton likewise remarks that, 'the sociality of the people, as an assembly and *polis*, is to be characterized by relations of fellowship/*koinōnia* (analogous to the mutual sharing and solidarity of kin).'[9]

So, we begin by exploring the application of the language of the civic *polis* to describe the church. Dorothea Bertschmann notes how, whilst the term πολίτευμα has often been understood as evoking a distant country, 'where the Philippians are fully at home and enjoy the rights of citizens', it has also 'very active and dynamic connotations, signifying political actions, the subjects of political actions' in the present.[10] Williams adds to this sense of the political life of the church through drawing out the implications of the language of *ekklesia* (a public assembly of the people), which recasts the church as the civic assembly of a new social order. As the citizens' assembly the church is 'not a private group, not a transcendental worshipping community in heaven, but a civic fact': 'a place where members of a civic society exercise their civic dignity […] in a common life that seeks to conform itself to the purpose, in this case, of God'.[11] Bretherton comments that by drawing on classical usage, the New

[7] Bernd Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.143. In drawing on Wannenwetsch's work, I am mindful of his personal ethical history. This becomes particularly relevant in later discussions of power and status within the church. For this reason, Wannenwetsch's is not a central voice in this dissertation – I draw on him only to make discrete points, and not as a sustained conversation partner in the advancement of my thesis.

[8] Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship*, p.144, referencing Ephesians 2.19.

[9] Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life*, p.409.

[10] Dorothea Bertschmann, '"But Our Constitution Is in Heaven": New Testament Sketches on the People of God between Divine Law and Earthly Rulers', in *Christianity and Constitutionalism*, ed. Nicholas Aroney and Ian Leigh (forthcoming).

[11] Rowan Williams, 'Rethinking the Church: Lesslie Newbigin and the Household of God' (Lecture, 2017), https://newbiginhouse.org/2017/10/video-rowan-williams-rethinking-the-Church/ [Accessed 20th June 2018].
William Cavanaugh likewise argues that the church as *ekklesia* is not an 'association ... gathered around particular interests', but 'an assembly of the whole', where 'those who are by definition excluded from being citizens of the polis and consigned to

Testament authors convey that 'it is active and virtuous participation or communion (*koinōnia*) in the people that is a condition for fulfilling what it means to be human.'[12] This all gives us a sense of life in the ecclesial polity as necessarily participatory, involving active negotiation of common life.

Additionally, understandings of what it means to be the people of God are radically reordered through being described as a household. To understand the church in familial terms expresses that it is a community held together by, and whose distinctiveness lies in, relationships with a single person: 'it is the kinship group of Jesus of Nazareth.'[13] So, the church's membership is constituted by sharing in the circulation of a life.[14] In seeking to better understand the contested and negotiated political life of the church, we must not lose sight, then, of the impossibility of speaking of the church as if it has a free-standing life aside from the life of Christ – as if membership can be reduced to visible participation. Rather, as Williams puts it, '[k]inship is a bare fact about belonging together: commonality as the Church is not based on an agreement that has been brokered, but is about the simple fact that you and the person next to you both belong to someone independent of both of you.'[15]

Moreover, from the nature of this person who creates kin follows the openness of the *oikos*: for, as Williams writes, the 'Christian community has a focus for its identity in Jesus, yet the "limits" set by Jesus are as wide as the human race itself.'[16] In a similar vein, Benjamin Myers draws out Williams' understanding of 'Christ as the beginning of a reconciled human community in which all dividing boundaries are broken down'.[17] Recognising how kinship with Christ cuts across all other 'natural' ties of belonging is important not only for the ordering of life 'inside' the church, but also for the relationship between the church and the world in relation to the kingdom, which are, as Julie Gittoes

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the oikos – women, children, slaves – are given full membership through baptism'. – William Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Christian Practices of Space and Time* (London: T&T Clark, 2001). pp.117-118.

[12] Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life*, p.406. Whereas, '[n]oncommunion means one is subject to a realm of spiritual and moral chaos.' Ibid.

[13] Rowan Williams, 'Rethinking the Church: Lesslie Newbigin and the Household of God'.

[14] Ibid. As such, as Mike Higton writes of Williams' conception of the Church, '[t]he Church, in order to be the Church, must constantly represent to itself the fact that its life depends upon Jesus' life.' For '[t]he Church 'is not accidentally, but essentially *his* community, and its life demands 'steady and radical exposure to the fundamental events of Christian faith'. Mike Higton, 'Rowan Williams' in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology*, edited by Paul Avis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 505–24 (pp.508-509). Higton is quoting Rowan Williams and James Atkinson, 'On Doing Theology', in *Stepping Stones: Joint Essays on Anglican Catholic and Evangelical Unity*, ed. Christina Baxter (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), 1–20(p.7).

[15] Williams, 'Rethinking the Church'.

[16] Rowan Williams, 'Trinity and Revelation', in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 131–147(p.137).

[17] Benjamin Myers, *Christ the Stranger: The Theology of Rowan Williams* (London: T & T Clark, 2012), p. 51.

notes, undermined by the imposition of 'false limits'.'[18] So, just as understanding the church as *polis* does not mean it possesses and controls a territory, understanding the church to be a household is not to render it a closed and static community. This reconceptualistion of both spheres in their uniting, then, gives us an outline of the form of ecclesial life to which we are called.

[18] Julie Gittoes, 'Where Is the Kingdom?', in *Generous Ecclesiology: Church, World and the Kingdom of God*, ed. Brutus Green, James Heard, and Julie Gittoes (London: SCM Press, 2013), pp.98-99.

3.II. Two central paradoxes of Anglican polity

We move now to consider how this kind of negotiation of paradoxes is understood and manifested in the Church of England.[19] It is worth noting at the outset that the difficulty in overlaying accounts and in finding resonant language to speak of Anglican polity is compounded by diverse manifestations of polity on which these accounts reflect and which they seek to describe. At the same time, we must bear in mind that these accounts do not just replicate what is happening on the ground – rather, normative statements are being made about what the church *ought* to be. Furthermore, these accounts of polity are themselves in play, forming in some ways how polity is enacted. So, in saying, as I will below, that an account of the church as humble is important for conceptions of Anglican polity, this is not to say that the Church of England *is* a particularly humble church. Rather, I am saying that this has become important to the self-understanding of the church, as articulated mainly by certain academics and clergy, and this sustained articulation has come to shape a broader self-understanding of what it is to be the Church of England. It has come to be part of how we understand ourselves, and so is partially true of how Anglicanism works: it has come to form polity in certain ways.

All that being said, we turn to two central and, ostensibly, paradoxical understandings of Anglican polity: the church as both confident and humble, and located in both its gathering and scattering.

3.II.i. Confident and humble polity

Hardy states that 'Anglican polity is based on a humble confidence in Anglican Christianity as a mediation of the engagement of the triune God with the world.'[20] By this account – one that is perhaps most fully expounded by Williams – the choice between the church as confident or humble is false: for, 'our real confidence, our ultimate security, is our radical insecurity in the presence of Christ, who is alone our security'.[21] It is this ultimate confidence that should allow the Church of England to examine itself and confront the ways in which we get church wrong.

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[19] Anglican polity is deeply entwined with every dimension of the relationship between the church and the wider civic community in the formation of Christian political identity, and in Part III I will discuss how this plays out in civil society and in relation to the state. However, for now, my concern is with describing and analysing how conceptualisations of polity shape the church's corporate identity and relations of belonging, and with suggesting how this could and should work better. I should note here that in speaking of 'Anglican polity' I am, unless otherwise stated, speaking only of the Church of England rather than of the wider Anglican Communion.

[20] Hardy, *Finding the Church*, pp.158-159

[21] Williams, 'Rethinking the Church'.

Confident

For Williams, the confidence of the church, therefore, is not about its history, traditions, institutional structures, but about its call to be the assembly: the convoked, convened body of those who inhabit the new creation. As he puts it, '[w]e have been summoned, we are united, we are given a share in what is eternally Jesus' life'.[22] In this way, Williams relates the proper confidence of the church to his account of it as household: a household, or habitat, is where we know we live. It is where we know we can return (to be fed), and to which we know we can invite others (to share our food). So, confidence in the church is not about our ability to solve problems, but about 'where we know there is food, and how we keep the door open'.[23]

In showing forth the life of Christ in this way, Williams goes on to argue, the church inevitably holds a particular place in the world. It is to be a place where people know that certain dimensions of their humanity belong most fully, as these are birthed and brought more fully to life through being centred in the unique events around the living, dying and rising again of Jesus of Nazareth.[24] Therefore, it is possible to say with confidence that 'to belong in the Church is to know what God wants you to know, because it is to live as God wants you to live.'[25] Yet this place that is a distinctive form of life in the world, capable of inviting and resourcing, is not something to be possessed and defended. Whilst the church's calling leads it to seek a place and a voice in society, this is not to be a specially protected place. Indeed, Williams ventures, the distinctive characteristic of the place of Christ is that it does not seek to be a protected form of life.[26]

Humble

We can see then that, by this account of polity, the church's confidence in its calling obliges it to think critically and to work hard at what the church looks like. Two central aspects of the humility of the polity of the church are the acknowledgement of its ongoing need for penitence and the recognition of the provisionality of its institutional structures.

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Rowan Williams, *Anglican Identities* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2004), pp.92 – 95.

[26] Williams, 'Rethinking the Church'.

Williams' sense of the provisionality of Christian identity that we saw in the previous chapter is set in the context of an ecclesiology that is also never achieved in any finalisable way. In a similar vein, Gittoes underlines the always incomplete nature of the church: '[a]s it refers all social meaning to the truth of God, the Church is much more conditional than is recognized by those who suppose it is somehow complete and perfect. Whatever grasp it has of the truth of God, it still needs the deepest formation.' She sees this incompleteness embodied in the formative practices of the liturgy: 'The Scriptures we read embody the complexity of human life lived before God, and the struggles of holiness; the Eucharist we participate in embodies brokenness and betrayal as well as forgiveness and abundance.'[27]

From this recognition of our always partial and imperfect grasp of the truth of God follows an awareness of the need for openness to being surprised in the life of the church. Williams speaks of this as the need for the church to be 'transparent to grace', with discipleship understood as 'a condition of learning from the one teacher', a mode of being in which limits are not imposed on whom one may learn from by Christ's Spirit. Williams references St. Benedict's averral that the Abbot should be surprised by where he learns, to illustrate the need for ecclesial leadership 'which is alert to the prospect of learning from unlikely people'.[28]

This posture of humble leadership also requires the recognition of our failures to reach out and learn: being able to say, 'I failed there because I failed to learn'. Indeed, Williams has remarked that he has often thought that there should be a fifth mark of the Church: 'I believe in one, holy, catholic, apostolic,

[27] Gittoes, 'Where is the Kingdom?', p.116. Gittoes goes on: 'A theology of careful walking celebrates the Church's calling as provisional. We live and worship and work between the now and the not yet. We are called to make real the divine transformation. we continue to seek mercy in our own relationships, we work out our disappointments and mistrust in the public sphere.' Ibid.

[28] Williams, 'Rethinking the Church'. It is worth noting here a question Mike Higton raises in relation to Williams' emphasis on self-scrutiny and penitence 'The Body's Grace:

> [O]ne way of reading the lecture would be to see it as advocating some kind of anxious self-scrutiny, a refusal to lose oneself in the rhythm and dynamic of sexual activity because one is always mentally standing to one side, trying to see how one's actions might be read. It could perhaps be read as advocating some kind of heroic moral agonising about sex – one that has little connection with the deeply unheroic ordinariness of good sexual relationships: the fun, the tenderness, the pleasure of it all. And when we shift this discourse in the direction of ecclesiology, Williams' account of ecclesial life can become one focused on the risks, fragility and pain associated with growth in holiness. I find myself wondering how best the processes of prophetic calling, of self-scrutiny and penitence, can find their proper place – their subordinate place – within an ecclesiology focused on the ordinary delights of ecclesial life: the fun, the tenderness, the pleasure. (Higton, 'The Ecclesial Body's Grace', p.16n21)

and repentant Church.'[29] Sedgwick goes so far as to claim that central to Anglican polity is the understanding of the Church of England 'as a body that can and does err'.[30] Whether or not this is actually particularly true of the Church of England in practice, we can nonetheless mark here that the church is constituted as a body by forgiveness and as such ought to be marked by ongoing patterns of penitence.

Williams finds deep connections between these penitential patterns and the sacramentality of the church, which is expressed 'both in its specific sacramental acts and in its awareness of its poverty, articulated in penitence and also in the silence of contemplation'.[31] The church thus 'becomes sacramental as a whole when it penitently redescribes itself in the light of the self-giving of God':

> By so doing, it surrenders the power of deciding what it is in human terms alone. It establishes its identity as 'mystery' by admitting that it is humanly ambiguous – capable of failure and sin – and so also a sign that encodes as well as revealing. Its sacramental character is in its confession that it participates in a humanity still in process of enlightenment and transfiguration, still absorbing the effect of the divine act in Christ. [… I]t is a sacramental sign in its admission of poverty in respect of God: it has nothing to do or say that can reveal God except the admission of dependence on God in Christ.[32]

Yet, as Sedgwick also notes, '[i]n confessing dependence and penitence, the Church confesses hope, a conviction that the renewing power of God is accessible in forgiveness and that the purpose of God for the ultimate future of the universe is to be relied upon.' [33]

3.II.ii. Gathering and scattering

> […] the Church is the body of Christ. As such we are gathered and sent. The gift of assurance and healing deepens commitment to the world; it makes us alert to the kingdom breaking through here and now. The eschatological hope of fulfilment acts as a check and balance,

[29] Ibid.

[30] Sedgwick, 'On Anglican Polity', p.196.

[31] Rowan Williams, 'The Church as Sacrament', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 10, no. 1 (2010): 6–12(pp.9-10).

[32] Ibid., p.9.

[33] Sedgwick, 'On Anglican Polity', p.199. So, rhythms of self-inspection and penitence are one of the ways in which the church is formed, yet these are to be understood as ingredients in the ordinary shape of a life – penitence is not a thing in itself outside of a whole life.

> guarding against conflating the kingdom with the Church or identifying it uncritically with the world.[34]

Oliver O'Donovan notes that the life of the early church was located in the daily movement *between* the temple and their households.[35] This chimes with what we noted in Chapter 2: that in conceptualising Christian formation, Williams is notable in not simply locating formative practices *within* the church. We cannot talk about how people are formed purely with reference to ecclesial practices, precisely because no one lives in church. Rather, Williams works with a rhythm of Christian life as gathering and scattering, in and out of church – between church and world.[36] Therefore, as Julie Gittoes, Brutus Green, and James Heard write, '[t]he celebration of the Eucharist cannot be fully understood without being attentive to the apostolic imperative at its heart. There is gathering; there is sending out.''[37] This retrieves the meaning of Mass as the missal - the sending out - and so underscores a sense of Christian formation that resists stasis and fixity. For, the church is not a 'home' we are to stay in.

The location of the life of the Church of England in its gathering and scattering is perhaps most fully explored in the work of Hardy. In ways that we will address in greater depth later on, he offers an account of the life and presence of the church as 'sociality', a concept that denotes social embeddedness and (historical and geographic) placing. Closely related to this is Hardy's sense of 'intensity' and 'extensity'. The precise meaning of these terms is hard to pin down in Hardy's thought, but 'intensity' means something like the transformative worship of the people of God, 'where the Church is called into being and where its calling is refreshed' – and where the fulfilment of the kingdom of God is anticipated.[38] 'Extensity', meanwhile, connotes the manifoldness of the life of God, as expressed and found in the particularity of all that is encountered in life in the world. We can better understand what is meant by these terms in this context through his account of the church being called to 'careful walking': 'Such dynamic ecclesiology is rooted in worship – being drawn ever more deeply into the very being of God and glimpsing a doxological vision of the fulfilment of God's kingdom. The calling to walking in the world means witnessing to God's activity within it as well as holding that vision.'[39] In her reading of Hardy, Gittoes makes clear that this ongoing pattern of moving in and out of the assembly is necessary for the church to be all that is called to: 'The Church cannot fulfil this call to

[34] Gittoes, 'Where is the Kingdom?', p.118.

[35] O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgement* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2005), pp.268-269.

[36] It is worth underlining that his scattering and working out of identity is thought by Williams to be an inherent part of the church, not simply an unfortunate corollary of the loss of monastic patterns of life and other 'ills' of modernity.

[37] Julie Gittoes, Brutus Green, and James Heard, 'Introduction', in *Generous Ecclesiology*, p.6.

[38] Ibid., p.5.

[39] Ibid., p.12.

embody God's purpose apart from worship; nor can the Church be itself if it neglects the call to participate in the world.'[40]

Gathering

Gittoes, Green, and Heard identify this dynamic at play in Hardy's understanding of the heart of the church's life, the eucharist: 'This wandering and embodied ecclesia is constituted by the Eucharist, which establishes its calling as society – a Church formed by the intensity of worship and the extensity of mission, witnesses to a God of salvation, the limits of whose generous love we cannot identify.'[41] Gittoes names the eucharist the 'gathered interval' in the scattered life of the Church where we are measured and reshaped.'[42] Hardy too understands the eucharist in terms of gathering: 'The opening words of the liturgy gather those present in the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.'[43]

Jenkins describes how, in corporate prayer this kind of gathering takes place:

> The business of recollection in preparation involves a certain assembling of those persons, causes and projects for whom one has to pray, by each of the small number of people present. In this way, they represent a community. At the same time, each of the persons, causes and so forth is itself tied to larger groupings: the local church as part of the church in that place, and outward in the rings of the Communion of Saints; the institutions as part of wider economic, political and so forth systems, and so on. There is therefore a set, loosely ordered in a hierarchical fashion, of human groupings brought together and represented by the congregation.[44]

In these gathered intervals, Jenkins argues that everyday life passes through a transformative 'sieve'.[45] He sees the Anglican offices of morning and evening prayer, in particular, as allowing for a

[40] Ibid., p.4.

[41] Ibid., pp.12-13. Gittoes, Green, and Heard go on: 'Working out the implications of the Eucharist in this way is vital for parishes. It demands the empowerment of the laity, rather than relying on a single parish priest. It blurs the boundary between Church and world in a way that generously accommodates the spiritually curious or those seeking the Church's blessing in the midst of birth and death and committed relationships.' Ibid., p.6.

[42] Gittoes, 'Where is the Kingdom?', p.118.

[43] Gittoes, Green, and Heard, 'Introduction', *Generous Ecclesiology*, p.6.

[44] Timothy Jenkins, 'An Ethical Account of Ritual: An Anthropological Description of the Anglican Daily Offices', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 15, no. 1 (2002): 1–10 (p.8).

[45] Ibid.

confrontation of 'all one's passions, desires, burdens, tasks, responsibilities, relationships with Scripture: not therefore with reflections of the human will and understanding and point of view, but with God's.' In the time to think provided by the office, the participant is 'read by Scripture'.[46] This confrontation then 'issues in the intercessions, which deal not only with local projects and persons, but also with matters of Church and State, and current affairs ... So, there is a quite complex process of construing everyday life, consisting of recollection, representation, meditation and intercession, all conceived in terms of entering into the mind of God, or being read by the mind of God.'[47] Hardy, too, is clear that, whilst through the corporate activity of worship 'people are embedded into a particular kind of society', it is not reducible to a social structure: 'It is about an encounter with Christ: receiving the gift of his body.'[48] So, we get the sense of the life of the church beating from a centre, and worship therefore being about a call to that centre, rather than about stepping within a particular boundary.[49]

Scattering

In line with this, Williams explicitly argues against any temptation to conflate the identity of the church with the eucharist, contending that whilst '[t]he Church may be perfectly the Church at the Eucharist, […] its life is not exhausted at the Eucharist: there is a life that is always struggling to realise outside the ''assembly'' what the assembly shows forth' (and, indeed, we sometimes discover that life more fully outside the assembly).[50] This is so for Williams because, as Higton puts it, the church is 'the place where the source of [the world's] transformation in God is named, acknowledged and pursued', and therefore it is also 'the place where the particular human being Jesus of Nazareth is named, his unlimited significance explored, and his active and dangerous exceeding of the Church's present understanding acknowledged and awaited.'[51] This means that the way of discipleship 'is beyond our concept of an object that has been made by a fixed law', for 'Jesus grants us a solid identity, yet refuses us the power

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Gittoes, Green, and Heard, 'Introduction', *Generous Ecclesiology*, p.6.

[49] Whilst the gathered interval is understood as essential to the life of the people of God, there is a tendency amongst those I engage with here to assume, or at least to not explicitly describe, the life of the gathered church. In more strongly missiologically focussed accounts of the church, in which there is a picture that assumes that the drama of the gathering is about who joins it, there is likewise not a strong picture of the internal life of the Church. In Hardy's work, however, we can understand this better as stemming from his concern with the Church of England's distinctive embeddedness in its place, and therefore the impossibility of talking at length about the gathered church on its own.

[50] Williams, *Anglican Identities*, p.99 – 100.

[51] Higton, 'Rowan Williams', p.508.

to ‘seal’ or finalize it, and obliges us to realize that this identity only exists in an endless responsiveness to new encounters with him in a world of unredeemed relationships’.[52]

Hardy uses the image of pilgrimage to conjure this sense of the church being engaged in unending new encounters in the world. The church’s journey is one of ‘careful walking’, which demands that we pay attention to God and the world.[53] We discover things about God on our journey of interaction in the world that we could not discover otherwise. Gittoes too argues for an ecclesiology that reflects this practice of careful walking, and, as such, is ‘shaped by worship and embodied socially’: ‘it also both recognizes and strives for the manifestation of the kingdom in the world through participation in the complexity of its social life.’[54] By this account, rather than being mutually exclusive, ‘the life of the Church and the fabric of modern society are bound relationally and with mutual influence. The Church is formed by its own polity: shaped by word and sacrament, the people of God are drawn into the purposes of God in learning the truth of others ‘through the deepest care for them’.[55] Gittoes argues that, ‘[t]oo often our discussion of discipleship focuses on service in the gathered life of the Church, or perhaps on close relationships or specific projects’; yet, ‘[w]e do not cease to be the Church when we are offering legal advice or on duty as a classroom assistant. In those places we are caught up in the energetic of attraction – seeking the flourishing of human beings.’[56]

This ongoing encounter with realities outside the church calls the church to see and understand itself anew. These restless journeys outwards carry with them the expectation that what one encounters out in creation will drive one back into what one has already been given. For, whilst for Hardy there are bad forms of extensity (forms of distraction from God), his work emphasises those forms of extensity through which Christians encounter the same God out in the world that they meet with in the church. We have seen, then, that Hardy’s account of the church as called to ‘careful walking’ is in keeping with a sense of the church’s proper confidence and humility. As Gittoes, Green, and Heard argue, ‘[t]o think of our ecclesiology as “moving” develops the idea of the Church as a pilgrim people on the way. It enables us to speak of healing and provisionality; discipleship and humility.’[57]

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[52] Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002), p.76.

[53] Gittoes, ‘Where is the Kingdom?’, p.109, referencing Daniel W. Hardy, *Wording a Radiance: Parting Conversations on God and the Church* (London: SCM Press, 2010).

[54] Gittoes, ‘Where is the Kingdom?’, p.114.

[55] Ibid. pp.113-114. Gittoes goes on: ‘To describe this in terms of abduction and *sociopoiesis* reveals that the movement and energy involved have their ‘source in the divine life’. In this way, Hardy describes the body of Christ as embodying `God’s work to reconstitute the social fabric of the world.’ Ibid.

[56] Ibid., p.114.

[57] Gittoes, Green, and Heard, ‘Introduction’, *Generous Ecclesiology*, pp.12-13.

This emphasis on the church being always contingently 'placed' as it walks about on the land is particularly pertinent to certain ways of talking about the Church of England's polity. As Jenkins contends,

> [P]aying attention to one's context is fundamental to the Anglican vocation. The practice is not a matter of bringing God into a place, but of discerning him in it. It is not just about gathering people together, but discovering their desires; what moves them: 'For if God is already present in the world, in particular people and situations, one encounters truth rather than constructing it, and matters of great importance impinge upon one, rather than one's discovering them through any act of will or intention.' Part of the Church's vocation is to go to unexpected places. The chaplain and parish priest, the pioneer and the bishop, are charged with this task – but so are the people of God as they are scattered within the world before and after the sacramental interval of gathering for worship.[58]

[58] Ibid., citing Timothy Jenkins, *An Experiment in Providence: How Faith Engages with the World* (London: SPCK, 2006), p.7.

3.III. Formation by the Spirit

We can understand these ecclesial dynamics - of gathering and scattering, of confidence in what has been given to us and humility about our response to the call we have received – more fully by conceiving of them in terms of the action of the Spirit in the world. Here I will be drawing on the way that these dynamics of the Spirit are articulated by Dan Hardy and Ben Quash.

Hardy writes that 'theology itself – that is God and God's dynamic activity in the world – translates into the sociality of the church, and with that into the sociality of society at large.'[59] Alongside his stated concern with how Anglican ecclesial polity can 'bring free, moral agents together by their common consent in a fashion which mediates the character of God and God's saving grace in human society', Hardy might seem to be very much in step with the accounts of Christian political formation engaged in Chapter 1.[60] Yet, Hardy differs in crucial respects from the tendencies identified there in that he affirms that this grace is also encountered outside the gathered practices of the church. In fact, Hardy specifically criticises understandings of the connection between God and society which have the effect of denying 'general sociality' or 'created sociality present in the human condition', by rooting the 'social transcendent' in the specific gift of God in Christ. He argues that such understandings lead their exponents to lose 'their commonality as created social beings with the society to which they speak': 'They put themselves outside the society to which they speak, and put Christian faith in the position of pronouncing God's work to society'.[61]

Indeed, Hardy argues that the church 'has become over-concentrated on its inner meaning', and that Christians need to learn 'how to persist with our task in the world.' This involves being part of the '[o]pening up of the true potential and resources of human life': that is, of being part of people's formation. The liturgy is one way of 'facilitating and helping people to enter into this creative dynamic

[59] Hardy, 'A Magnificent Complexity', in David Ford and Dennis Stamps, eds., *Essentials of Christian Community* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), p.337.

[60] Ibid, pp.340-341.

[61] Daniel W. Hardy, *God's Ways with the World: Thinking and Practising Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), pp.201-202. He sees as related those understandings which deny the 'general dynamic whereby the social transcendent should be brought into correspondence with truth'. Instead, when 'confronted with the need for sociality', these understandings invariable put 'the specific apostleship and witness of the Church' in the place of an account of general sociality. Further, 'in proclaiming the specific gift of God in Christ as one of the graces which comes through God's victory, without relating this to God's work in creation, they narrow God's work unduly.' This gives the impression. Hardy argues, that the church has nothing to say to the contingencies of modern life (and so that it is 'obsolete as a medium of identity formation'). Ibid.

and drawing them deeper into the light', but the ability to do this is 'not exclusive to the Church.'[62] For, 'the presumed sufficiency of human wisdom, discernment and power', including in ecclesial life, 'must give way to the Spirit of God, that which searches the very depths of God and human life and gives knowledge of God and of the true possibilities of humanity.'[63] In a similar vein, and influenced by Hardy, Quash argues that an overemphasis on the 'givens' of the Christian faith risks cutting us off from new experiences and what we might learn from them, as such an overemphasis 'supposes that we already have a sufficient grasp of just what those givens really are and mean'.[64]

Against such sealed and fixed understandings of the Christian faith, Hardy proposes an understanding of the Spirit as 'a kind of turbulence which – as they accept their weakness in fear and trembling – pushes human beings ever more deeply into the deeds of God.' [65] Quash likewise speaks of 'the God who takes us over new horizons', as we follow: the God of 'constant recession'. Yet, this is also a God of 'perpetual Advent', who is always approaching and giving: 'Such a God is manifest in an otherness from us, an independence of us, that breaks our idolatrous hold on God – and will often feel like "departure'. But this thrill is also … the thrill of the lover's approach.'[66]

This 'inexhaustible excitement in the vitality of God in the world that, through the Spirit, we are to share' means that we should live, Hardy argues, with an ongoing expectation that the Spirit will be 'pressing us into the surprising depths of God and God's purposes for human life.'[67] He writes of how this expectant posture can be formed through the practices of evensong, for example, but understands this ecclesial practice to also propel Christians outward to encounter the Spirit at work (in surprising ways) in the world. He also sees the same dynamic at play in reading Scripture: writing of the diary of a Jew from the Warsaw ghetto, Hardy sees the man's faith as '[a]lways shaped by the Word of God', with the 'intensity' of faith remaining, and even growing deeper, 'while there is also deep change'.'[68] By the movement of the Spirit of Christ, 'the intensity of faith meets the extensity of life, not in such a way as to provide an explanation of what is happening, but so as to force faith deeper and make it more

[62] Daniel W. Hardy, *Wording a Radiance: Parting Conversations on God and the Church* (London: SCM Press, 2010), p.32-33.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ben Quash, *Found Theology: History, Imagination and the Holy Spirit* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.1. This can in turn imply that God is absent or detached from 'the ongoing world of apparently contingent historical events, and those bits of our experience that do not immediately seem to fit the 'story' we have inherited.'

[65] Hardy, 'The Surprise of God', *Finding the Church*, p.233.

[66] Quash, *Found Theology*, xvii.

[67] Hardy, 'The Surprise of God', pp.232 - 233.

[68] Ibid, p.236.

unshakeable.'[69] For, the 'wide-ranging issues of life today' (such as the concerns of political life) 'are the necessary medium for renewing the categories by which the primary intensity of life in the world – that is, the life of God in Christ – is to be understood and lived.' The issues of life 'do not undo faith in God, but require it to be redeveloped in its meaning and our awareness – that is, in all its demandingness.'[70]

Hardy's affirmation of the need to grapple with extensity – understood here as the particularity of that which is encountered in life in the world - in order to grow in faith could seem like an understanding of the world only in terms of suffering and challenge. Yet this should be filled out through his broader account of the attraction drawing us to God through all of creation, and through its redemption. So, the sense of challenge and difficulty is held within Hardy's positive account of the goodness of creation and of the work of the Spirit bubbling up in the world. This makes it clear that Christian formation through engagement with the world does not just take place through grappling with difficulty and suffering, but also through stumbling across joyful gifts of the Spirit in unexpected places.[71]

Quash talks about this dynamic as 'finding.' He writes that 'the Spirit is the one to be 'found' over and over again, and in the finding of the Spirit one realizes oneself as, in fact, caught up in a trinitarian dynamic, in which the Son who shows us the Father is redelivered to the Church by way of its active, imaginative engagement with the events of history.'[72] Quash therefore understands the Christian task as learning to discern divine 'operative conditions' in the particulars of the world.[73] This discussion is set against the backdrop of Christian liturgical worship as 'a mode of making the divine operative conditions of the world as fully present as possible, so as to live in the fullest possible relation to them.'[74] So, liturgical worship is not in itself the fullness of these conditions. Rather, '[t]he life of

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid. This is the same Spirit who 'searched with [St. Paul] for renewed understanding of how the One who gives being and life and justice to the world actually did so in these new conditions.' Therefore, if we too 'allow ourselves to be questioned by the Spirit of Christ that searches the depths of everything, even the depths of God, the intensity of our faith will be renewed in the extensities of life today.' Hardy is confident that '[a]s we open ourselves to the searching Spirit of God, the steadfastness and quality of our faith will grow as we confront the task of understanding and living in this world.' Ibid.

[71] Hardy, 'The Surprise of God', p.234.

[72] Quash, *Found Theology*, xvi. This has implications, Quash argues, for British post-liberal theology, whose 'very positive account of the divine as the source and ground of the historical world in all its aspects can [and should] also permit an affirmation of politics, the non-human natural world, sex, art, and other aspects of social life as parts of the medium through which we relate to the truth of Christ.' This 'ultramediatory' theological style begins with a trust that 'Christ's work begins with whatever one finds in the world, rather than beginning with theological concepts that precede the world and require the world to reshape itself in order for Christ's work to begin to be done.' Ibid., p.10.

[73] Ibid, p.239, referencing Hardy.

[74] Ibid, p.240.

Christian discipleship (which has as its operative condition the fundamental orientation of creatures to God) "is about recognizing how much more there is than we have ever seen before and about being attracted by it and lifted up to it".'[75]

This unfolding of the 'ever more' happens through relating the given to the found.[76] The given happens in canonical Christian tradition, including the gathered practices of the church, and the finding 'out' in the world.[77] Whilst Quash does argue that 'the givens of Christian faith will help to order and illuminate newly ordered experiences or challenges', this is not the full story. For, 'found things, conceived as gifts of the Holy Spirit who unfolds all the riches that are in Christ, can and must reconfigure, unlock and amplify what is already held true by the Church.'[78] This dynamic is in keeping with the way in which Hardy's patterning of intensity and extensity is understood above.

By this account, the Christian life is one 'in which love is always concretely and particularly taught and learnt – not in universal and abstract principles – and it requires a response to what is found in front of you, under your nose, here and now.'[79] This attentive responsiveness to 'the surprising possibilities of the present moment' – learning to 'read the detailed particularities of our present as sites where "God truly is, though we did not know it"' - is thus central to discipleship.[80]

We can see that both Hardy and Quash have a strong sense of the Spirit being at work outside the church, as well as inside. By this understanding, the Spirit forms the church through ongoing encounters – 'findings' – amidst the 'extensity' of life in the world. These surprising encounters reshape how the 'givens' of faith are understood, and so too re-form the 'intensive' worship of the gathered people of God.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to describe the broad parameters of the church's polity. Having argued that we need to understand how the polity of the church needs to be formed (and to go on being formed),

[75] Ibid, p.249, citing *Wording a Radiance*, p.104. Quash likewise affirms that all things both come *from* and go *to* God. He describes this attraction as 'towardness': 'the responsive advance of…creation into the ever more glorious fullness of God's life', including the work of God in us. Ibid., p.249.

[76] Ibid, xiv.

[77] Ibid, p.17.

[78] Ibid, xiv.

[79] Ibid, p.24.

[80] Ibid, p.282.

in this chapter I have provided some basic terms with which to grasp what kind of polity such ongoing formation depends. Drawing on recent commentators on Anglican polity, I have suggested that it is (or can be) a *polis* that is also an *oikos* (and vice versa); that it is (or can be) marked by humble confidence and confident humility; that its life takes place in gathering and scattering, 'intensity' and 'extensity'. I have further argued that these dynamics by which the life of the church is formed can be understood in terms of the action of the Spirit in the world. If the church is politically formative in a way that responds both to its own and to the world's complexity, then, it will be so through the ways in which it inhabits this complex space.

I will take my lead from Hardy in understanding the ways in which the church inhabits this space more specifically. As we saw above, he argues that the church 'claims neither completeness nor infallibility, but – in the provenance of God – the capacity to bring free, moral agents together by their common consent in a fashion which mediates the character of God and God's saving grace in human society. The visible means by which it achieves these purposes are not so much theoretical as liturgical and practical-political.' [81] On this basis, he argues for greater attention to be paid to the practices of liturgy and polity in the church. In Chapters 4 and 5, I will seek to do precisely this – attending to the practices that take place when the people of God are gathered in worship and to its practical political life.

In particular, I am concerned with the way these practices involve negotiation amidst difference in pursuit of common life. This will mean attending to the way the polity is formed by its members: exploring who is included or excluded from belonging to the body, both through liturgy and governance practices. This will involve looking at how belonging in the church is expressed liturgically. Yet, this will be done with an emphasis on liturgical settings (including the wider social context), not simply on liturgical text in itself. Gittoes writes of the need to take both liturgy and the world more seriously, and I will go on to argue in the following chapters that this is a mutually reinforcing attention: that is, taking seriously the world will change the way one attends to and understands liturgical practice, and vice versa.

[81] Ibid.

4

The Malformed and Malforming Body

Introduction

The church needs to go on being formed in part because, as we saw in Part I, there is ongoing struggle within it with sin. We have seen the need, therefore, to better account for how malformation occurs through the structures and practices of the church. In this chapter, we look more closely at the way the polity and practices of the church are (mis-)shaped by sin.

I am seeking to address the widespread failure, noted in the previous chapter, to attend to the way the practices of the church can be ethically malformative, as well as positively formative. We saw there that this lacuna includes inattentiveness to the ways in which any actual liturgy is always working with materials that are not perfectly receptive to its impression, as our lives are more messily in play in liturgical formation than a simple picture of harmonious formation suggests. The accounts offered by Wells and Ward also failed to properly account for the fact that our liturgies are imperfect instruments, themselves marred by imperfect sight.

Here I will argue that this oversight can be understood as a failure to account for the ongoing and disruptive presence of sin in the life of the church. Indeed, I believe that we need to be aware that we will never be sufficiently aware of the presence of sin in the church. Therefore, as we saw in the discussion of the proper humility of the church in Chapter 3, there is not a particular posture that we simply need to accomplish in order for our formation to be assured. Anglican niceness will not save us.

Rather, I draw here on the work of Ben Quash, who writes of 'finding', as a dynamic of always being driven to see with new eyes what one has already received: it is the way the Spirit works to reveal truth. I extend this, arguing for a similar dynamic in the way the Spirit works to convict the church of sin.[1] So, in this section, I will demonstrate this dynamic of circling into a deepening awareness through offering a deepening account of the levels at which sin is operative in forming ecclesial polity. It is

[1] Quash, *Found Theology.*

important to attend to practices of inclusion and exclusion in liturgical and practical-political matters as these are what form the polity of the church.

I should note here that the church's provisionality for which I argue leads to a particular approach to concrete liturgical examples. This approach largely draws on analogous examples from beyond the Church of England, as well as historic Anglican examples, but generally seeks to avoid being prescriptive about current practices within the Church of England itself. This approach means that the examples I offer are impressionistic, rather than detailed. In a longer text I would wish to undertake a longer exposition of particular Anglican liturgical practices (in keeping with this thesis' concern for the importance of attending to contingency and particularity, if we are to recognise the work of the Spirit).

4.I. Sin, power, and ecclesial pathologies

What is it that allows for unchecked malformation of ecclesial polity and its members? In short: ecclesial practices and structures which fail to expect, and therefore to recognise, sin as something that is ongoing and disruptive in the life of the church. Related to this are decision-making processes in which power is concentrated in the hands of relatively few people, and in which the limitations of their perspectives are not appreciated. I develop here an account of the way these ecclesial tendencies to overlook the disruptive and pervasive nature of sin are in fact themselves sinful. This is based on an understanding of sin as a refusal of the receptivity that is inherent to our creatureliness.

4.I.i. Finitude, sin, and creaturely receptivity

Simon Oliver has identified receptivity as an essentially creaturely quality. He does so through drawing on Felix Ravaisson's insight that all organisms have the habit of acquiring new habits – they are receptive to new forms of life in such a way that they develop a second nature. Oliver affirms this in terms of doctrine of creation, arguing that the first truth of a creature is that it is receptive – it receives its own being. So, we can say that, whilst nature has its own integrity, it is always yearning for more; the receptivity of nature is never exhausted, overcome, or completed.[2]

This chimes with what we have seen already in Williams' work on human finitude and ethical formation. As we saw in Chapter 2, the finite limitations of any one person's perspective are positively assessed by Williams in what has been called 'embodied Personalism': the sense that in the web of relations in which we each stand, our identity is constituted by being *here* and not *there*. We are, as Williams says, 'our limits', not simply in the sense of having a particular location, but in the sense of being material and historical – shaped by all manner of forces in a specific history, in a tangle far too dense for us to tease out our identity with any completeness. We inevitably see only some of the factors that shape our vision and our desire and make us who we are. For Williams, this finitude means that we grow by learning from others: this learning and growth cannot be generated on our own. We discover more of that tangle not by introspection, but by interactions that bring different strands to the surface. Our finitude means that there is always the need of being supplemented by others.

[2] Simon Oliver, 'Response to "Paul and the Gift"' (A Research Symposium in Conversation with John M. G. Barclay's Paul and the Gift, Ushaw College, Durham, 2018).

However, we humans are not only finite. We are also sinful. Against this account of finite creaturely identity, we can understand sin as a denial of our fundamentally receptive nature. It is the attempt to declare ourselves complete, and so to refuse finitude. The attempt to declare ourselves complete is *also* a refusal to recognise our ongoing sinfulness. This side of eternity, we will never cease to need others to challenge and correct us, to call attention to our sin.

So, finitude and sinfulness should not be confused with each other. Yet, although finitude is not sinfulness, one of the main forms that our sinfulness takes is an attempt to refuse finitude. This links the two forms strongly, and, this being so, we need the supplementation of others all the more.

4.I.ii. Receptivity and ecclesial polity

Understanding the relationship between creaturely receptivity and sin gives us a way to identify how this plays out at a structural level within the church. For the church too is always receptive, whether it recognises it or not. There are two kinds of 'receptivity' here: firstly, the church is receptive of bad dynamics: of corruption by the world; and, secondly, of good dynamics: of challenge, correction, and resourcing by the world.

Whilst muted in the accounts offered of ethical formation offered by Wells and Ward, there is nonetheless an increasing recognition amongst those concerned with Christian ethical formation of the undeniable truth that many church-attending Christians live less than saintly lives. As James K A Smith asks, 'if worship practices are formative, then why are there people who have spent lifetimes in the rites of Christian worship who emerge unformed or even malformed'?[3] Smith calls this 'the Godfather problem', after Michael Corleone's skin-deep renunciation of evil during the baptismal service of his godson, whilst a series of brutal assassinations are carried out by his orders. In response, Smith discusses how the church has often been 'captured' by worldly liturgies, assimilating to the often prejudicial and oppressive practices of rival kingdoms.[4] Failing to understand Christian and ecclesial identity as inherently receptive can lead to a failure to recognise how the church is always being shaped by its social context (as we will explore further below).[5]

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[3] James K. A. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), pp.167–168.

[4] Ibid., pp.170-179; 181-186.

[5] Dan Hardy, for example, speaks of 'complex overlappings and interweavings' of church tradition and social context. 'A Magnificent Complexity', p.334. Siobhán Garrigan also notes that '[s]acramental theologians … increasingly draw on the work of scholars from the social sciences in response to the late twentieth century relocation of theology in worship.' She goes on to identify the key shift as 'a recognition of the human being, inseparable from his or her context-dependence on the living organism of the earth, as the conduit through which any and all theology is constructed.' *Beyond Ritual*, p.41.

This means that we must also say that sin is not only about refusing receptivity, as identified above, but also can be about receiving the wrong things, and about causing others to do likewise. Recognising the presence of bad reception can lead to attempts to insist on the need for a self-contained and non-receptive church. However, that is impossible. As Stephen Sykes comments, 'Christian theology sets the whole of human existence in a deeply ambiguous context, a world of overlapping and intersecting powers in which we are enmeshed.'[6] Scharen also draws attention to the way congregational identity is formed through the forces exerted by contextual and cultural influences, as well as by religious traditions, arguing that, '[i]t is these multiple forces active in shaping a congregation's identity that then structure the range of possible styles of worship and social-ethical witness in a congregation.'[7] Smith likewise concludes that '[t]here is no "purity" for liturgical creatures in the saeculum', and that, indeed, '[l]iberation from myths of "purity" might be the beginning of wisdom for grappling with questions of deformation and sanctification'.[8]

For, recognising receptivity means attending also to injust social attitudes and practices that are incorporated into ecclesial polity. In fostering this attentiveness, social scientific accounts of ecclesial practices can be of particular value. As Sykes notes, '[e]xperience of the life of the Church suggests to me that there is a good deal for theology to learn about how the Church works as an organisation, including ways of penetrating the disguises which theology sometimes throws up when powers are being exercised.'[9] So, we can see that attempting to insist on a non-receptive polity also shuts off the church from sources of renewal.

[6] Stephen Sykes, *Power and Christian Theology* (London: Continuum, 2006), p.152.

[7] Scharen, *Public Worship and Public Work*, p.15.

[8] Smith, *Awaiting the King*, pp.169;188.

[9] Sykes, *Power and Christian Theology*, p.83. Sykes goes on (partly in response to Milbank's denunciation of the parasitic nature of social scientific disciplines): '[t]o be on one's guard against the abuses of power, and at least to that extent to welcome the development of 'suspicion', is by no means to capitulate to a quasi-theological scheme of 'original violence'.' He concludes that, '[t]o neglect the analytic opportunity of sociology is wasteful, though (as Milbank justly contends) one must resist the imperialistic suggestion that sociological observation provides a complete explanation of the phenomena it describes, replacing the need for theological interpretation.'. Ibid., pp.83 – 84.

4.II. Manifestations of sin in ecclesial polity

We will fill out these briefly sketched shapes of how ecclesial receptivity can function, and be resisted, in what follows. I offer here a deepening account of malformation of ecclesial polity and its members, in which the depths at which sin is operative and the failures of the church to recognise these dynamics are understood as bound up with one another.

Perhaps counterintuitively, Quash's understanding of found things as given by the Spirit can help us here. As we saw in Chapter 3, Quash distinguishes between the found and the given, with the given being described by analogy as the backpack that God has stocked for us for our journey, and the found as those things that God places in our path ahead of us.[10] Through finding, 'God is constantly inviting human beings to relate the given to the found': inviting us to be attentive to the findings that the Holy Spirit is offering us, in light of the things we have already received from God.[11] If we put this understanding of the work of the Spirit in leading us deeper into truth together with a concern for malformation through the practices of ecclesial polity, then we can come to understand the work of the Spirit to include drawing us into new 'findings' of our sinfulness. So, part of the work of the Spirit in grace can be understood as bringing us to new findings of truth, in the form of new convictions of sin.

In understanding the found as a genuinely new thing given by God, we draw attention to the fact that, as Williams suggests, there is a danger of 'theologizing what is "given" as if the given represented the finished, the fixed'.[12] As we respond to the invitation to relate the found to the given, we come to see, then, that the church has all too often calcified its 'givens' into distorted shapes which reflect the image of those who carry hegemonic privilege in ecclesial life. So, the church's tendency to under-recognise the presence of sin in its life is not an accidental feature of ecclesial polity: rather, we will never be sufficiently aware of how *unaware* we are of sin.

There is, then, the same shape of unexpected encounters in the world leading us deeper into knowledge of God, and of ourselves, in my account here of sin in the church as in Quash's pneumatology. This

[10] Quash, *Found Theology*, xiv. The given is understood as that which we receive from the past, that which is part of our inheritance, and which helps us to make sense of the world that we encounter. The found, on the other hand, is that which we encounter, which is genuinely new, and that we have to find some way of reckoning with.

[11] Ibid., xiv.

[12] Williams, 'Trinity and Revelation', p.132. So, it is not that the given is the realm of God's activity, and the found the realm of human activity. God works through both the given and the found, with the found understood to be a gift of the Holy Spirit.

understanding of the work of the Spirit leads us to a picture of the church in which openness to the Spirit means that we will always be coming to see anew our complicity in structural injustices. So, what are some of the sinful hegemonies that are being exposed in the church?

4.II.ii. Recognising the church as replicator and compounder of oppression

As we saw above, the failure of the church to acknowledge the social contingency of its polity results in a skewed and partial picture of how this life is formed. So, we start off here with the idea that forms of exclusion out in the world have an impact on the life of the church and are not sufficiently resisted. This replication of unjust social structures within the life of the church might be described as a centripetal malformation of the polity and its members.

In Mathew Guest's exploration of the social functions of worship within a community, and of the way in which worship shapes how we relate to one another (which he thinks it does to a significant extent), he argues that: '[w]orship events are often key contexts in which relations of power are negotiated, as they bring church communities together in a public space. At such events, norms of authority and hierarchy are often implicit in the very structure of devotional practice.'[13] Siobhán Garrigan too writes of the pain of coming to recognise 'that trusted and beloved forms of worship might fail'.[14] Analyses of race, class, gender, and colonization have helped to display the matrices of power and oppression across which liturgical practices and social context feed into one another.[15] So, the argument here is that in this exchange there is not just replication going on, but also a compounding of oppression through the church's iteration of it.

These matrices of oppression shape how participation takes place in the church. Experiences of inclusion and exclusion through the liturgy are formed in part through the church polity replicating and compounding the way power structures and identity markers operate in the surrounding society. This includes inclusion and exclusion of particular groups from participation, both in liturgical contexts and in decision-making (or 'practical-political') processes. Bretherton notes that, while the form of polity to which the church is called is one in which differences of role entail 'no essential conflict of interests

[13] Mathew Guest, 'Sociological Strand – Worship and Action', Helen Cameron et al., eds., *Studying Local Churches: Perspectives on the Local Church* (London: SCM Press, 2005), p.100.

[14] Siobhán Garrigan, *The Real Peace Process: Worship, Politics and the End of Sectarianism* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014), p.189.02/11/2021 09:10:00

[15] Ibid.

between … roles', in actuality the 'distribution of roles may be unjustly determined by false criteria based on gender, ethnicity, or class'.[16]

I will focus here on how sectarianism, nationalism and colonialism, and systems of social class are reflected in, and often fed by, who is included in or excluded from liturgical practices.

Sectarianism, nationalism, and colonialism

In her study of the role of the church in fostering and preserving sectarianism in the Republic of Ireland (and how this might be overcome), Garrigan draws on ritual studies to explore the enactment of particular ecclesial practices in the twenty-six churches which comprise her study.[17] Whilst the Church of England does not face a sectarian context in the same way, Garrigan's discussion sheds light on the way in which seemingly innocuous ecclesial practices can be fed by, and shore up, corrosive forms of social identity. It also raises questions about the relationship between colonial and national identity which are uncomfortably relevant for the Church of England, in the context of the wider Anglican Communion as well as at 'home'.

One of the first practices examined by Garrigan is that of greeting. Garrigan highlights how, in Protestant churches, a form of vetting routinely takes place through the questions asked of the new attendee by the designated greeters on the door.[18] She argues that '[s]uch vetting allows us to exclude or accept people and this allows us to feel safe' within an unchallenged sectarian identity – and so also replicates wider sectarian practices of vetting.[19] Garrigan sees this Protestant vetting through greeting as symptomatic of an understanding of belonging in which to belong is always at the expense of somebody else's exclusion.[20] Conversely, in the Catholic churches she visited, Garrigan noted the absence of any greeters in all but one church. She sees this practice of non-greeting as creating an insider-outsider binary, in which there is no space for guests. In common with the Protestant churches, this forces identity into one of two pre-extant categories and so reinforces sectarianism.[21]

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[16] Luke Bretherton, 'Sharing Peace: Class, Hierarchy, and Christian Social Order', in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, Second Edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 329–43(p.337).

[17] Garrigan, *The Real Peace Process*.

[18] Ibid., p.70.

[19] Ibid., p.69.

[20] Ibid. She contrasts this with 'affirmative belonging', which is derived from something that has been chosen by all, and which therefore binds all together.

[21] Ibid., pp.72-74.

Garrigan also reads ecclesial practices of confession and reconciliation as replicating and compounding the 'cold peace' of sectarian Ireland. She identifies a tendency to confess sin at either a very abstract level ('sin as the basic human condition of having fallen away from God') or as something very personal ('the little ways we each individually fail in our relationships').[22] In this way, Garrigan argues, both Catholic and Protestant practices of confession display failures to recognise sin as something that is structural and in which each person present is implicated. Instead, the practices of confession observed actually obscure sin, failing to equip Christians to recognise the systems and practices in which they are implicated and for which they share responsibility: 'When, then, people turn their attention to the peace process, it is without having ever interrogated sectarianism as sinful… it is, therefore, not conceived as something to be confessed or forgiven.'[23] Moreover, Garrigan describes how, 'while human beings are ostensibly reconciled to God, any requirement for human beings to be reconciled to human beings is circumvented.'[24] She highlights, in particular, the omission of the practice of peace-passing in a number of the churches she studied.[25] All of this plays into the way that, in Ireland, '"[p]eace" is thus adopted, and embraced, but it is not wrought: the things (sectarian attitudes and practices) that made up the 'un-peace' remain".[26]

Garrigan's discussion of intercessory prayer centres on the way that the language of prayer for 'our community' can smuggle in an oppositional sense of concern for the welfare of this community over and against those other communities which it was established to protect against. As she puts in, '[i]n Church, the language of "our community" ... reinforces a sense in which our Church is: a) separate from and b) more worth praying for than that of others'. This sense of 'our community' often runs together with 'sticking together' and looking after our own'.[27] Garrigan suggests that by referring instead to 'the town as the thing that binds us, or to the neighbourhood as the arena that defines belonging' Catholic-Protestant affiliations can be 'decentred', such that they are no longer 'the primary way in which we organize our thinking about ourselves and our relation to other people in the world.'[28] We can see

[22] Ibid., p.47.

[23] Ibid., p.48. Leon van Ommen also notes that 'people may have a perspective on their life that is concealing rather than revealing, so at the rite of confession they think there is nothing to say sorry for'. Or, 'others may be so caught up in their guilt that the words of absolution cannot sink in.' Léon van Ommen, *Suffering in Worship: Anglican Liturgy in Relation to Stories of Suffering People* (London: Routledge, 2017), p.85.

[24] Ibid., p.50.

[25] Ibid., pp.86 -91. Garrigan also notes the differences between practices of confession and reconciliation in Protestant and Catholic churches, and the way these inhibit the ability to speak of reconciliation mutually intelligibly. Ibid., pp.48 – 51.

[26] Ibid., p.48.

[27] Ibid., p.112.

[28] Ibid., p.114.

similar oppositional tendencies in Anglican churches, whether identity is understood in opposition to other churches in the parish, or as against the tradition in which Anglican churches of neighbouring parishes stand. Here too, then, there is much for the Church of England to learn from Garrigan's suggestion of praying in terms of locality and so challenging whatever assumptions are being carried about the scope of 'our community'.

Garrigan sets Irish sectarianism in the context of having been the subject of British colonialism. So, whilst the way the practices of the Church of England are fed by and play into colonialism will generally look different to those identified by Garrigan, we must recognise that a colonising history also attaches to Anglican practices in ways that perpetuate this form of oppression. Additionally, whilst Garrigan's discussion of 'denomi-national' practices – that is, the ways in which denominational identity is bolstered through an oppositional nationalist mode - is focussed on a context in which there is a binary contest for national sovereignty, it is also worth considering the valences of this discussion for the Church of England. [29] Perhaps particularly pertinent here is Garrigan's discussion of the presence of flags in sanctuaries, noting this as particularly prevalent in Protestant and Anglican churches in Ireland and Northern Ireland.[30] The display of flags, and the way this is often intertwined with military memorialisation, is a practice that also requires considerable renegotiation in Church of England churches. Much greater consideration is needed of the understanding of British identity, and indeed of the relationship between this identity and the national church, being conveyed through such displays.

Class

Also relevant to a consideration of how Anglican ecclesial practices can reflect and compound matrices of social oppression is the issue of class-based identity. As Gustavo Gutierrez and others have long argued, 'the Church (and its worship) perpetuates the dominance of elite groups and reinforces social divisions if it fails to confront the injustices of the class system.'[31]

In the UK church, an awareness of the way class divisions shapes ecclesiology has come the surface in recent years, particularly through discussions around mission. This has been spurred on by the findings

[29] Garrigan, *The Real Peace Process*, pp.193. 194. One other obvious example is the need for Church of England could learn to better recognise the colonial and military themes encoded in its own hymnody. For more, see: Michael N. Jagessar and Stephen Burns, 'Hymns Old and New: towards a Postcolonial Gaze', in *The Edge of God*, pp.50 – 66.

[30] Ibid., pp. 78 – 80.

[31] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (London: SCM Press, 1988), pp.145 – 8.

of surveys such as one conducted by YouGov in 2014 survey which reported that only thirty-eight per cent of respondents who identified as regular church goers also identified as working-class, and the *Talking Jesus* survey which estimated that eighty-one per cent of practising Christians had a university degree.[32] In the 2015 British Social Attitudes Survey, meanwhile, sixty per cent of those surveyed defined themselves as working-class. Commentary, such as the following from the *Church Times*, is characteristic of this discussion: 'The Church in the UK is dominated by the middle class, who must eschew superior attitudes and empower working-class culture if the dearth of working-class people in their congregations is to be reversed.'[33] Or, as Philip North, the Bishop of Burnley and chair of The National Estates Churches Network, has put it, '[o]ur language, culture, resources, literature, and structures alienate many from poorer backgrounds.'[34]

Bretherton notes some of the forms this alienation can take, arguing that '[c]lass as a phenomenon directly affects our common worship, as the form, timing, language, and aesthetic of worship are often determined in unacknowledged ways by class rather than theological commitments.' He goes on: '[c]lass thereby affects with whom we do or don't gather on a Sunday and therefore what kind of peace we bear witness to in our worship.'[35] Whilst there is scope for liturgy to constitute 'an alternative mode of production to that which dominates contemporary forms of social order, [it also] reproduces and reinforces class conflict'.[36]

This is a problem that even well-meaning attempts to address the church's broader exclusion of the poor and working class can end up masking. For example, Martin Charlesworth and Natalie Williams argue that the answer to this discomfort is not to 'convert them to our middle-class ways', but to 'move out of our comfort zones and accept them as they are.'[37] However, such language can risk smuggling in a sense, as North puts it, that 'the onus is on middle-class people to be more astute and clever in sharing the gospel with the poor, as if we "have it" and "they" don't'.[38]

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[32] Madeleine Davies, 'Class Divide at Church Must Be Addressed, New Study Suggests', *The Church Times*, 4 August 2017, https://www.Churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2017/4-august/news/uk/class-divide-at-Church-must-be-addressed-suggests-new-study.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Quoted in Ibid.

[35] Bretherton, 'Sharing Peace: Class, Hierarchy, and Christian Social Order', p.331.

[36] Ibid., p.337.

[37] Martin Charlesworth and Natalie Williams, *A Church For the Poor: Transforming the Church to Reach the Poor in Britain Today* (Eastbourne: David C Cook, 2017). As quoted in Davies, 'Class Divide at Church Must be Addressed. New Study Suggests'.

[38] Quoted in Davies, 'Class Divide at Church Must Be Addressed, New Study Suggests'.

Class and church leadership

In considering how class can shape Anglican polity, it is worth paying particular attention to the selection and training of church leaders.[39]

North argues that radical change in selection procedures, particularly for ordination candidates, is required if the church is to expand its priesthood beyond an 'executive class'. He sees the current criteria deployed by those selecting ordinands as 'hugely favour[ing] eloquence and education and confidence, over authenticity and evangelistic gifts and genuine vocation', and as 'reward[ing] those who have done professional jobs and have led teams.' This 'over-emphasis on lived experience over and against potential' has a class dimension, in that '[c]andidates from less affluent backgrounds are far less likely to have had the kind of life chances that enable them to evidence, for example, leadership skills.' North further highlights how 'expectations that candidates should have experience of the Church of England in a variety of contexts are often completely unrealistic for those who have not moved away from their home towns to go to university or for work.' [40]

4.II.iii. Top-down polity

So, we have seen how Anglican polity is shaped by the social forces of the class system and of sectarianism and colonialism. In this, we have noted forms of exclusion, out in the world, which have an impact on the life of the church and are not sufficiently resisted, and are, in fact, often reproduced and reinforced within the life of the church. We have also begun to see how these social forces shape who is included or excluded from participation in particular roles the church. We now turn to consider in more depth how extant forms of social oppression take on distinctive forms of marginalisation and exclusion in ecclesial polity, and how exclusionary hierarchies distinctive to the church operate in its polity.

An Anglican clericalist tendency

The class-bias in selection procedures for the priesthood, highlighted above, can be seen as part of a wider set of difficulties over understandings of the nature and role of the priesthood in the Church of

[39] It is obviously not class alone - race, gender, and sexuality are all facets of identity that, whether consciously or not, also play into who is allowed to participate in ordained ministry.

[40] Madeleine Davies, 'Selection Procedures "Favour Middle Class"', *The Church Times*, 27 April 2018, https://www.Churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/27-april/news/uk/selection-procedures-favour-middle-class.

England. In underlining this as a particularly pressing Anglican concern, this is by no means to imply that it is a problem unique to the Church of England. Luke Bretherton writes of 'a characteristic deformation of all forms of ecclesial polity, which is for them to be shot through with the patriarchal form of the classical *oikos*.' He goes on to identify '[o]ne manifestation of this [as] the absolute claims of priests, bishops, or popes to be the *patresfamilias* of the people and thereby exercise absolute and centralized sovereignty marked by the attempt to determine the life of the polity without reference to the consent of the people/commoners/laity.'[41]

Hardy sees the problem of clericalism as intertwined with inadequate understandings of ecclesial polity, contending that Christians tend to deal with the complexity of issues around and relations between God, Church, and world by personalizing them, 'through concentrating on the one-to-one relation of the individual Christian to the personal God' and that '[w]here the Church is concerned, it is easy to displace this relation onto a power figure, the cleric.'[42] He remarks too upon the crucial importance placed on the role of the ordained priest (as 'priest-in-obedience-to-God' and as 'prophet-in-the-world'), and 'how relatively underdeveloped are the notions of lay ministry, the Church and its mission.'[43] He concludes that '[i]t seems the effects of God's work in non-religious situations […] are not clearly seen, which tends to produce a centripetal notion of the Church.'[44]

Sykes also notes the need to recognise the power that is held by Anglican clergy, partly in order to acknowledge and protect against the temptations that accompany power.[45] This propensity for the Anglican priest to be unaware of their power exists within a broader tendency of the Church of England, as an established church, to fail to recognise (and also to presume upon, without questioning) the social power and status to which it has become accustomed over the centuries. This power and an insider status has often fostered an implicit and unreflective expectation that Anglicans will be included in the conversation. With the questioning of this insider status in recent decades, the failure of the Church of England to recognize its own continuing power not only plays into corrosive power relations, but can also feed a narrative of the erosion of the Church's power.[46] This status has also been frequently accompanied by an expectation that certain codes of behavior (including excluding certain groups from

[41] Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life,* p.414.

[42] Hardy, 'A Magnificent Complexity', p.341.

[43] Ibid., p.342.

[44] Ibid., p.343.

[45] Sykes, *Power and Christian Theology*, p.138; pp.150 – 151.

[46] Dan Hardy identifies Peter Sedgwick's 'On Anglican Polity' as displaying this kind of preoccupation with the Church of England's loss of power. *Essentials of Christian Community*, p.339.

state institutions) will not be seriously challenged.[47] This has too often gone undisturbed because of failures of those in positions of power to question the correctness of their perspective and that of those like them. This sense of self-sufficiency has tended to lead to an insufficiently participative ecclesial polity – as we will discuss below.

Priestly power in liturgical contexts and the side-lining of laity

Perhaps the most obvious context in which to consider the power of the priesthood and the ways it shapes ecclesial polity is liturgical.

In *Beyond Ritual*, Garrigan analyses the liturgical rites of a Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, as well as of several 'marginal Christian communities'.[48] Garrigan's analysis of the Catholic eucharist in these terms yields painful insights into the way priestly liturgical practices can result into what she calls 'systematically distorted communication.'[49] This distortion can be seen most starkly in her description of the over-amplification of the presiding priest's microphone which, coupled with a failure to give sufficient time for congregational responses, meant that a single voice dominated proceedings. Moreover, consent to the validity of that voice, and the claims made by it, was never truly established. Garrigan goes on to interpret the generally muted or absent linguistic congregational participation – for example, only approximately ten per cent of the congregation joining in with the prayer of confession – as connoting a sense of alienation from, and even hesitancy regarding the validity of, the service.[50]

Garrigan also notes moments of contested communication in the liturgy, such as when the woman reading the second lesson started to introduce it, but was interrupted by the presiding priest, who introduced the lesson himself. Garrigan interprets this as the presider making the claim, whether consciously or not, 'that the woman was not thought (trust)worthy' to introduce the scriptures.[51] Whether on the basis of gender or of lay status, this moment of interruption illuminates how priestly action can exclude the rest of the people of God from participating in the *leitourgia* – the ministry or work of the people.

In contrast to the priest-dominant communication observed by Garrigan, Bretherton affirms that *vox populi, vox dei*:

[47] I will explore this mode of exclusion further in Chapter 9.

[48] Siobhán Garrigan, *Beyond Ritual: Sacramental Theology after Habermas* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

[49] Ibid., pp.135-7.

[50] Ibid., pp.125 -133. Garrigan does also note moments in which assent is expressed. Ibid., pp.133 -134.

[51] Ibid., p.130.

> The voice of God can be heard only where the voice of the people is heard. Listening to the whole … is crucial to the discernment of the *sensus fidelium* – that is, coming to a judgement about what is faithful, hopeful, and loving witness.[52]

Scharen likewise discusses the importance of the laity in the formation of a congregation's communal identity. Whilst acknowledging the importance of priestly leadership, he notes that strong communal identity depends on longevity (it cannot simply be established under the tenure of any single leader) and a mass congregational sense of identity (it cannot be imposed from above).[53]

In a similar vein, Sykes also highlights the equality of giftedness amongst the people of God, and that '[t]he point of ordination is to recognize this giftedness in lay people, to give them the opportunity of nurturing the gift, and then to entrust them with the responsibility of exercising it.' He goes on: 'In the theology of giftedness, [gifts] are specific gifts for a specific purpose, set in the contexts of all gifts given to the people of God, to be used harmoniously and in co-operation with the full diversity of gifts of the whole people.' Thus, '[i]n the context of total giftedness, it only makes sense to say that those called 'clergy' and those called 'laity' are alike part of the people or *laos* of God.'[54]

This develops a new dimension of the pneumatology I have been working with. So far, I have been drawing on Quash's receptive pneumatology, but taking that pattern of thinking in a more negative direction, such that conviction of sin has emerged in this light as a work of the Spirit. Now, putting this together with Sykes' work on giftedness, we see that challenges to the malformation of the church are in fact part of the 'gift' given through multiple members of the body. This is part of the way the whole body of Christ is formed by the Spirit, and the Spirit speaks through all of them - including in the form of prophecy and conviction of sin (as we see in 1 Corinthians 12 - 14). So, the gifts of the Spirit must be taken to include what Jenny Daggers calls the 'troubling gifts' of exposure to others' experiences of oppression.[55]

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[52] Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life*, p.414.

[53] Scharen, *Public Worship and Public Work*, p.219.

[54] Sykes, *Power and Christian Theology*, p.150.

[55] Jenny Daggers, 'A Theological Anthropology for Human Flourishing: Postcolonial and Feminist Reflections for These Troubled Times', *Louvain Studies* 41, no. 2 (2018): 152–72.Therefore, we need to cultivate practices and disciplines in the church which open us up to receiving the Spirit in what Daggers terms 'graced persons'.

Whilst there are notable recent attempts to offer a richer account of lay vocation, this is still far from evident in the predominant modes of Anglican praxis.[56] It is clear, then, that a richer dependence on one another requires a stronger role for the laity, as full, gifted members of the polity of the church.

Theologian-king models of polity

The picture sketched above of the troubling gifts of the Spirit for the body also stands in contrast to the idea of a formation of polity and its members flowing *from* what is common to the community *to* the individual members. This can take on a problematically centralised and top-down vision of the political life of the church, which can be seen in various forms in Anglican theology.

One prominent example is John Milbank's sense of the role of the theologian in the Church. Amidst what Milbank characterises as the uncertainty over where to 'locate true Christian practice', he argues that 'the theologian feels almost that the entire ecclesial task falls on his own head'.[57] The role in which the theologian is cast by Milbank mirrors, to a degree, the position of the classical philosopher-king. Martyn Percy identifies similar tendencies in the Anglican teaching document *Working as One Body*, arguing that it 'posits power in the hands of an elite class: the thinkers, or those with certain kinds of managerial skills.'[58] This tends to suggest that there are a small and fixed pool of decision-makers for the church, who have a certain immunity to 'the challenges of questions and resources which others bring.'[59]

The necessity, and giftedness, of the voices of others is not inherent to such a sense of the church's political life. This stands against what we have seen about the limitations, through finitude and egotism, of any given perspective. Such a polity will, therefore, necessarily fail to recognise the gifts and challenges brought by *all* of its members, and will exclude many from full participation in liturgical and practical-political structures.

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[56] See for example: 'Setting God's People Free' (Archbishops' Council, February 2017), https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/GS%20Misc%202056%20Setting%20God%27s%20People%20Free.pdf [Accessed 23.09.2019].

[57] John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) , p1. Milbank continues: the theologian alone 'must perform this ask of redeeming estrangement; the theologian alone who must perpetuate the original making strange which was the divine assumption of human flesh, not to confirm as it was, but to show it again as it surprisingly is.'

[58] Martyn Percy, *Power and the Church: Ecclesiology in an Age of Transition* (London: Cassell, 1998), p.124. Percy further notes that the church's power is '[a]ll too frequently… remote for those who need it most: the poor, the persecuted and the politically disadvantaged.' Ibid., p.16.

[59] Mike Higton, *Difficult Gospel: The Theology of Rowan Williams* (London: SCM Press, 2004), p.121.

4.II.iv. The church as instigator and narrator of oppression

So, in the pneumatological account I have been advancing, the Spirit draws all these people together and also speaks and works through all of them. In relation to sin and malformation, the every-member pneumatological vision of the church matters because in that very participative nature it overcomes the divisions of class, gender, race, elitism, and so forth. This is an egalitarian vision that we can imagine already, although we know it is a vision that will involve learning and negotiation.

At this point, then, we could still labour under the impression that there are things that we can stop doing, and do others more seriously and so be okay.[60] At these first two levels, forms of oppression (particularly around gender and class) are understood to be actively reproduced, strengthened, and passed on in new and virulent ways by ecclesial polity. However, this description of the malformation of ecclesial polity is still mainly at a level of how the church receives from outside and the implications for its own members. Whilst this account acknowledges the forms of exclusion and marginalisation particular to the church (such as clericalism), these are not understood to be pushed outwards from the church to society.

However, my contention is not just that the church mirrors the prevalent power relations of a given social context, or that it is only its own members who are malformed by distortions of polity. I will argue in this final section that the church has also been, and continues to be, an instigator of social oppression, and has pushed out a theological narrative in support of this. Coming to see this third level of malformation forces us to recognise the church as an instigator and narrator of structural oppression. We might describe this third level as centrifugal malformation, coming *from* the church *to* wider society. It is brought home particularly through engagement with Willie James Jennings' work on doctrine of creation, by which he demonstrates how the church created 'whiteness'.[61]

Willie Jennings on the Christian origins of race

Jennings' *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* has justly, been described as 'magisterial'.[62] Jennings' discussion of the Iberian conquest and subsequent European colonisation

[60] Smith, for example, tends towards this emphasis in *Awaiting the King*. Yet, Smith's response, which is to highlight that the church's liturgies are too weakly embodied, is not quite sufficient. It is also important to recognise how the church can, and often has, not only mirrored the oppression of its societal context, but also instigated it.

[61] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

[62] See, for example: https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300171365/christian-imagination [Accessed 23.09.2019].

exposes the church's 'long capitulation and contribution to a racialized world fraught with harrowing injustice and inscrutable evil that was, time and again, baptized with "Christian" justification and even blessing.'[63] He argues that, as part of modernity's rationalisation, 'Europeans enacted racial agency as a theologically articulated way of understanding their bodies in relation to new spaces and new people and to their new power over those spaces'. In this way, default racialisation was created. Jennings traces this emergence of 'whiteness', which, he argues, was 'a social and theological way of imagining, an imaginary that evolved into a method of understanding the world'.[64]

Jennings records how, as part of this theological imagining, liturgical forms were extended to incorporate the new practices of slavery of the fifteenth century, focussing particularly on the account of Gomes Eanes de Zurara, chronicler for Prince Henry of Portugal. Jennings renarrates Zurara's account of the unloading of a slave ship on 8th August 1444, during which, 'Prince Henry, following his deepest Christian instincts, ordered a tithe to be given God through the Church. Two black boys were given, one to the principal Church in Lagos and another to the Franciscan convent on Cape Saint Vincent.'[65] Jennings draws the conclusion that this ritual places the slave auction which followed 'inside Christian society, as part of the *communitas fidelium* … [and so allowed the auction to] draw ritual power from Christianity itself while mangling the narratives it evokes'.[66]

Not only were new liturgical rites created, but the meaning of existing sacramental practices was also mangled in support of enslavement. Katie Walker Grimes speaks of the use of the sacrament of baptism within the Catholic Church to control African slaves in the Americas, as part of stripping them of their sense of belonging to their native country and binding them to their new white masters. Before they boarded ships to the Americas, captives kidnapped from across Africa were forcibly baptised at ports by Catholic priests, sprinkled with holy water whilst shackled, and then assigned a European name. As Walker Grimes writes, '[p]erformed *en masse*, baptism stripped Africans of their social identities as well as their individuality, helping to consolidate them into a single racial type.'[67] In this way, baptism,

[63] Smith, *Awaiting the King*, p.171.

[64] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, p.58.

[65] Ibid.,, p.16. Jennings argues that '[t]his act of praise and thanksgiving to God for allowing Portugal's successful entrance into maritime power also served to justify the royal rhetoric by which Prince Henry claimed his motivation was the salvation of the soul of the heathen.' Ibid.

[66] Ibid., p.22. Jennings concludes that '[t]he telos and the denouement of the event will be enacted as an order of salvation, an *ordo salutis* – African captivity leads to African salvation and to black bodies that show the disciplining power of the faith.' Ibid., p.20.

[67] Katie Walker Grimes, *Christ Divided: Antiblackness as Corporate Vice* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), pp.190–91. See also Robert Beckford on the Anglican Communion and the Church of England's complicity with colonial powers, and its creation of 'Christian zombies'. Robert Beckford, *Documentary as Exorcism: Resisting the Bewitchment of Colonial Christianity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

perversely, 'ushered slaves not out of bondage and into freedom, but from freedom and into bondage. It brought slaves not out of death and into life, but from life and into death, both social and physical.'[68]

For Jennings, this baptism continues to be part of the way race distorts Christians' ability to imagine belonging in the church:

> [Baptism into racial existence] has stolen from the Church its revolutionary power of belonging in Christ. People from vastly different regions, histories, and ways of life through the optic of race imagine themselves or imagine others as part of a white race, or a black race, or something in-between. The point here is not how they designate themselves. The point is the power to imagine connection, belonging. In almost all cases such racial imagining is always stronger, more enduring, and more decisive than ecclesial belonging. Moreover ... the Church, crippled by its colonialist-born disease, is utterly impotent in the face of ethnic strife, becoming in many cases simply the church of a particular people and not a place for the radical belonging of all people.[69]

So, recognising the 'ecclesial failure' described by Jennings and Walker Grimes means that we must acknowledge the way the church has not only replicated oppression, but also instigated it (and continues to do so).[70] Both clearly see the colonial logic of slavery as drawing its power from theology, rather than simply being a political agenda that was provided with a *post hoc* theological justification. As Jennings puts it, '[t]he reordering of Indian worlds was born of Christian formation itself'.[71] In this way, 'the Christian story' remade the world to conform to the distorted and displaced 'truth' of colonial enslavement.[72]

Whilst Jennings and Walker Grimes focus on the Americas, we must also seek to recognise how the Christian-colonial imagination is also operative today in the Church of England. It is necessary to

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[68] Ibid, p.195.

[69] Jennings, 'Being Baptized: Race', *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics (Second Edition)*, p.284.

[70] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, p.247.

[71] Ibid., p.81. Jennings goes on: 'It would be a mistake to see the Church and its ecclesiastics as entering the secular workings of the state in the New World. No, the Church entered with the conquistadors, establishing camp in and with the conquering camps of the Spanish.'

[72] Ibid., p.104. Jennings describes how the Jesuit Jose de Acosta Porres 'fashioned a theological vision for the New World that drew its life from Christian orthodoxy and its power from conquest', revealing 'in a very stark way the future of theology in the New World, that is, a strongly traditioned Christian intellectual posture made to function wholly within a colonialist logic'. He goes on: 'When Acosta looked out onto the New World, the Christian habitus in which he had been shaped became the expression of a colonialist logic.' In sum, '[t]he inner coherence of traditioned Christian inquiry was grafted onto the inner coherence of colonialism', and a 'Christian-colonial way of imagining the world' emerged. Ibid., pp.83;106;208.

consider here the way in which Anglican theology undergirded the British Empire in such a way this continues to shape the polity of the Church of England and the wider Anglican Communion. There are also ongoing implications for civic life and national identity.[73] One instance of this centrifugal ecclesial malformation concerns, again, baptism. Whereas baptism should properly disrupt our allegiances and priorities and draw us closer to one another, this is not always reflected in Anglican practice. Robert Beckford has described the privatisation of the rite of baptism as whites moved the celebration away from black presence in the parish church to domestic spaces, and there are ways in which this still happens today.[74] For example, the practice of holding designated baptismal services after the Sunday morning service can show an unwillingness to disrupt the regular pattern of worship, and to acknowledge the disruption that joins members of the church to the newly baptised.[75]

So, here, when it comes to race, the church is a (or even *the*) source of social malformation. The church does not just act as the carrier of an infection, but rather these things are generated by deep practices of Christian thinking. The very practices that we think are positively formative are themselves malforming. So, we cannot just advocate throwing ourselves more fully into the liturgical process. We cannot say, 'at least we know where to stand', for what the church needs to be is not something that is already known. Therefore, the every-member pneumatological vision of the church *also* matters because that kind of participation allows the prophetic voices of participants to challenge it in particular ways. This requires an insistence that we do not know yet what it will look like (and *cannot* in advance of the contribution of specific participants), because the future of the church is contingent on *each* member shaping and forming it in as yet unimagined ways. This formation will include being shaped by those at and beyond the church's margins.

Conclusion

So, we have explored here the ways in which the depths of sin are operative in the church, and how the church all too often fails to recognise these malforming structures in its polity. Failures to acknowledge the ongoing and disruptive presence of sin in the church lead to forms of polity in which single voices of authority are able to make decisions unchallenged by differing or opposing perspectives. This in turn fosters an environment in which unjust ecclesial practices flourish unchecked.

[73] We will return to this in Chapter 5 regarding questions of corporate penitence, and again in Chapter 9 regarding national identity.

[74] Beckford, *Documentary as Exorcism*, pp.84 – 86.

[75] Alison Walker, 'Baptism as Disruptive Sacrament: A Journey Towards a Diverse Body', 2019, paper given at the annual conference of the Society of the Study of Theology, April 2019. Walker argues that understanding baptism as disruptive also challenges a current Anglican emphasis on continuity in baptism, whereby it is presented principally as part of a life journey.

Yet, this is not a call to despair of the church. This unearthing of the levels at which ecclesial polity is malformed and malforming has been undertaken not as an exercise in self-flagellation, but as a way of making room for the strange act of trust on which ongoing formation of ecclesial polity depends. Our faith is in that calling - not in any particular instantiation of that calling. We do not know what the polity towards which we are being called will look like exactly, but we continue in trust that participating in this life, which has Christ as its centre, will lead us deeper into truth.

5

Forming the Body

We have seen that we must expect the ongoing and disruptive presence of sin in the church, in ways that malform ecclesial polity and its members – and, too, malform wider society. Indeed, we need to be aware that we *never will be* sufficiently aware of the presence of sin. That is to say, we will never (before the eschaton) have got to the end of discovering the ways in which our actions and structures are sinful. Bringing Quash's understanding of the work of the Spirit into a concern with malformation of ecclesial polity leads us to a picture of the church in which openness to the Spirit means that we will always be coming to see in new ways the forms of our complicity in structural injustices.

This means that there is a need for centrality to be given, in an account of the formation of the Body, to ecclesial practices which foster the recognition of the ongoing, disruptive, and structural presence of sin in the life of the church. These will be practices which also account for our ongoing tendency *not* to recognise the malforming presence of sin.[1] So, what are the kinds of practices the church needs to cultivate to shape this self-critical stance and an openness to receiving 'troubling gifts'? Here I consider how the practices of confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation can be part of shaping a self-critical and receptive ecclesial polity. The recognition of the body's need to receive the gifts unique to each member also means seeking to foster a polity whose life truly depends on the participation of all members in both liturgical *and* practical-political matters, and in both the life of the church *and* the life of the wider political world. An ecclesial polity in which we look to receive from one another the disruptions of grace will also recognise that the movement of the Spirit of Christ is not contained within the church. This awareness will inform the ways in which the 'sociality' of the church, to use Hardy's term, shapes its practices – for example, in intercessions and offerings.

So, in the practice of this receptivity we must put ourselves in positions – discipline ourselves in certain sorts of practices – to be open to receiving the Spirit. There is a posture, a process, and a form of polity

[1] See also Aristotle Papanikolaou's proposal that, '[t]he entire Christian ascetical architecture is built on the premise that to be all one was meant to be requires ascetical struggle.' This means that, '[t]he Christian community itself has to organize itself so as to guard against Christians not being all that they can be; and what is paradoxical (and a little sad) is that Christians have to think about political communities that guard against Christians not being Christian.' For example, 'What is the form of political community that would guard against Christian support of slavery?' This is a reality to which proponents of eucharistic ecclesiologies do not give sufficient attention.' Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), p.85.

which together one might think of as waiting upon the work of the Holy Spirit; praying for it; openness to it; diligent obedience to what the Spirit has so far shown. These are all appropriate pre-conditions for receiving the work of the Spirit and being drawn into new 'findings', and so taking this stance really does matter. Yet, we must remember that posture *itself* is not the thing: there is not a particular posture which guarantees proper formation of polity and its members. Moreover, even the nature of these postures is something we go on learning from others (they are both given and continually found).

As noted in the previous chapter, this concern for provisionality leads to a particular approach to concrete liturgical examples. I largely draw on analogous examples from beyond the Church of England, as well as historic Anglican examples, but generally seek to avoid being prescriptive about current practices within the Church of England itself. What follows is not offered as paradigmatic vision of how any given church should be. Such a prescription would be contrary to the contingency of these practices upon the particularity of members and social context, and also contrary to the extent to which they are always provisional and revisable. The practices I mention are, therefore, not offered as exemplary examples of the self-critical stance this thesis advocates – I am not presenting them as already sufficiently embodying it. Rather, they are intended to illustrate the kinds of practices that can draw the church into this posture – but without an expectation that the posture can ever be fully achieved. This means that no practice can be thought of as complete and closed to further revision and alteration by the Spirit moving through the members of the body.

My hope, then, is that in attending to the capacity of liturgical and practical-political practices to express and enact the calling of the church, I can sketch an illustration of what it might mean for the church to be characterised by a humble confidence, with its polity configured by patterns of gathering and scattering (as outlined in Chapter 3). With this is mind, we turn to the task urged by Jennings, of considering what it means to form faithful people amid complex social situations: to 'attempt to imagine belonging and relationship beneath the guiding hand of God through relations that are fundamentally diseased and reflective of the remade world'.[2]

[2] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, pp.285 – 286. Smith puts is thus: 'How to remake the remade world? How to reconfigure the disconfiguration of creation we have inherited' [and, I would add, in which we are implicated]?'. Smith, *Awaiting the King*, p.179.

5.I. Penitence, forgiveness, and reconciliation

We begin, then, by considering ecclesial practices which foster the recognition and naming of the ongoing, disruptive, and structural presence of sin in the life of the church. We are concerned here with how ecclesial polity can be formed through confessing sin; asking for, and receiving, forgiveness; and practising reconciliation. I understand these practices as deeply constitutive of the common life of the church, not as additions to some prior, stable form of life. In seeking practices that disrupt falsely confident and fixed understandings of the church and its place in the world, we are acting in faith that, as Gittoes expresses it, '[s]acramental practices allow space for honesty in failure and brokenness while expressing hope, mercy and reconciliation.'[3]

5.I.i. Recognition and confession of sin

We have seen in the previous chapter the importance of recognising the structures of sin in which the church is mired and which it upholds. As Jennings argues, '[i]f Christianity is going to untangle itself from these mangled spaces, it must first see them for what they are: a revolt against creation'.[4] To this end, we must ask how existing practices could be better enacted for the polity of the church to more fully become what it is called to be.

Scharen underlines the importance of ecclesial practices of self-examination, exploring the role of these practices in baptism. He argues (as a Lutheran minister) that current Lutheran baptismal practices do not adequately confront the necessity of renouncing sin – which in turn makes the baptismal candidate insufficiently aware of the ongoing presence of sin in their own life. In particular, he suggests that the lack of attention given to the renunciation of the devil leaves unchallenged 'the implicit assumption that after becoming a Christian one can basically remain in the life one has lived previously.'[5] In a similar vein, we saw in the previous chapter from Garrigan how our ability to recognise sin can be masked through practices of confession which fail to acknowledge sin as something that is structural.

There is a need, therefore, for the liturgy of the church to create space for the admission of the truth of each member's complicity in structures of oppression. Simeon Zahl draws out the affective dimension of such a moment of truth in his discussion of the language of human sinfulness in the Book of Common Prayer. Zahl argues that it is emotionally necessary that one's sense of moral culpability is able to be

[3] Gittoes, 'Where is the Kingdom?', p.116.

[4] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, p.292.

[5] Christian Scharen, 'Baptismal Practices and the Formation of Christians: A Critical Liturgical Ethics', *Worship* 76, no. January (2002): 43–66(p.46).

communicated liturgically, alongside offering understanding and mercy. Therefore, whilst it may seem paradoxical at first glance, being provided with a language for the suffering of being aware of one's sinfulness in fact offers a form of consolation to the sinner, and this consolation can be transformative.[6] In Scharen's terms, 'facing up to this complicity and renouncing allegiance to the powers of evil then opens up a critical space for a new identity and direction of life.' In this critical space, 'allegiance to Christ and his work in the world … takes shape as a distinctive loyalty formative of Christian people.'[7]

The need to repent of loyalty to prevailing power structures through public corporate confession is pressing for the Church of England at a number of levels. We will return to this below, but it is worth noting here that confession is also important in relation to allowing the acknowledgement of suffering of those wronged. This is particularly important when we consider the way that structures of accountability and justice have failed in relation to sexual abuse in the church. The use of episcopal powers to protect clergy who have perpetrated sexual abuse, along with failures to support and seek justice for victims, shows the kind of practices of confession described above to be sorely needed.[8] The role that the Church of England has played in providing theological justification for the British imperial project is another such area.

As Williams says:

> The truth will set you free… and to accept the truth of the mixed history we have, as communities and as individuals, is key to growing up. It means that I look at my past self and think 'how could I have thought that, how could I have done that' … But I did, and it's part of me, and it's part of what God sees, and it's part of what God works with. Only if it's brought into the light, can it fully be worked with.[9]

This is true too of our communal histories.

5.I.ii. Forgiveness and reconciliation

[6] In a paper given at the Centre for Anglican Studies research seminar, Durham University, May 2018.

[7] Scharen, 'Baptismal Practices and the Formation of Christians', p.53.

[8] Alexis Jay et al., 'The Anglican Church. Case Studies: Chichester/Peter Ball Investigation Report' (Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse, May 2019), https://www.iicsa.org.uk/publications/investigation/anglican-chichester-peter-ball.

[9] Marilynne Robinson and Rowan Williams, 'Rowan Williams and Marilynne Robinson in Conversation - 2018 Theology Conference' (4 June 2018), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lB1Kft0OprI [Accessed12.9.19].

Having noted how practices of self-examination and penitence are essential to the church coming to see how far short it has fallen of its calling, and so receiving it again, we turn now to consider how this re-reception of ecclesial vocation requires a willingness to seek, receive, and offer forgiveness.

Divine forgiveness

We will focus first on asking for and receiving forgiveness from God, before considering forgiveness between Christians. In this, I build on the argument sketched in Chapter 2 for the importance of recognising sinfulness and finitude in accounting for Christian ethical formation – extending it to consider how a recognition of these conditions should shape the common life of the church. There I argued that to ask for and receive forgiveness entails both an acceptance of the limited and dependent character of creaturely life. These aspects of creaturely finitude must be considered as part of what it is to be brought into conformity with Christ.[10] As Williams contends, 'the holy life always begins with a Christlike acceptance of humanity's finitude, of an incomplete, sinful, and frustrated present moment (including the sin of both myself and my fellow Christians).' What, he asks, 'makes this acceptance the gateway to a true narrative of the soul?':

> The exchange between Christ and the human self … moves the present moment toward the goal of created things because of Christ's action. What I am now is transformed into a moment in the history of Christ, who in accepting the conditions of this world employs what they offer so as to bring about the fruition God intends. Christ is the supreme signum, the point of greatest transparency within the world to its divine origin. The human present, accepted by the believer, becomes therefore a kind of signum in Christ, a reinscription of scripture.[11]

Whilst there is much to explore in this quotation, for our purposes here I will just observe that, for Williams, the Christian's acknowledgement and acceptance of the sinfulness of their present moment joins them to Christ's action and purposes in history. So, this acceptance is not a passive resignation to the inevitability of being trapped in an ongoing pattern of sin, without hope of change. To the contrary, being joined to Christ in this way makes transparent in the life of the Christian both the origin and intended fruition of the world, in which the Christian participates in Christ. This emphasis on penitence

[10] We should note that this is not an elision of finitude and sinfulness. However, whilst human finitude and sinfulness are distinct characteristics of being human, we cannot separate them out from one another in our experience of the condition in which life is lived and ethical identity is formed.

[11] Rowan Williams, 'Augustine and the Psalms', *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 58, no. 1 (2004): 17–27., pp.23-24. This forms part of a discussion of how reading the Psalms can make our own voice the voice of the Body of Christ in worship.

should not, therefore, be misunderstood as a cyclical returning to the cross without the hope of ongoing learning and growth in the life of the church.[12] Rather, this pattern of returning to the foot of the cross in brokenness is part of being drawn into conformity to the one upon the cross. However, there is still no guarantee that one progresses towards deeper formation, or that we correctly recognise our own formation.

Forgiving one another and being reconciled

Williams also emphasises the base necessity of forgiveness for life together in the church, arguing that, as disciples, we live by forgiveness: cycles of revenge and death can only be disrupted by forgiveness, so we truly do *need* one another's forgiveness.[13] Wannenwetsch, too, writes of the way forgiveness frees members of the church from 'the hermeneutics of suspicion' (which 'is not invented out of nothing but is a result of "digesting" disappointing experiences of trust that have been betrayed') and also 'frees the other person too from the rigid law of revenge and mere reaction'.[14] This is made possible, as Higton says, by '[t]he resurrection [which] creates forgiven persons, in a community of the forgiven.'[15] This identity is re-received each week in the church's central act of worship: 'In celebrating the Eucharist, the Church acknowledges its existence as a community is held together despite failures and betrayals by the gracious giving of God's love in Christ'.[16]

A community marked by passing on this gift is a community of reconciliation. Yet, as we saw in Chapter 4, ecclesial practices of reconciliation can mask deep structural divisions, and can in fact get in the way of mutual forgiveness.[17] We saw from Garrigan how, in a deeply sectarian society, being used to forgetting without forgiving can render liturgical practices of reconciliation more about personally starting afresh than about serious grappling with corporate sin.[18] Bretherton likewise acknowledges that whilst the sign of peace normatively constitutes 'an alternative form of social order to those based on class and its largely economic determination', '[t]he performance of this alternative social order is enacted within and through a local and catholic body that is simultaneously conflicted and cankered

[12] Williams is interesting in this combining of a strong sense of learning, and therefore growth, with a sense of returning in brokenness to the cross.

[13] Williams, *Being Disciples*, p.37.

[14] Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship*, p.291.

[15] Higton, 'Rowan Williams', p.508.

[16] Ibid., p.509.

[17] Léon van Ommen, *Suffering in Worship: Anglican Liturgy in Relation to Stories of Suffering People* (London: Routledge, 2017), p.86. Ommen is clear that reconciliation is not forgetting, bargaining, or revenge.

[18] Garrigan, *The Real Peace Process*, pp.47 – 48.

around issues of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and class.'[19] As Leon van Ommen puts it, '[w]hile stories and rituals are potentially powerful agents of reconciliation, they may be in need of reconciliation themselves as well.'[20]

So, whilst Bretherton does not deny that '[t]he reproduction of inequitable and unjust social divisions in worship is a perennial problem', he also argues that 'it is precisely to this perennial problem that the sign of peace is addressed.' He further contends that this problem begins to be addressed through the sign of peace unveiling 'the reality of ongoing and unjust inequalities and thence the need to become enemies reconciled'. Having recognised this need, we then 'ritually enact and conform to one's primary identity as those who are brothers and sisters in Christ, and thereby relativize class or other earthly divisions.'[21] This does not mean the straightforward overlooking or abolition of social divisions in the Church, but 'that in Christ we become enemies reconciled.'[22]

There is a radical equality, then, that is inscribed into being part of this community, where belonging is based on receiving one's identity as a forgiven sinner. Sykes writes of this equality which springs from recognition of our common sinful nature, which ought to so bridge the '[t]he social gulf separating 'rulers' from their subjects' that it is received as a compliment 'to the humility of those who rule if a subject feels able to address to them words of admonition'.[23] This equality of status is enacted through practices of confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation – for, 'we cannot know ourselves as sinful members of the world and its systems of idolatry and domination until we gather as the Church and therein encounter each other as members of God's covenantal order.'[24] As Wannenwetsch puts it, '[w]orship is political when the "peace" before communion is not merely practised as a non-committal sign of general solidarity, but is also taken seriously as an act of reconciliation between people 'who may have something against each other'.[25] In this, he and Sykes more strongly draw out a sense of the

[19] Bretherton, 'Sharing Peace', p.335.

[20] Ommen, *Suffering in Worship*, p.85. Ommen describes a 'spirituality of reconciliation' as weaving together divine and human stories, and sees reconciliation as called for 'whenever stories and rituals are not authentic, and often they are not'. Ibid., p.85.

[21] Bretherton, 'Sharing Peace', p.338. Bretherton continues: 'The sign of peace makes visible the otherwise hidden divisions…while simultaneously gesturing towards their transcendence.' – Ibid.

[22] Bretherton, 'Sharing Peace', p.340.

[23] Sykes, *Power and Christian Theology*, p.143,

[24] Bretherton, 'Sharing Peace', p.338. Jane E. Wallman–Girdlestone also writes of the unifying impact of receiving forgiveness and anointing, from God and one another: 'We find commonality in acknowledging our individual and corporate finitude'. Jane E. Wallman-Girdlestone, 'Blurring the Edges', *The Edge of God*, p.112.

[25] Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship*, p.76.

contingency and particularity of the reconciliation enacted than we see in Bretherton's account of sharing peace.

The reconciled relations forged through the peace entail mutual responsibility – and are, as Bretherton puts it, 'the basis of *tezedekah u'mishpat* (justice and righteousness), the Hebrew term for the complex of obligations that form the basis of the God-given covenantal order we are born again into through baptism.'[26] This raises the question of how justice is to operate within the ecclesial community. We will return to this below, but for now we will note Ommen's claim, that '[w]holeness, healing, and justice are the horizon of suffering for a community of reconciliation'.[27] In addition to the need for reconciliation at an interpersonal level to be marked by justice and healing, there is also a need for a different, healed Christian social imagination, 'not just refinement of our theological syllogisms'.[28] We can see then that, as Garrigan puts it, 'a deep part of reconciliation is recognising that there was never a conciliation for us to return to. We must make something new.'[29]

This call to make something new illuminates that we have, in fact, seen here three levels at which penitence and reconciliation play out in forming church polity (and which are similar in certain ways to the three levels of sinfulness set out in Chapter 4). First, we saw from Bretherton penitence and reconciliation playing at a level where members of the church bring themselves up against a standard that they have already seen. So, in the peace, for example, they are brought up against the abstract standard of equality, independent of who is actually there exchanging the peace. Second, Wannenwetsch articulated a level where members of the Body are challenged by the specific people that are there - and are therefore brought up against the specific hurts for which they are responsible. Here, the specific instance of the peace becomes the core. And finally, we have seen from Garrigan a level where the challenge is to the very way members practice the peace – born of a recognition that it brings with it and perpetuates various exclusions. This is a distinctive turn away from the first two levels, as it is a level at which there is not an implicit paradigmatic form of the peace to which members are trying to return. Rather, it is a new thing to be wrought.

[26] Bretherton, 'Sharing Peace', p.340.

[27] Ommen, *Suffering in Worship,* pp.88 – 89.

[28] Smith, *Awaiting the King,* p.176.

[29] Garrigan, *The Real Peace Process,* p.61.

5.II. An attentive and participative polity

This acknowledgement that there never has been a paradigmatic form of harmonious polity to which we should be aiming to return has far-reaching implications. It is part of a wider recognition that we do not have an example, in any realised institutional form, to look to of all the things the church should be, and so nor do we even *know* the form of our common flourishing.

Making something new thus requires acknowledging that our current vision of the Body is not exhaustive – that, as Higton puts it, '[n]o one individual, no one group of Christians already *possesses* Christ, and so does not need to receive him – and to go on receiving him – from others.'[30] This requires that we learn to attend to one another – both to the other's gifts and to their challenges – that we may receive Christ from one another.[31] Learning to attend requires, in turn, participating in the common life of the polity. As Hauerwas observes, '[t]o be a Christian is to be trained to care for one another through the building up of a common life by engaging in the time-consuming and time-creating work of the everyday.'[32] In what follows I will explore the kinds of practices that might be involved in forming a more attentive and participative church polity.

5.II.i. Attentive and participative liturgy

Attending to challenges: Experiences of suffering and the liturgy

From the previous section we have seen that one of the ways we see God's ways with the world is in the working of the Holy Spirit to bring to light in new ways the oppression between humans. Receiving the challenges that others bring can therefore be understood as part of what it is to circle into deeper participation in the life of God, as are our attempts to respond to the invitation to relate the given to the found. So, learning to attend to one another in the polity of the church involves social relations – being interrupted by one another in order to see more clearly how one is involved in holding others back from participative flourishing. This involves nurturing the skill of seeing what stands in the way of a richer vision of corporate life.[33]

[30] Higton, 'Rowan Williams', p.513.

[31] Ommen, *Suffering in Worship*, p.88.

[32] Stanley Hauerwas, *The State of the University: Academic Knowledges and the Knowledge of God* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p.146.

[33] Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), p.129.

Fundamental here is the practice of receptivity towards perspectives that highlight one's own accretions of hegemonic privilege. In the practice of this receptivity we must put ourselves in positions – discipline ourselves in certain sorts of practices - to be open to receiving troubling gifts. This is not to argue that there is *a* particular posture which guarantees proper awareness of hegemonic privilege. Rather, I am arguing there are postures, processes, forms of polity, which can put us in a position of openness toward the ongoing discovery of sin. We now explore further what is involved in this attention to challenges.

Nicholas Wolterstorff notes the importance of remembering that when people gather for liturgical celebration, they bring with them all their experiences of life.[34] In particular, he is concerned with people's experiences of suffering, and the extent to which the ecclesial community hears the voices of suffering and allows these voices to contribute to the community and its liturgy. Wolterstorff contends that too often lament, in particular, with all its angularity and tension, is muffled in Christian liturgy.[35] Ommen also notes the lack of space for lament and expression of suffering in formal ecclesial contexts, arguing that '[t]he language and deportment of Sunday liturgy largely silences the cries of human suffering'.[36] He traces the way liturgy can create a dissonance, whereby participants who feel that the liturgy does not generally address suffering also feel that they cannot express their own particular suffering in the community.[37]

Deryn Guest finds a deep connection between what is expressed with such rawness in psalms of lament (characterising them as psalms that 'declare dissatisfaction with the status quo and demand change') and experiences of LGBTQ Christians in the church.[38] She emphasises the importance of spending time with 'the weeping, the shame, the alienation' expressed in psalms of lament, rather than skipping too quickly to the praise and thanksgiving with which the psalms close.[39] Moreover, she argues for the need for this to form part of liturgy, with its 'healing properties', rather than remaining a private practice: 'For liturgy to reach these congregants before they are driven away, it needs to be comfortable with

[34]Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Liturgy, Justice, and Tears', *Worship* 62, no. 5 (1988): 386–403

[35] Ibid., p.396.

[36] Ommen, *Suffering in Worship*, vii.

[37] Ibid., pp.60-61.

[38] Deryn Guest, 'Liturgy and Loss: A Lesbian Perspective on Using Psalms of Lament in Liturgy', in *The Edge of God: New Liturgical Texts and Contexts in Conversation*, ed. Nicola Slee, Michael N. Jagessar, and Stephen Burns (London: Epworth, 2008), 202–16(p.213).

[39] Ibid, p.207.

lamenting before God, with complaint and protest, with images of the neglectful and abandoning God.' Only in this way can space for transformation be opened up.[40]

Ommen also argues that '[t]he antidote to the exclusion of suffering, and therefore to exclusion of suffering people, is remembering' suffering before God.[41] In the context of a Sunday service, remembering the suffering of people and communities often most fully takes place in the context of intercessory prayers, through which the suffering are reminded that they and their situation are not forgotten by the ecclesial community and, moreover, that they are worthy of divine attention and compassion.[42] Through shared attention to suffering in a liturgical context the situation, the sufferer, and the relationship with the ecclesial community are reframed. In this way, being able to express suffering is also important for the development of solidarity in the ecclesial community.[43]

Clergy therefore have a particularly significant role to play in either allowing space for the expression of suffering or compounding it through further alienation.[44] Exercising a ministry of attention will also mean being discomforted oneself, and having one's role re-shaped. This particularly needs to be remembered in contexts where the priest is likely to have a more privileged socio-economic status than many of their congregation, and will therefore have very different experiences of suffering. Barrett describes how, in his congregation, through 'intentional folding-back-into church of our practices of receptivity in the neighbourhood, some of our African-Caribbean congregation members have found a space to speak out of their painful (and until recently unacknowledged) historic marginalisation from active participation in worship and decision-making structures locally – and, for some at least, to begin to create and claim positions of leadership.'[45] In this way, attending to challenges can unsettle and re-form the way members participate in ecclesial polity, and so re-form the polity.

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[40] Ibid, p.213. Guest argues that 'the Church … needs to reattune itself once more to this right of complaint and re-accommodate lament into liturgy. Only by so doing will worshippers be able to develop and mature as equal covenant partners'. Anthony Reddie also writes, although from a different perspective, of expressing experiences of racial and colonial injustice in liturgy. Anthony Reddie, 'Liturgy for Liberation', in *The Edge of God: New Liturgical Texts and Contexts in Conversation*, ed. Stephen Burns, Nicola Slee, and Michael N. Jagessar (London: Epworth, 2008), pp.67-72.

[41] Ommen, *Suffering in Worship,* p.86.

[42] Remembrance of suffering can also be expressed in silence and lament, which 'brings suffering before God and reframes it'. Ibid, p.113.

[43] Ibid., pp.73-74.

[44] Ibid., pp.66-67. Ommen highlights for example, the significant role of clergy in creating spaces that allow for the expression of negative experiences. This requires overcoming disconnections between the story of the liturgy and the stories of the people gathered – a disconnection that Ommen sees as particularly pronounced in the Anglican context.' This disconnection must be overcome so that 'in the liturgy, the people graft their own story on to the story of Jesus Christ'. Ibid., pp.73-78.

[45] Al Barrett, 'Interrupting the Church's Flow: Hearing "Other" Voices on an Outer Urban Estate', *Practical Theology* 11, no. 1 (2018): 79–92.(p.90).

The priestly role also involves drawing attention to that which it would be more comfortable to ignore. This might include challenging the congregation to become who they are called to be in Christ in ways that are not comfortable. Scharen, in *Public Worship and Public Work*, describes a weekly supper and liturgy established at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception (in downtown Atlanta) in the 1980s for men with HIV/AIDS by the priest, Fr. Adamski, and the congregational tensions around the decision to begin this ministry. Kristopher Norris and Sam Speers recount similar tensions around the decision of a priest to institute the passing of the peace in order to include AIDs sufferers.[46] This can be seen as an instance of what Quash calls the priestly vocation to truthful description – here, describing the truth of the place of dignity reserved for these men within the household of God.[47] So, the role of the priest is to both *form* and *receive formation from* their flock.

We can see, then, that learning to attend to the challenges facing others (including to the often structural nature of these challenges) involves remembering suffering before God. These practices allow space for the one suffering to be held up as worthy of divine attention and of the attention of other members, and so for the development of solidarity. Space is allowed for reflection upon one's own involvement in the situation being remembered before God. There is scope, then, for these practices to lead to corporate repentance and common action: united by a common recognition of the injustice to be overcome as well as a shared vision of human flourishing, and bound together by a solidarity in pursuit of this flourishing.[48]

Attending to gifts

This helps us to see that through and beyond the conviction of sin, there is an invitation here to abundant life. Practising receptivity means not just receiving the needs of one's congregation and local area, but also learning to receive the gifts that each person in both the church and wider community brings to the body. A posture of attentive anticipation is necessary to notice and receive the work of the Spirit in the world – expecting those outside of the church as well asthose within to bring gifts. In the Church of England, this means attending to gifts a) within one's congregation, and b) within one's parish.

[46] Kristopher Norris and Sam Speers, *Kingdom Politics: In Search of a New Political Imagination for Today's Church* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2015), pp.85-86.

[47] Ben Quash, 'The Anglican Church as a Polity of Presence', in *Anglicanism: The Answer to Modernity*, ed. Duncan J. Dormor, Jack McDonald, and Jeremy Caddick (London: Continuum, 2003), 38–59.

[48] Ommen, *Suffering in Worship*, p.97. Corporate remembrance is necessary for redress and other kinds of action, particularly when it comes to structural injustices.

Attending to gifts within the congregation

Frances Young highlights how the gifts brought by linguistically disabled people enrich the church. In particular, she draws out what is given through the presence of her son, Arthur, in worship. Arthur, writes Young, enlarges understandings of what is going on in worship, allowing those around him a 'deep identification with that reality of not being able to put the sacred into words or grasp it'.[49] In this way, he offers to them an opportunity for more fully understanding what is being performed and pointed to through the liturgy: 'Arthur reminds us that we are caught up in something bigger than ourselves – certainly bigger than our words, and bigger than our understanding.'[50] So, he helps his fellow worshippers to remember that 'what we do matters less than being bathed, like him, in the music of voices and the smiles of presences, in a sense of abandonment to the sensations of sounds and sight, even bodily movement, as we receive grace through the mediation of liturgical actions and through one another.' In sum, 'Arthur reminds us that often we may well receive grace without being fully aware of the fact and there is much more to receive than we can know.' This allows worship to become more fully what it is meant to be: as Young argues, '[t]he aim of worship is to generate the kind of participation that takes [worshippers] out of themselves so that they become more fully themselves in the larger whole', and Arthur's participation does just this.[51]

Understanding participation in worship in this way also has implications for the way we conceive of the positions of the priest and the laity. In the account of church polity I am advancing, the priest's principle role is to attend to their congregation and parish, and to also direct their attention. Having their attention directed by the priest through the liturgy illuminates the priestly dignity of the congregation and allows them to receive this identity and calling afresh. The priest's ministry of attention therefore allows congregants to become more fully themselves - and so to receive back their particular ecclesial ministry. Receiving their own priestly dignity, as part of being joined to and mediating Christ's priesthood, requires that the congregation must also be able to 'assume its own office' in worship; it must be *able* to assume it, and must also *want* to assume it (not remaining in what Wannenwetsch names

[49] Frances Young, 'Songs without Words: Incorporating the Linguistically Marginalized', in Stephen Burns, Nicola Slee, and Michael N. Jagessar, eds., *The Edge of God: New Liturgical Texts and Contexts in Conversation* (London: Epworth, 2008), 91–103(p.95). So, Arthur does not just make those around him aware of their own finitude and vulnerability (as the gifts of those with disabilities are sometimes understood), but brings his own distinctive gifts that enrich the body.

[50] Ibid., p.96.

[51] Ibid., p.98. This may indeed be through disruption: 'Arthur's contribution is small and potentially disruptive. That may in itself be a gift to the rest of us, jerking us out of habit into new depth.' Ibid.

as a 'consumer attitude', to which disempowered congregations can become accustomed).[52] Wannenwetsch contends that, for the polity of the church to become what it is called to be, the congregation must be 'actively involved in responsibility for the proclamation, and imagination … invested in the question of how this can be brought out appropriately in the Church service.' He highlights the opportunity offered by the notices or announcements slots during a service, for example, for 'the pool of the charismata existing in every congregation [to be brought out] … so that these gifts are made mutually available and can be drawn on by others too.'[53]

So, attention to challenges and gifts will shape participation. And pursuing the flourishing of all requires that all are included in the liturgical life of the church. As Bretherton puts it, worship is 'something in which the flourishing of each is intertwined with the flourishing of all: if I don't contribute my charism to the proceedings, or am excluded from doing so, then both I and the body are impoverished.'[54] Ecclesial inclusiveness is thus not pursued for its own sake, but out of the conviction that everybody has a particular charism to contribute in worship.

Receiving gifts from beyond the Church: Intertwining of Anglican polity and sociality

Being attentive to one another's gifts also requires attention to one another's social context: to what James Hopewell calls the 'deep and implicit inter-connections' between church and world.[55] So, in

[52] Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship*, p.76. Donald McFadyen notes that 'Roman Catholic ecclesiologist Yves Congar was forced to face just this question of the relation between Church theory and practice.' Having written an 'extraordinarily influential study of laity in the Church, by which he hoped to correct what he considered an overemphasis on the Church as hierarchy and to re-establish a sense of the Church as primarily the people (*laos)…* [he was] faced with questions about the actual apathy of the majority of lay people, [he] could only answer by referring to the theological reality of the Church as the Body of Christ in which all members are involved and active.' McFadyen, Towards a Practical Ecclesiology for the Church of England', p.139n454, citing Clare Watkins, 'Organizing the People of God: Social-Science Theories of Organization in Ecclesiology', *Theological Studies* 52 (1991): 694–97.

[53] Ibid., p.76. In a similar vein, Guido de Graaff discusses the way Christians' common priestly dignity can be expressed through lay-led intercessions - Guido de Graaff, ''Intercession as Political Ministry: Re-Interpreting the Priesthood of All Believers', *Modern Theology* 32, no. 4 (2016): 504–21.

[54] Bretherton, 'Sharing Peace', p.336. He goes on: 'there is an asymmetric dynamic of exchange – some give more than others – but it is one where all are dependent on each other'. So, whilst there is a hierarchy in the church, Bretherton argues that this must be based on 'covenant, vocation, and gifting', not on social background, wealth, or ownership.

[55] Percy, *Power and the Church*, p.127, citing James Hopewell, *Congregation: Stories and Structures* (London: SCM Press, 1987). Hopewell describes 'a contextual ecclesiology' as one which 'sees the Church and world as a woven fabric that share a variety of strands, yet also has an obligation to somehow stand apart from society, yet not in a way that removes it from its deep and implicit inter-connections.' He further 'points out that mechanistic approaches to the Church occur when contextual visions are lost. Typically, a contextual ecclesiology is concerned with how it related to its environs.' Ibid.

addition to fostering practices of attention and receptivity within the church, these must also be fostered in relation to the world – and to one's particular locality, especially.

As we have noted, a posture of anticipation and attention is necessary to notice and receive the work of the Spirit - and this is true of receiving from those outside the church as well as from members of the church. This sense of anticipation is expressed particularly strongly by Hardy, who emphasises ongoing encounter with realities outside the church as calling the church to see and understand itself anew. Indeed, Hardy sees 'God's life at its fullest' as 'an engagement with the extensity and manifoldness of the world for the sake of bringing it to the perfection appropriate to it in the purposes of God'. [56] These restless journeys outwards ('extensity', in Hardy's terms) carry with them the expectation that what one encounters out in creation will drive one back into what one has already been given. There are echoes here of a central sensibility in T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, in which Eliot writes of returning to the place where one began one's journeying and knowing it again but as if for the first time (a sense Quash names as 'vertiginous at-homeness').[57]

This is part of what Higton calls the 'attentive Church's' task of calling: 'of pointing people who might have some experience of the good… (people inside and outside the Church) in the direction of the fullness of that good … and beyond that to the fuller good of re-ordered desire to which the gospel calls us.' [58] We should note here that arguing that the church should expect good to be found on the other side of its walls, does not mean, as Williams makes the point, 'that Church will make no rules, have no policies, and draw no boundaries'.[59] Nor is this a denial that learning to be the people of God depends in important ways on the ecclesial community, constituted by the Spirit (although not the Spirit's domicile). However, 'it does mean that Church will have to operate its policies, and police its boundaries, in the recognition that it neither thereby creates a sterilised environment within which everything is guaranteed to be good, nor erects a pale beyond which everything is guaranteed to be bad.'[60] We have seen already the church's inability to guarantee goodness within its own boundaries,

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[56] Hardy, *Finding the Church*, p.159. For Hardy, the churches of the Anglican Communion, in their diverse immersion in different contexts yet united relationship, 'are an effective sign of the intensity of God's life and purposes engaging with this extensity and manifoldness.' Ibid.

[57] 'We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.' T.S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding', in *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001); Quash, *Found Theology*, p.240.

[58] Higton, *The Ecclesial Body's Grace*, p.18.

[59] Higton, *The Ecclesial Body's Grace*, p.17. So, Williams is not seeking a practice of receptivity which dissolves 'boundaries of truthfulness'. Higton, 'Rowan Williams', p.515.

[60] Higton, *The Ecclesial Body's Grace*, p.18. Whilst these words were written about the Church's attitude to sexual morality, they apply to the relationship between Church and world more widely.

and are now exploring the positive flipside of this: the manifold life of God we are called into through unbounded encounter with Spirit. There is a sense here in which the church needs the world in order to become more fully what is called to be.

We will unpack this further in Part III, but for now will briefly explore some of the implications for how we might recognise and receive gifts from the world in liturgical contexts. Barrett writes of the practice of gathering at the start of worship and 'hearing to speech the stories people bring of their encounters during the week, the glimpses they have caught of the kingdom of God, the places where they have been challenged, fed and changed.' He understands this practice as 'inviting the 'centres' of the church to learn from and be transformed by a passionate … engagement in the abundant, resource-full 'edges'.[61]

This delight in the richness of the 'edges' of life can perhaps be particularly powerfully expressed in the offertory. As Quash writes, the offertory can help those gathered realise that:

> [T]he whole world belongs to God, not as property, but as something intrinsically communicable and communicating: part of the fellowship of all created things which is made visible in the Eucharist. By the power of the Holy Spirit the whole world can "belong" to Christians in the same communicable and communicating way, so long as they let their practices teach them that they are in common possession of themselves, of one another and of the rest of creation only because all these things are first and last in Christ.[62]

The practice of the offertory associated with the Parish Communion movement expresses this faith in the 'communicating' potential of all of life. A reportedly common practice was for the offertory procession to include objects produced during the work of the week (such as, in Durham, lumps of coal), which were brought amidst God's people and offered on the Lord's table. In this way, the offertory also reflected local ties of belonging, receiving the gifts encountered in each member's own neighbourhood.[63] This practice also reconfigured the work of the week, showing it to be a gift from God that should be offered back in praise. This helps us to see how membership of the gathering and

[61] Barrett, 'Interrupting the Church's Flow: Hearing "Other" Voices on an Outer Urban Estate', p.89.

[62] Ben Quash, 'Offering: Treasuring the Creation', in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p.318.

[63]Andrew Bishop, 'Eucharist Shaping: Church, Mission and Personhood in Gabriel Hebert's Liturgy and Society' (DTh thesis, King's College London, 2013), https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.628479, p.124 [Accessed 12.9.19]. I should note that it is hard to substantiate the exact form of the practices of this movement.

scattering church is formed through working with the material of our lives, with the everyday work of the laity feeding into and being illuminated by ecclesial liturgies.

5.II.ii. Attentive and participative practical politics

We have seen, then, that attending to the gifts and challenges of one's congregation and parish is necessary for the formation of participative liturgy. Just as, for Bretherton, 'true worship is constituted not by the aggregation of individual self-interests, but is an expression of the participants' mutual interest in deeper relationship with God and neighbour', so too is this true of the governance of the church.[64] This conception of governance as expressing deep mutuality requires attending to what is necessary for each person's flourishing. And, if, as I argue, participation in decision-making (in this instance, in the governance processes of the church) is part of what it is to flourish, then we must also consider what such a participative ecclesial polity looks like and how it can be formed.

Attentive disagreement, deliberation, and discernment of common ecclesial life

If the good of each member and of the whole body are inextricable from one another, then good governance processes must allow space and time for attention to the good of each member. This first requires acknowledging the limitations of our prior knowledge of what is in the other's good. As we noted in Chapter 2, the opacity of others ought to act as a check on delusions that we can know the other person fully. We must also doubt our own ability to see and speak truthfully on our own. Acknowledging both our finitude and our opacity to ourselves means recognising that we can only come to know who we are, and what our good consists in, by encountering those who are not us - who exist beyond our limits. Our obscurity to ourselves and to one another should result in 'the inescapability of taking time' in our social relations, if we are to try to understand the other's good (and so also our own).

Williams characterises the practices of deliberation necessary to do justice to our own opacity and that of others as 'contemplative pragmatism'. He sees this as an Anglican mode of practical reasoning, perhaps most fully expressed in the theological writings of Richard Hooker, who, 'against the backdrop of basic creedal and liturgical commitments', was 'pragmatic to the degree that the accumulation of historical precedent has real intellectual weight, in the light of our ineradicable folly, selfishness and slowness as human thinkers'. Williams goes on to characterise Hooker as 'contemplative to the degree

[64] Bretherton, 'Sharing Peace', p.336.

that his guiding principles are seen by him as received, not invented, as the uncovering of a pattern of 'wisdom' in the universe, focused in and through the Word incarnate.'[65]

These practices of attention are all the more necessary and demanding across deep difference. Williams, whilst Archbishop of Canterbury, described the need to work at recognising the other with whom one is in disagreement: 'Having heard what you say, can I recognise the possibility of being called to deeper obedience to the gospel (given what I currently understand that obedience to mean) by what you say, and can I see the possibility (given what you currently understand obedience to mean) of calling you to deeper obedience?' As Higton puts it, 'Can I see that his or her discernment is being offered as a gift to the Church, an attempt to show the Church more of the Church's Lord and the demands that his love makes on our lives?'[66] This hard work of attending to the other's obedience and discernment is undertaken in the context of an ecclesial community in which each member has committed to what Williams calls 'a promise to be willing to be converted by each other.'[67] 'Disagreeing well' thus requires humility about one's self-knowledge.

This willingness to be converted entails being prepared to continually renegotiate our sense of who we are and how life together should be conducted. Yet, as we saw in Chapter 2, this is not a picture of negotiation that starts from clear and fixed positions. For, we discover who we are together through negotiation. By this light, conflict can be seen as an inevitable and even necessary part of associational life. For conflict is part of what it is to be human *and* Christians, who do not and cannot individually see the whole picture. Therefore, ecclesial polity should not be geared towards the avoidance of conflict at all costs, as only ongoing contestation can lead to a fullness that none of us reaches alone. Higton writes of there being a 'wider circle', beyond those with whom we are in simple agreement, in the church of those we recognise as also, like ourselves, 'not in possession of truthfulness but in serious

[65] Williams, *Anglican Identities*, pp.38-39; 56. To avoid romanticising the tenor of deliberation within the Church of England, it is important to note here that Williams is offering contemplative pragmatism as a *normative* mode of Anglican reasoning, not as descriptive of current and historical practice. Martyn Percy's category of 'consecrated pragmatism' shows us a form of pragmatism that is frequently on display, and which is not what is meant by contemplative pragmatism. Percy, *Power and the Church*, p.131 – 135.

[66] 'Higton, 'Rowan Williams, p.515, referencing Rowan Williams, 'Making Moral Decisions', in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Robin Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3–15(p.11). So, 'Williams is describing the Church as 'a community in which not only do *I* seek *your* deeper obedience, but in which *I* also seek *your* seeking of *my* deeper obedience.' Higton, 'Rowan Williams', p.518.

[67] Higton, 'Rowan Williams', p.518, referencing Rowan Williams, 'Debate on a Covenant for the Anglican Communion', (13 February 2008), http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1522/debate-on-a-%20covenant-for-the-anglican-communion [Accessed 17.09.19].

pursuit of it, hoping and working for it.'[68] This wider circle will include the church's risk-takers, who 'speak for a church that doesn't yet exist, so they believe, out of a conscience informed by scripture and revelation.'[69]

Participative decision-making

If we require ecclesial processes of deliberation that foster an awareness of the limitations of any single perspective, we therefore also need governance structures which allow for any one voice to be challenged and supplemented by others. We have seen that there is an incompleteness to any existing voice, and a need for it to be brought into robust conversation with others, in order to enable the possibility that I might discover my own good as well as the good of others more deeply in the process, and thus hitherto invisible possibilities of mutuality.

Bretherton draws out how, in being ruled by God, sovereignty in the church is 'structurally divided' and cannot be claimed by any single human ruler or class.[70] In line with the critique offered in the previous chapter of theologian-king models of polity, Sykes argues for cutting down to size the power of both the episcopate and theologians. In relation to bishops' powers of discipline and patronage, Sykes argued that those who govern should themselves be open to rebuke.[71] The people of God are thus not to understand themselves as 'passive recipients' of divine commands, which are mediated through a priestly caste. Rather, as Bretherton argues, 'the fullest expression and paradigmatic form of God's rule are the assemblies where God and the people speak and hear each other … These public assemblies include various kinds of Spirit-annointed speech, including reasoned deliberation, prophetic indictment, legal proclamation, exhortation, cries of repentance, and shouts of acclamation, all of which help constitute the people of God'.[72]

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[68] Higton, 'Rowan Williams', p.515. Higton goes on: 'the church is formed by reading in company, with each individual reading with those who read differently, and those whose readings challenge that individual to look again, look more closely, and to take more time. The church is therefore properly and inherently a community of conversation – even argument – about Scripture.' Ibid.

[69] Rowan Williams, 'Speech in Debate on the Windsor Report' (17 February 2005), http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1680/general-synod-speech-in-%20debate-on-the-windsor-report [Accessed 17.09.19].

[70] Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life*, p.408.

[71] Sykes, *Power and Christian Theology*, pp.149 – 150; 152.

[72] Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Life*, p.408.

Forming assemblies where 'God and the people speak and hear each other' requires attending to how voices can speak and be heard that have historically been silenced. In this, we pick up from what was noted earlier regarding the need for structures of justice as well as of forgiveness and reconciliation, now turning to consider the relationship between these structures. Williams argues that moving beyond an oppressed-oppressor/plaintiff-accused relationship requires that the oppressed or otherwise injured party be able to enter into the discursive life of the community (without losing sight of ongoing power imbalances governing the discussion).[73] The oppressed's participation in the life of the community is also important in allowing them to enter into self-definition: taking their part in deliberative conversations about individual and common flourishing.[74] The vulnerable and oppressed speaking themselves into full participation in the decision-making fora of ecclesial polity in turn shapes structures of justice and accountability. For, the voices of those who have been oppressed need to be heard in order to shape systems of polity that do not simply protect the powerful.

As noted in the previous chapter, in the context of the Church of England there is a particular need to hear the voices of those who have been excluded from leadership roles and decision-making processes on the basis of class identity. As North has argued:

> This means equipping Churches in poorer areas to identify and draw out their own leaders and evangelists rather than ship them in from outside. It means taking massive risks with leadership styles that are counter to the Church's accepted culture. And it means having the courage to allow the mainstream Church to allow its structures, its institutions, and, above all, the content of its proclamation to be moulded by these working-class voices.[75]

In the wider Anglican Communion, too, the Church of England must seek to recognise more fully how the voices of other Anglican Churches, particularly those in the global south, have been, and continue to be, marginalised in ways that contradict the supposed equality of churches in global Anglican polity. This is part of a wider need for those with power and privilege 'to learn a new receptivity towards the views of human groups that are on the margins, rather than assume entitlement to define for others what their flourishing might entail.'[76] For, there are genuinely new possibilities for what the church could be

[73] Williams, *Lost Icons*, p.116.

[74] In this way, we see there is a relationship between belonging and political agency. James K A Smith writes of entering into discursive community through language, for which being able to 'explain oneself' is a both necessary condition for belonging *and also* that which is made possible by belonging to the community. James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Relativism?: Community, Contingency, and Creaturehood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), p.115.

[75] Davies, 'Class Divide at Church Must Be Addressed, New Study Suggests'.

[76] Daggers, 'A Theological Anthropology for Human Flourishing', p.159.

that can only be brought about by those who are on the margins describing for themselves what their flourishing might entail.

So, we have seen that there are no guaranteed ways of properly forming church polity. Yet, there is a posture, a process, a form of polity, which can put us in a position of openness toward the ongoing discovery of sin. There are things we can do, as members of the church, to wait upon the work of the Holy Spirit, and to be oriented to what the Spirit has so far shown.[77]

[77] In arguing for changed practices, I must also acknowledge the challenges to change, and slow pace at which such change is likely to happen. Moreover, if change is to be based on the participation of as many voices as possible, then it will be necessarily slower and more diffuse than executive action.

Conclusion to Part II

In this Part, we have explored the appropriate formation of ecclesial polity, and the way that this requires that members undertake certain postures and practices. I started with a question: if we do not have a picture of a basically finished church that can properly form its members, what do we put in its place? How can we think about the church itself as a body needing to be formed (and to go on being formed), especially at the level of polity? So, instead of focusing on the political formation of individuals within the Body, my focus shifted here to the ongoing formation of the Body itself, as a site of negotiation amidst deep difference for the sake of common life.

In answering that question, I set out a brief ecclesiology: an account of the basic dynamics and structures that the church needs if it is to be formed in this way. I imagined the church we need – but not in an idealistic way. Instead of looking at the sinfulness and brokenness of the church as an afterthought, or as a topic that comes as a caveat *after* the description of what the church should be, I placed it right in the heart of my account. This approach has allowed us to see how church polity is malformed and malforming: how the church acts as a replicator and compounder of oppression; in distinctive ways in its polity; and an instigator of oppression in the world. This has brought to the fore the recognition that we will never be aware of how unaware we are of sin. More positively, we have also seen how the Spirit is at work in forming church polity and its members, through bringing it to new convictions of sin. The polity of the church therefore requires postures, practices, disciplines that open it up to the convicting work of the Spirit, through every member of the polity.

So, we must put ourselves in positions – discipline ourselves in certain sorts of practices – to be open to receiving this disruptive and troubling grace. These are all appropriate pre-conditions for being drawn into new findings by the Spirit, and so taking this stance really does matter. Yet, this is not to argue that there is *a* particular posture which guarantees proper awareness of complicity in oppression: of properly forming church polity. Rather, I am arguing there are postures, processes, forms of (ecclesial) polity, which can put us in a position of openness toward the ongoing discovery of challenge and gift from others. There are things we can do, as members of the church, to wait upon the work of the Holy Spirit and to be oriented to what the Spirit has so far shown.

Even the nature of these postures is something we go on learning from others (they are both given and continually found).[78] It is not a stance that we can simply will into existence on our own resources. It

[78] This helps us to see how our openness to grace is *itself* a work of grace in us. We must remember that a posture *itself* is not enough to ensure a church attuned to oppression.

is truly a matter of our agency, but our agency *as* impelled and shaped and continually taught by the Spirit. Being open to receiving these troubling gifts is therefore part of making room for the strange act of trust on which ongoing formation of the life of the Church depends. For, polity is always unfinished, and what we are a straining towards does not yet exist nor has it ever existed. Yet, that is also the point: the tension between the present reality and the yearned-for community is precisely where Christian political formation takes place. As Williams says:

> I long for the Church to be more truly itself…. Yet I must also learn to live in and attend to the reality of the Church as it is, to do the prosaic things that can and must be done now and to work at my relations now with the people who will not listen to me or those like me – because what God asks of me is not to live in the ideal future but to live with honesty and attentiveness in the present.[79]

So, the ongoing need for others to disrupt us by exposing to us our sin does not rest on a kind of metaphysical scepticism. Rather, this dynamic of coming to recognise 'ever more' is fundamentally about abundance. Being brought by the Spirit to new findings is part of learning to trust in the manifold unfolding of the triune life, in which we participate, amongst those with whom we live. So, the way learning to attend is understood shapes in turn the way we understand participation in the body of the church and in the wider body politic, and the kind of formation that these bodies can and should undergo. Being formed as a body through learning to better attend is about recognising our limits *and* God's abundance, manifested in social relations. We do not know what the polity towards which we are being called will look like exactly, but we continue in trust that participating in this life, which has Christ as its centre, will lead us deeper into truth.

From this, it seems obvious that the manifold unfolding of the life of God could not be contained by the church. So too, Christian political formation does not just take place in the church. We turn now, in Part III, to consider how Christian political identity is, or can be, formed 'outside' of the church.

[79] Williams, *Christ on Trial*, pp. 85–86.

Part III

Formation in the World

Introduction

From Parts I and II, we have seen that the church is not sufficient for Christian ethical and political formation, and that engagement with the world is necessary to form both the Christian and the church. So, what kind of engagement is that?

We start, in Chapter 6, with a discussion of the Christian citizen, and some of the ways that Anglican theologians have talked about this role and the formation of this identity. I conclude that, Anglican theologians have tended to speak as if Christians are formed in the church, and that out of this flows the form of their participation in public life. So, the idea that Christian and ecclesial formation can and should happen through political engagement is not one that has received much attention in recent Anglican political thought.

Against this tendency, I argue that, as we saw in Part I, because Christian formation is messier than has often been identified, then we need a positively messier account than we have identified for describing Christian civic identity. This entails talking about the potentially positive relationship between political participation and discipleship. In Chapter 7, then, we turn then to the question of how Christians are formed *as Christians*, and the church as *the church*, through belonging to and participating in political life beyond the life of the gathered church. Here, I identify resources from theology and political theory for developing an alternative at a conceptual level to these dominant Anglican accounts. In this, I seek to make theological sense of a church that is engaged in civic life, and shaped by this constant participation, and to make political sense of political life emerging through such engagement.

Chapter 8 continues this exploration, making it more concrete, by looking at engagement with civil society and the state. I make the argument that Christians are formed (as disciples, as church, as citizens) by their engagement with civil society and the state, as well as by their ecclesial liturgies and Christian practices: they are formed in the interaction of all these. So, Christian political vocation includes participating in the civic community outside the gathered practices of the church with the expectation

that through this civic participation one will be formed *as a* Christian. Civic life is not only an arena for working out our Christian calling, but is also a site of the Spirit, where we can be formed as disciples.

6

Anglican Accounts of Christian Political Formation

In this chapter I am concerned with understandings of the Christian's political identity outside the gathered practices of the church, and how the formation of this civic identity is related to discipleship. I outline here three prominent Anglican accounts: exploring first William Temple's thought, before turning to the work of John Milbank and Graham Ward, and finally to Oliver O'Donovan and Joshua Hordern.[1] Together these represent three well-developed and dominant schools of social and political thought within the Church of England, and are therefore a helpful place to begin in seeking to understand how formation of Christian civic identity has been understood in contemporary Anglican theology. Whilst Temple is an outlier chronologically, his work nonetheless continues to shape contemporary theological discussion – whether through those whose work is framed in reaction against him or through those who continue to self-consciously work within the 'Temple Tradition'.

[1] For both Milbank and O'Donovan, the political ethical implications of their critique and conceptual construction is largely worked out by others who share their theological sensibilities. We will therefore look to the work of Graham Ward and Joshua Hordern, respectively, to fill out our understanding of what it is to be a Christian citizen in Milbank and O'Donovan's thought.

6.I. William Temple

6.I.i. The role of the Christian in society

William Temple understands Christians to have a responsibility to communicate to the world: they are, he argues, charged with 'guiding society so far as society consents to be guided'. This is their task because the church 'has a special illumination which it is called to bring to bear on the whole range of human relationships.'[2] This illumination involves a dialogue between Scripture, reason, and tradition, through which are discerned God's purposes for the world.[3] Through this dialogue, the Christian is to seek 'to restore hope to the world through a true understanding of the relation of the kingdom of God to history, as a transcendent reality which is continually seeking, and partially achieving, embodiment in the activities and conflicts of the temporal order.'[4]

So, Christians are to work to orient their particular society more fully towards the kingdom. This will include fostering recognition amongst their fellow citizens of how the kingdom is already being partially realised within it. Seeing that, society will have hope: both because they will see what to hope for – a fuller embodiment of the kingdom – and because they will see that God is at work bringing this about. An awareness of the greatness of their responsibility, combined with this recognition that God is at work around us, will, Temple argues, drive Christians to a renewed reliance on the prior and ongoing redemptive work of God.[5] So, the responsibility to communicate to society involves Christians calling both themselves and society to a renewed recognition and reliance on God.

This is what the task of articulating the kingdom of God looks like, for Temple. This task combines: a responsibility to shape society; an awareness of God's ongoing and future redemptive work; and a reliance on this divine work as one seeks to shoulder the responsibility. All three strands hang together and are not to be taken alone, as these three things are an unfolding of one reality: a realisation of God's purpose, 'that runs through and beyond human history'.[6] Recognising the shape of human flourishing in the light of God's redemptive purposes then allows Temple to derive principles for the ordering of

[2] William Temple, *Religious Experience and Other Essays and Addresses* (London: James Clarke, 1958), p.244.

[3] Alan M. Suggate, 'The Temple Tradition', in *Anglican Social Theology: Renewing the Vision Today*, ed. Malcolm Brown (London: Church House Publishing, 2014), p.30.

[4] Temple, *Religious Experience*, pp.253-5.

[5] Ibid., p.58.

[6]Stephen Spencer, 'William Temple and the "Temple Tradition"', in *Theology Reforming Society: Revisiting Anglican Social Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2017), p.91.

society. As Stephen Spencer puts it, 'the social principles were a succinct distillation of his understanding of God's will for the future development of society, and they were open to being applied to a range of social questions.'[7] These principles are closely intertwined – and the first two ('freedom' and 'fellowship'), in particular, seem to be, for Temple, aspects of a single truth that only really makes sense when all its aspects are understood. The third principle, 'service', seems to then grow out of the first pair.

So, Temple begins by affirming the freedom and dignity of each person, as a child of God. Politically, this mean 'there is in each a worth absolutely independent of usefulness to society': '[t]he person is primary, not the society; the State exists for the citizen, not the citizen for the State'.[8] This worth, Temple argues, should be reflected in the space given in social structures for freedom of choice. Yet this is not a 'bare' unconstrained freedom to choose, but rather a freedom for 'forming and carrying out a purpose', which therefore requires discipline (both internal and external). More explicitly, freedom should be oriented to obedience to God for it to be true freedom: 'the claim to obey God rather than men is a course both of moral strength, for it inspires devotion to duty, and of political stability, for such freedom may only be used in the service of the whole fellowship.'[9] In this way, Temple argues, '[t]o train citizens in the capacity for freedom and to give them scope for free action is the supreme end of all true politics.'[10]

This true freedom - to act as a unified self, directed freely towards a chosen goal, yet oriented by obedience to God - can be attained, for Temple, only through the reciprocal relationships of society. This societal context informs the second principle, which affirms 'social fellowship' (or, solidarity).[11] This affirmation of the inherently social nature of persons leads Temple to underline here the importance of intermediate associations (i.e. those that mediate between the citizen and the state) for forming a properly purposive and mutually dependent civic freedom.[12]

As Temple puts is, '[t]he combination of Freedom and Fellowship as principles of social life issues in the obligation of Service.'[13] The principle of service extends this social account of personal unity and

[7] Ibid., p.93.

[8] William Temple, *Christianity and Social Order* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1942), p.44f.

[9] William Temple, *Christianity and Social Order* (London: SCM Press, 1950), pp.67-68.

[10] Temple, *Christianity and Social Order* (1942), p.44f.

[11] Temple, *Christianity and Social Order* (1950), pp.62-63.

[12] Ibid., pp.63-68. This emphasis of the political importance of the life of 'natural associations' and the formative power of social structures tempers the power of the claim, often levelled against Temple, that proclamation alone is the fullness of the social role of the church.

[13] Ibid., p.68.

fulfilment of self, arguing that these lie in the purpose of promoting love for all, which requires undertaking service to others.[14] This principle strongly informed Temple's critiques of long-term unemployment, of which, he argued, the worst evil is the sense of being unwanted and incapable of serving, of having 'fallen out of common life'.[15] This moral isolation must therefore be addressed through policies which allow the unemployed person to use their particular gifts and skills in service of their community. This is in keeping with Temple's broader affirmation that, as Suggate puts it, '[h]umans are created to be active citizens and everyone has their own contribution to make to the welfare of society.'[16] So, we can say that, for Temple, human flourishing is a matter of each individual being enabled to contribute freely in service to the common good. This is the vision of flourishing expressed in the social principles.[17]

6.I.ii. The Christian citizen's enactment of the social principles

So far we have seen that, for Temple, the church must first 'announce Christian principles and point out where the existing social order at any time is in conflict with them. It must then pass on to Christian citizens, acting on their civic capacity, the task of re-shaping the existing order in closer conformity to the principles.'[18] Having been formed morally in the church and having also received from the church the social principles which orient their civic activity, Temple's Christian citizens are then charged with working out the practical content of the principles.[19]

This process of application of the social principles to the current state of British society begins with seeing how it fell short of these, and then formulating practical objectives which Christians 'are entitled to call upon the Government to set before itself… and pursue them as steadily and rapidly as opportunity permits'.[20] Temple's policy recommendations were, as Malcom Brown has argued, 'provisional, from

[14] William Temple, *The Nature of Personality* (London: Macmillan, 1911), p.76.

[15] Suggate, 'The Temple Tradition', p.61; Temple, *Christianity and Social Order* (1942), p.12.

[16] Ibid., p.61. Temple's earlier work contains a fourth social principle which grows out of and extends the third: that of sacrifice. God's love, taking the ultimate form of Christ's sacrifice, means that in society we are also called to forget ourselves in service for others. This principle was dropped from Temple's later work as he became aware of the difficulties in practising sacrifice for collective bodies, particularly nations. We can therefore perhaps best understand the principle of sacrifice as superogatory: incumbent upon Christians, but perhaps not expected of the broader citizenry. Ibid., p.61n68.

[17] These principles are set within an affirmation of democracy, with its freedom of thought and speech, as 'the best and most natural means in the political field of giving scope to reason', whilst also accounting for the fallenness of humanity and its need for governance. Ibid., p.63n73.

[18] William Temple, *Christianity and Social Order* (London: Shepheard-Walwyn, 1976).

[19] Suggate, 'The Temple Tradition', p.62.

[20] Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, 1942, p.98 – 99.

careful negotiation'.[21] These broad policy recommendations have been called 'middle axioms', because they stand between the general social principles and the specifics of actual legislation.[22]

Temple argues that the work to translate the middle axioms into concrete policy and legislation requires immersion in the affairs of the world and 'in those empirical disciplines that seek to gain a purchase on it.'[23] It is necessarily a collaborative task, which depends on the knowledge of the world that is offered by disciplines other than theology.[24] The social sciences, in particular, are understood as giving valuable knowledge of the world (and therefore are not primarily seen as rival ideologies).[25] Consultation with those with expertise in these disciplines, and their associated professions, is therefore the mechanism by which policies are formed which can enable social flourishing.[26] In this light, we can see that the middle-axiom approach was intended to create common ground between the church and the world – to govern the conversations between theological principles and the realm of policy and legislation - and so enable collaboration in pursuit of the common good.

In this way, the laity are encouraged to engage ethically with the affairs of their own social and professional contexts.[27] For, whilst the orientation of their public action is received from the church, the Christian citizen is also always embedded in the world. We should note here that for Temple, this means that the Christian citizen is also always already embedded in the world's sin and in the way sin is manifested in the pursuit of self-interest of by individuals and groups. It is from this entanglement in sin that the social responsibility of the Christian citizen is also derived, as they have a responsibility to work to restore what they have helped to break.[28]

6.I.iii. Critique

Whilst the middle-axiom approach was intended to create the common ground necessary to encourage wider participation in social and political deliberation, in practice the method has tended to foster a top-

[21] Malcolm Brown, 'Politics as the Church's Business: William Temple's Christianity and Social Order Revisited', *Journal of Anglican Studies*, 5, no. 2 (2007): 163-185 (p.167).

[22] Although Temple did not himself generally use this label, as Spencer notes in 'William Temple and the 'Temple Tradition', p.100.

[23] Suggate, 'The Temple Tradition', pp.46-47.

[24] Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, pp.47; 98.

[25] As they are for Milbank, for example.

[26] Suggate, 'The Temple Tradition', p.62.

[27] Ibid., p.47.

[28] Suggate, 'The Temple Tradition', pp.46; 65. Nonetheless, '[t]he goal is the completion of the kingdom, where justice is perfected in love.' Ibid., p.46.

down political life. The 'Royal Commission approach' has been widely condemned as being too rooted in the Establishment life of the country – in parliamentary committee rooms and so forth – and far removed from the grassroots of democracy.[29] Whilst the views of those with relevant expertise are certainly of great value in policy discussions, Temple's understanding of those who have knowledge of how society works is narrowly drawn: these experts, would, as Alan Suggate puts it, 'inevitably be drawn from the ranks of the intelligentsia.' There is a need, he argues, for 'more mutual sharing of experience between all, and especially more listening to those most vulnerable in society'. [30]As it is, the whole approach speaks of a process of report writing (from principles, to middle axioms, to specific policy recommendations) that is removed from those who will be most affected by the end result. Temple's vision of civic life is not ultimately one that is marked by wide and diverse participation, in which the perspective of each citizen is valued in the negotiation and discernment of common goods.[31]

This tendency is also evident in the role envisioned for the church in shaping civic life. As Wannenwetsch argues, '[j]ust as the Oldham Groups consisted of experts and responsible people from different spheres of society (generally chaired by theologians), so the Church itself is seen as being an expert for social principles.' This 'strategic potentiality of the Church as expert body' means, Wannenwetsch contends, that 'the insufficiencies always lie on the side of their implementation by individual Christians.' For, '[t]he principles themselves appear to be sacrosanct. In their claim to timelessness they resemble Plato's eternal Ideas.'[32] Wannenwetsch critiques this 'ideal' sense of the political task of the church drawing on Hannah Arendt's account of action versus making: 'Whereas action, as the political form of free cooperative activity, is pierced through by temporality, and must continually begin anew, and leaves behind it unforeseeable consequences in every case, fabrication is associated with the durability of the product, in which the material world to some degree receives a share in the eternity of the Ideas.' So, we can see that the problem is partly rooted in the very methodology of the principles. If the primary political task of the church is to provide and announce social and moral principles, which individual believers are then to put into practice in society, then 'the

[29] Elaine Graham, Laurie Green, Christopher Baker, and Malcolm Brown are amongst those seeking to extend and deepen the Temple tradition in the light of this challenge – to connect it more closely to the life of local communities and the contribution of these to public life. Ibid., pp.49 – 54. This is not to deny, *a la* Michael Gove, the value of expert knowledge in shaping political decisions.

[30] Suggate, 'The Temple Tradition', p.47.

[31] Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship*, pp.98 – 10.

[32] Ibid., p.93. Wannenwetsch argues that Temple's privileging of principles and experts is rooted in 'his Platonically moulded philosophical standpoint, according to which the nature and goal of the world process are to be found in the control of spirit over matter.' Ibid.

collaboration of the many' ('[t]he really political thing'), 'comes into play … only at the application stage, with the implementation of the principles in a local situation.'[33]

So, there is no scope in Temple's account of civic action for one to be formed *as a citizen* (to be made capable of political action) through deliberative processes of contestation and negotiation. Rather, Temple seems to understand political life as consisting in the application of self-contained expertise: the picture is of political decisions being made by those who sit on boards and committees. Moreover, the firm ground upon which the church stands to 'address the world' never shifts.[34] In this light, middle axioms, in particular, as an attempt to find a stable strategy for mediating between Christian ideals and particular social policies, seem to end up (whether deliberately or not) refusing temporality and provisionality and instead posing an 'overview' for social life.[35]

Temple's account of the world as offering only the expertise necessary for the *application of* the social principles, also means that Christian formation ultimately remains located in the church. Participation in the world gives Christians knowledge which they then 'Christianly' apply to the world's problems, using the principles they have already received from the church. The principles themselves do not undergo any transformation as a result of their being collaboratively enacted. Citizenship grows out of but does not shape discipleship. All in all, we can say that, for Temple, political knowledge and action is not formative of one's Christian identity.

[33] Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship*, p.99. Wannenwetsch goes on: 'Arendt believes that the reason why Plato applies the doctrine of Ideas to political life, thereby putting fabrication in the place of action, is the desire to bring into the sphere of human affairs the 'solidity' and order which belong to fabrication. His proposal that the state be given a philosopher-king can be seen as the attempt to replace the unsurveyable co-activity of the many by an activity by an activity for which all that is required is a single individual who 'would remain the complete master of what he had begun, not needing the help of others to carry it through'.' Ibid., p.97.

[34] Suggate, 'The Temple Tradition', p.57.

[35] Higton, *Difficult Gospel*, p.121.

6.II. John Milbank and Graham Ward

In contrast to Temple's relatively spare account of the political nature of the church, and his related positive assessment of the value of secular knowledge in political deliberation, stands the political theology of Radical Orthodoxy. I will focus here on John Milbank and Graham Ward, as the proponents of the radically orthodox sensibility who have dealt most closely with the question of the Christian's civic identity and its formation.

6.II.i. Democratic citizenship as formed through the true polity of the church

In seeking to map where the Christian as citizen is located in this body of thought, we must begin with the critique offered of the formation fostered by the liberal democratic state. Milbank argues that belonging to a liberal polity means participating within its zero-sum hierarchies - the 'absolute spatial hierarchies of fixed power: one can climb up the ladder of power but only to displace someone else.' These hierarchies are competitive and utilitarian and therefore form citizens in ways that are inimical to the 'sharing of excellence' for the common good. [36] Milbank characterises this as 'market mediation of an anarchy of desires – of course ensuring the triumph of a hierarchy of sheer power and the secret commanding of people's desires by manipulation.' One of the results is the creation of 'contracting individuals', who are unable to relate in any other way. [37]

So, whilst there is also a democratic bias in Christianity, Milbank argues, it is one based on mutual virtue rather than 'mutual concessions of baseness': in that 'all should love and trust, all should become virtuous'. Moreover, there is also a hierarchy which should be upheld. For, whilst hierarchies within liberalism are competitive and utilitarian and therefore destroy the common good, 'spiritual hierarchy' has its *telos* rooted in excellence rather than utility.[38] This spiritual hierarchy, unlike liberal hierarchy, is not a fixed spatial hierarchy of power, and in it the pupil can overtake the teacher, as 'excellence is intrinsically shareable'. It is, according to Milbank, not a hierarchy of the privileged but is rather made up of a portion of society that has dedicated life to education and the pursuit of excellence, committing to listening to multiple perspectives in order to discern wisely. Milbank advocates a central political role for these 'guiding virtuous elite' (who are, he implies, to be supplied by the church).[39]

[36] John Milbank, *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2009), p.248.

[37] Ibid., pp.259; 248.

[38] Ibid., xiv.

[39] Ibid, xii.

This spiritual hierarchy actually, Milbank argues, makes true democracy possible, 'for where there is no public recognition of the primacy of absolute good as grounded in something super-human, then democracy becomes impossible, for it is no longer supposed that one should even *search* for the intrinsically desirable'.[40] Democracy, as the rule of the many, can only function without manipulation of opinion if it is balanced by an 'aristocratic' element of the pursuit of truth and virtue for their own sake on the part of some people whose role is legitimate even if they remain only 'the Few', although they should ideally be themselves the Many.[41] This leads Milbank to understand the church's social task as including boldly teaching that 'the only justification for democracy is theological.'[42] As Aristotle Papanikolaou summarises Milbank's position, 'democracy needs a theological perspective if it is to realize its most cherished values of the inherent quality and dignity of each citizen'.[43]

We see this sense of civic life's need of the church also in the work of Ward. For Ward, 'only a theological or analogical account of bodies', and of the body of Christ most especially, 'safeguards the concreteness' of communities of genuine belonging, genuine participation. Such communities are those 'in which the desire for the good cultivates the virtues of theological citizenship'.[44] In a similar vein, Milbank too asserts that 'only the Church has the theoretical and practical power to challenge the global hegemony of capital and create a viable politic-economic alternative'.[45] True democracy requires 'sacramental ordination' and citizens formed in virtuous intermediate communities.[46] So, the church is, by this account, the facilitator of wider social flourishing.

There is an ambiguity over the extent to which this vision is theocratic, as seen when Milbank argues that '[w]e have seen that *ecclesia* names a new sort of universal polity, primarily democratic, yet also monarchic, which was invented by Christianity.'[47] Milbank hopes for a 'deified democracy', as to 'eternalize democracy, and maintain its link with excellence … deification as the doctrine of the offer of equality with God is required.'[48] As Williams notes, the Church of England is presented in this way

[40] Ibid., p.259.

[41] Ibid., xii – xiii. This aristocracy includes 'anointed monarchy': the 'monarchic' sense of an architectonic imposition of intrinsic justice by a transcendent 'One', however constituted, that is unmoved by either the prejudices of the Few or those of the Many'. Ibid.

[42] *The Future of Love*, p.245. Milbank continues: 'the Church needs boldly to teach that the only justification for democracy is theological.' Ibid.

[43] Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, p.139.

[44] Barrett, 'Interrupting the Church's Flow' (thesis), p.73, referencing *Cities of God*, pp.117-8.

[45] Milbank, *The Future of Love*, p.48.

[46] Ibid., xii – xiii.

[47] Ibid., p.256.

[48] John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp.132 – 133.

as the host of the nation: 'as a model for church-state *symphonia*.[49] Papanikolaou concludes that 'Milbank's democracy, then, is really the Church', as the most valued principles of democracies can only be realised within a theological framework: 'What Christians should aim for is a nonsecular Christian society framed by a theological perspective that affirms a Christian metaphysics of participation.' [50]

So, the picture painted so far (chiefly by Milbank) is that the reason we cannot just have democracy pure and simple is that it must be guided by some sure vision of the good. The only way this happens is if there are people who can point to it, and the church and theologians do this. So, the flow of civic and political formation here is from the church to the democratic state, with the church making possible democratic life and virtuous citizenship.

6.II.ii. Inhabiting the democratic polity: Ward's political ethics

We now turn to Ward's work in more detail, to fill out the content of the vision of the good (which both he and Milbank identify as needed). More particularly, this vision provides a way of thinking about Christian political participation. Ward's *Politics of Discipleship* is particularly pertinent here, centred as it is on the question: 'What is it for the Christian to act [politically]?'[51]

Ward defines a political act as one that entails power, effecting either subjection, liberation, or maintenance of the status quo: 'Political power is a social operation [supported by the investment of money or electoral support etc.] with respect to relations between people and the institutions to which

[49] Rowan Williams, 'Liberalism and Capitalism Have Hollowed out Society – so Where Do We Turn Now?', *The New Statesman*, 18 October 2016, https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2016/10/liberalism-and-capitalism-have-hollowed-out-society-so-where-do-we-turn-now [Accessed 19.9.2019].

[50] Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as the Political*, pp.140-141. Papanikolaou argues that Ward implicitly allows for a political order that is distinct from *ecclesia* (they are not elided in his thought), and is not so concerned with reestablishing an outwardly Christian culture as Milbank is. Nonetheless, '[Ward] does, however, suggest that democracy as a community of dispute … can only be saved with reference to the transcendent.' – Ibid., pp.148; 150. Ward does also leave space open for a return to theocracy, asking: 'If the rejection of theocratic language came with the acceptance of liberal-democratic polity and secularism, then, in a time of postdemocracy and postsecularity, should we not revisit this form of polity?' – Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship*, p.299.

Additionally, John Hughes suggests that there is significant, if not obvious, overlap in the projects of Milbank and O'Donovan, both in their approach to critiquing liberalism and in their 'shared refusal to simply give up on Christendom'. John Hughes, 'After Temple? The Recent Renewal of Anglican Social Thought', in *Anglican Social Theology: Renewing the Vision Today*, ed. Malcolm Brown (London: Church House Publishing, 2014), pp.85-86.

[51] Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship*, p.166.

these people belong'.[52] Against this backdrop, Ward sets Christian political action: 'A Christian action is political not because it takes place within the polis and is implicated in the struggle for the city's soul…but because the God who acts in history is political, for this God exercises authority, power, and judgement in order to establish a kingdom.'[53] Ward therefore understands political discipleship as involving the reversal of established values, powers, and received authorities in the coming of the Messiah. It would seem, then, that disciples, in their engagement with political life beyond the church, are to assume a primarily oppositional posture.

Yet, Ward's account of political discipleship is not, he argues, an attempt to make the church or individual believers more political in order to seize back lost power. Rather, his professed aim is to foster new descriptions of the social and cultural interactions of the church in the cultural imaginary, including with other faiths.[54] So, the political role of the church is not to re-seize power, but to shape people's imaginations differently: to show people that a different way of imagining the world is possible, and so to shape the cultural imaginary. However, just as the disciple's political vocation is not to seize power, they are also not called to 'de-politicisation': Ward is not advocating social and cultural retreat. Indeed, depoliticisation is at the heart of late modernity's problems for Ward - for, '[i]f [Christians] cannot act politically, then we cannot counter the enemies either of dehumanisation or dematerialisation.'[55] Rather, in helping to shape the cultural imaginary, discipleship is what enables the overcoming of these forces. Ward describes this as a process of 'repoliticisation'.

As part of this call for change, Ward offers a reading of the parable of prodigal son in terms of de- and re-politicisation, framed in a 'politics of love'.[56] In a similar vein to what we have seen above in Milbank's spiritual hierarchy, Ward understands the political hierarchy of the *oikos* to be 'founded on acts of love that incarnate the operation of the good, the true, and the just.' The Christian household's embeddedness in daily liturgical routine and activity shows the lived nature of the political order of love.[57] Ward further argues that it is '[t]hrough love, not law, [that] the just order is established; through love is the alienated citizen once more called to play his or her part.'[58] Having been re-formed in this

[52] Ibid., p.27.

[53] Ibid., p.167.

[54] Ibid., p.18.

[55] Ibid., p.262.

[56] Ibid., p.275. Ward posits the political character of love as the central insight of Christianity – revealing the inextricability of personal and social ethics from one another, and from the flourishing of the community. Or, put otherwise, love should be understood as 'always implicated in a field of differential power relations' and therefore political. Ibid.

[57] Ibid., p.273. So, the law of love 'dictates that the elder son is indeed still the sole heir (the law of love does not wipe out the consequences of disordered desire), yet also still the brother to the younger son.' Ibid.

[58] Ibid., p.271.

way in the political liturgy of the household of God, Christian citizens are then called to play their part out in the world. Again, as we saw with Temple, Christian civic action flows out *from* the formative community of the church *to* service in the world.

As we noted in Chapter 1, prayer is, for Ward, the laboratory for the imagination that enables the Christian citizen to see where they are to play their part. Indeed, Ward claims prayer not just as a central Christian practice but as 'the most political act any Christian can engage in'. In this paradigmatically political act, the Christian brings all their connections and concerns with the world to God. Ward understands the practice of prayer to be 'continuous' and 'richly layered', a 'deep inhabitation of the world, its flesh and its spirit, that stirs a contemplation and a reading of the signs of the times that is more profound than we can ever apprehend or appreciate.'[59] This inhabitation is one marked by continual listening: partly to our yearning for communion with Christ, and also to the complex yearning in the heart of Christ (both to heal and transform the world and to judge). Prayer's concern is thus always with ushering in the kingdom of God, and Christians participate in the 'eschatological remainder' through these practices of hope.[60]

As Papanikolaou summarises it, for Ward, '[a] true Christian politics of discipleship is pro-democracy and pro-materiality […], as Christians patiently work towards the realization of the kingdom of God and engage in practices that make present the kingdom in the world.'[61] So, the Christian citizen forms political life through their engagements in a 'cultural politics' that 'reschools the cultural imaginary'; in inhabiting the eschatological 'yearning' of prayer; and in service of those 'in need'.[62]

6.II.iii. Critique

Church as host of political life

[59] Ibid., pp.281-2.

[60] Ibid., p.283.

[61] Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, p.150. He continues: in Ward's vision, Christians, whilst 'always grounding all they say and do in particularistic presuppositions, on the question of polity they must also challenge the assumption that a polity must be based on immanentist assumptions.' Ibid.

[62] Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship*, pp.281-2.

In a stronger vein than we saw with Temple, there is a sense from Milbank, in particular, that theology ought to be firmly in control of the political conversation.[63] The argument that democracy needs a theological perspective plays out in his account of the role played by sacramental ordination and the 'guiding virtuous elite' in political life. Ward's insistence that he holds 'no superior position from which [he] can prescribe a Christian politics or a Christian polity – to either the secular world or the church'- notably contrasts with Milbank's tone.[64] Rather than a prescription, Ward believes himself to be offering a description of social and cultural interactions that are already taking place – describing the operative traditions, liturgies, symbols, stories, current practices, and hopes of the church in this cultural imaginary. However, as we saw in Chapter 1, Ward also sees political discipleship as involving 'announcing to the postmodern city its own vision of universal justice, peace and beauty, and […] criticis[ing] the structural injustices, violence and uglinesses which resist and hinder the reception of that vision.'[65] So, whilst Ward does not display the same comfort with theocratic models of polity as Milbank, the church nonetheless still holds a privileged vantage point on what is needed for social flourishing in his vision of political life.

Theologians emerge in Ward's model as the legislators for the imagination of the world. This is a different kind of power to setting up theologians as political legislators *per se* (as Milbank verges on), but it is nonetheless still a position of power. The political role of Christians is one of *giving to* (including through challenging the status quo) civic life. Here we can, in fact, see commonality with Temple. In emphasising the role of the laity in enacting the social principles, Temple is markedly less clerical and theologian-centric than Milbank and Ward.[66] Nonetheless, the real work is still done by elites – by those with recognised professional expertise – who, moreover, are interpreting principles announced by the church. So, in both accounts surveyed so far, civic life is principally located in established hierarchies and structures of representation (for instance, it is the spiritual hierarchy, for Milbank, that is capable of saving democracy). There is very little sense of social flourishing resting on common civic participation – on the distinctive contribution of each citizen in processes of shared negotiation for the sake of common goods.

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[63] I argue that this is not conceptually necessary – as we see in Williams' work on the finality of Christ, in which there is judgement at the foot of the cross but not a possessive or totalising account of the theological task (indeed, such a perspective is explicitly repudiated in 'Theological Integrity'). Part of what I am seeking to do is unpick how Ward's account of identity as gift can be taken in a non-possessive theo-political direction.

[64] Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship*, p.17

[65] Ward, *Cities of God,* p.70. This is despite also arguing, as we saw in Chapter 1, that '[a]n adequate Christian response [to the problems of the postmodern city] is one which listens to the many voices, the many claims for attention in the postmodern city. It risks encounter, knowing that its own voice is never pure, never innocent.' Ibid.

[66] For example, Milbank's ultimate assignation of all responsibility for ecclesial polity to the theologian – as we saw in Chapter 4.

Failure to equip Christian citizens for civic action

The minimal role for the active citizen can be further seen in the extent to which, despite Ward's professed intention, his work does very little to equip Christians for civic engagement beyond cultural interpretation and re-signification. As Bretherton contends, Ward takes his insistence on pure description too far, shutting down the imagining of 'concrete public action', limiting 'faithful politics to modes of cultural production', and so running the risk of what Ward most fears: further depoliticisation.[67] This tendency exists alongside the often politically prescriptive mode of Radical Orthodoxy, which renders it unable to grapple with the way that goods can exist within imperfect systems: unable to attend to the actuality of relationships and goods already being enacted (however imperfectly). This tends to render its political theology (and ecclesiology) a somewhat didactic blueprint rather than a resource to equip ongoing civic action.

Bretherton further argues that '[b]eyond description we need reception, both of the gifts our neighbours have to give us and ultimately, of the gift of God's presence.' This receptive listening is understood by Bretherton as presuming and creating a common realm of shared meaning in which 'long-term, mutually responsible modes of association (and the building of the kinds of institution that can sustain them)' can take place.[68] Such a common realm assumes that, irrespective of shared grounding, it is still possible to reach genuine consensus, by which practical action can be agreed. This practical settlement is one in which there is no single definitive account of what the settlement meant, but rather one where those with different theoretical understandings find overlap. This vision of discourse stands in contrast with the rhetorically violent possessivism to which Milbank, in particular, has sometimes been prone.[69]

So, faithful listening and reception will involve, as Bretherton puts it, 'encountering God and neighbour in the contingent flux of political and civic life through modes of concrete action', and taking time to

[67] Luke Bretherton, 'Reflections on Graham Ward's The Politics of Discipleship' (2009), http://www.calvin.edu/~jks4/churchandpomodocs/bretherton.pdf, pp.2-3. Bretherton argues that, despite Ward's 'powerful and prophetic mode of description', he ends up 'too nervous about action, too polite perhaps, to suggest what should be done'. Bretherton argues that it is therefore 'difficult to see how the "theological imaginary" Ward hopes to develop can meaningfully "transform aspects of the civic imaginary"'. Ibid., citing Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship*, p.17. In a related vein, Papanikolaou has also noted that, 'Ward often gives the impression that the Christian stands apart from other citizens in engaging in practices that sacramentally transfigure the world'. Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, p.154.

[68] Ibid., p.3.

[69] As seen, for example, in Milbank, *The Future of Love*, pp.140-141.

'make sense' together.[70] Conversely, a failure to listen and so to discern goods in common will result in an inability to communicate, negotiate, and compromise in order to identify and seek these shared goods. This is seen in the largely preformed vision of political life put forward by Ward and Milbank, which principally offers a theological view from above. This tendency further compounds the failure to equip for concrete political action, which will always involve uncertainty, provisionality, and negotiation. So, we see here, as with Temple, an understanding of Christian political action flowing out *from* the church *into* the world. Christian citizens, by this account, are formed on the church side of the divide to act well on the world side of the divide.

[70] Bretherton, 'Reflections on Graham Ward's The Politics of Discipleship', p.5.

6.III. Oliver O'Donovan and Joshua Hordern

Finally, we turn to the account of the Christian citizen's political participation and formation offered by Oliver O'Donovan and Joshua Hordern.

6.III.i. The political structures in which ruler and citizen act

The architecture of political authority

In a similar vein to Milbank, O'Donovan's account of the Christian citizen is set within his project of unearthing the theological roots of the secular, and so retrieving theo-political concepts by which to structure our understanding of contemporary social and political life. The central locus of this constructive project is the relationship between freedom and authority.[71]

In terms of the particular concerns of this chapter, this project involves reframing the relationship between Christian and civic identities, with these both understood as part of the moral order of creation, under the authority of Christ.[72] O'Donovan, in keeping with Augustinian tradition, understands the Christian citizen to be living in relationship to two authorities. He discusses this with reference to the relationship Israel have with kings and prophets in the Hebrew Bible: the dance that takes place between the authority of kingly rule and prophetic witness. This starting point indicates a wider pattern in O'Donovan's thought: namely that, for O'Donovan, politics is constituted by governing authority (rather than by common deliberation and negotiation, as advocated by Bretherton, for example).[73] There is, for O'Donovan, a constant shape to political life where there are those who recognise authority and those whose authority is recognised. This is needed for stable orderly life. We might say, then, that political life, for O'Donovan, happens pretty much as it is described in the pages of *Hansard* and *The Times*.

Yet, whilst this conception of political life lends a largely architectural tenor to O'Donovan's work (as opposed to a focus on political ethics), we should note that political authority is not fixed in the sense of residing in a particular person or regime. Rather, who occupies the position (and how they might

[71] Having laid the foundations of his understanding of this relationship between freedom and authority in *Resurrection and Moral Order*, it is expanded with respect to the church in *The Desire of the Nations*, and then to public authority in *The Ways of Judgement*.

[72] Hughes, 'After Temple?', pp.86-87.

[73] This top-down model begins by analogy with kingly rule.

come to occupy it) may change in all sorts of ways. O'Donovan explicitly repudiates the 'assimilation of the idea of authority to office and structure', on the basis that it represents 'a cardinal mistake which arose as Western politics turned its back on its theological horizons.'[74] So, whilst O'Donovan believes that what we need politically will always take a certain shape, he is not advocating for a calcification of a particular regime. Rather, for O'Donovan, authority to command resides in action, bounded by the act of judgement. So, authority does not reside in the particular person exercising judgement. On the contrary, he argues that the authority of secular government is attached to the singular practice of judgement (with judgement defined as 'an act of moral discrimination that pronounces upon a preceding act or existing state of affairs to establish a new public context').[75] The kind of practice in mind here can be seen in a parliamentary democracy where the legislators reflect on the present ordering of society and its problems in order to protect or enhance this through pronouncing new legislation.

The constitution and representation of 'the people'

To further understand what this account of political authority looks like in a democratic context, we turn to O'Donovan's account of representation (which he understands as the foundational democratic means through which a people is constituted). He argues that, '[w]hen we recognise a political authority summoning us to act together in defense of the common good, we recognize ourselves.'[76] In this way, '[t]o see ourselves as a people is a work of moral imagination', with this common identity referring 'to a sphere of common action open to us.'[77]

This recognition of authority, and so also of one's civic identity, also occurs at a deeper emotional level, in which, through God raising up those who will bear authority, '[t]he mysterious alchemy of the affections elicits recognition, a people see itself in the face of an individual thrown forward for the occasion, and representation occurs'.[78] This description of the representative 'alchemy' shows the

[74] Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.20.

[75] Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment: The Bampton Lectures, 2003* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2005), pp.3; 7. Later on he states that: '[p]olitical authority arises where power, the execution of right, and the perpetuation of tradition are assured together in one coordinated agency.' Ibid., p.149.

[76] O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgement*, p.149.

[77] Ibid., p.151. This conception of imaginatively entering into a sphere of common action leads O'Donovan to critique John Rawls' account of civic membership on the basis of a unifying political basis, seeing this as a vocation that is simply imposed wholesale upon the citizenry. Instead, he accounts for membership in terms of what we communicate in. He does so on the basis that social order is prior to, and so more foundational, than political order. Ibid., p.156.

[78] O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgement,* p.164

importance of the ritual and symbolic in the recognition and constitution of the representative and the people. Joshua Hordern's concern with the role of the affections in political life leads him to further extend O'Donovan's account by exploring the significance of particular affections (such as joy, compassion, and shame) in representative and legal institutions. He does so in the light of an understanding of the incarnation and coming of the Spirit as 'vindicating the moral order and bringing coherence to the human experience of it.'[79] Representation is therefore ultimately understood as the interrelation of 'Christ's representative status with the affective dimension of political loyalty as a form of shared, affective affinity between representatives and represented.'[80]

Given that that the authoritative act of judgement is held within this symbolic economy, O'Donovan's account of political authority is not as purely functional as it at first appears. This is in keeping with his understanding of law as something more than simply a contractual arrangement, or even an act of violence. So, the emotional, ritual, and providential elements meet the need for an order we can trust.[81] O'Donovan is not offering here a system that ever was or could be perfectible, although he does believe there to be genuinely good things that we have lost. Nonetheless, he affirms that a trustworthy political order is possible, and that it can be reliably recognised as such.[82] So, whilst he is pessimistic about the scope of political action to bring about any kind of ideal society, O'Donovan is also optimistic about the historical sedimentation of providence in the social and political order we have inherited.

6.III.ii. Political ethics

We have seen, then, that O'Donovan excavates a space in which being a citizen of heaven is not an abstracted and apolitical status, but neither is 'citizenship of heaven' a literal rival of earthly citizenship. Christian and civic identities are both understood as part of the moral order of creation, under the authority of Christ.[83] Yet, despite having excavated this space, the architectural or constitutional level at which O'Donovan's thinking tends to operate means that he is not much concerned with political ethics: that is, with the practices by which our civic identity as Christians is enacted and formed. [84] Therefore, we turn again to Hordern (a former student of O'Donovan, who is self-consciously working

[79] Hordern, *Political Affections*, p.202.

[80] Ibid., p.7.

[81] This might be described as a kind of political theology of *The Book of Common Prayer*.

[82] One implication of this is that corruption too can be reliably identified against the just state of affairs.

[83] Hughes, 'After Temple?', pp.86 – 87.

[84] John Hughes notes that O'Donovan does not have as much to say about concrete social and economic (and, and we might add, political) questions as Milbank does, for example. Hughes, 'After Temple?', p.86.

within these theological themes) and his work on civic participation to fill out the ethical implications of living as a Christian citizen within O'Donovan's theo-political vision.

The affective role of the church

In *Political Affections: Civic participation and moral theology*, Hordern seeks 'a conceptual understanding of people's engagement with their political representatives and the wider political process', in order to renew 'the sources of civic participation which maintain internally diverse political societies in reflective, deliberative, and active pursuit not only of their own common good but also of that of their neighbours.'[85] To this end, Hordern proposes political affection as a way of interrelating representation, judiciary, and locality to enable better discussion of what it means to belong to, and flourish within, a national polity.[86]

Hordern engages with the cognitivist turn in philosophical psychology to define affections as 'intersubjective, participative, intentional, and attracted beginnings of political reflection and deliberation which endure through memory and construe objects according to some kind of eschatology.'[87] Affections are, in this way, recognitions of value.[88] He then moves to develop this account of affections theologically , understanding them to serve as 'participative understandings of the world which endure through the power of [culturally mediated] memory [ultimately, of peace with God] and the stability of the moral order'. This remembrance is 'eschatologically combined to construe present objects in terms of their future orientation.' This eschatological construal is then developed in an explicitly Christological direction, with affections finally understood as 'attracted, participative understandings of God's good creation vindicated by the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ'.[89]

So, having understood affective civic life as bearing creational, eschatological, and Christological orientations, we must then ask how Hordern sees this as informing the role of the church in demonstrating how the gospel of Christ 'remains good news for political societies today'.[90] He identifies both a listening and a mediating role for the church in society. The church is firstly to listen to the cries of those around them for love, justice, and compassion and be reminded that 'citizens are

[85] Hordern, *Political Affections*, p.1.

[86] Ibid., pp.7-10.

[87] Ibid., p.202.

[88] They become 'intersubjectively shared, discussed and agreed upon aspects of political discourse.' Ibid., p.6.

[89] Ibid., pp.5-6.

[90] Ibid., p.3.

mortal, timely beings, who live and work, suffer and die.' Yet, the church's faith also allows it to set the 'affections' being expressed in Christological and eschatological perspective. The church has the ability, therefore, to 'interpret such cries and the cries of all people in such a way as to shape common life and political discourse for the benefit of all.' This service to common life includes challenging and re-orienting the disordered 'prevailing political loyalties'. [91]

The role of the Christian citizen in upholding authority

Yet, this account of the church's calling to challenge political loyalties is set within a broader affirmation of loyalty to, and the upholding of, the extant social order. Indeed, this is particularly strongly underlined in Hordern's account of how properly ordered affections lead to patriotic allegiance.[92] In a more muted way, O'Donovan too construes there to be a duty incumbent upon Christian citizens to exercise obedience and solidarity.[93] O'Donovan understands these duties as 'allowing ourselves to be restricted in our freedom of action by others' necessities'.[94] So, the purpose of political structures is to secure public freedoms, not those of individuals. O'Donovan further fleshes out his conception of public freedom, whereby, '[p]olitical subjection is not servitude; the political subject is freer *as* a subject. Political authority may abridge freedom in certain of its exercises; but it does so only to ensure and secure it'.[95]

6.III.iii. Critique

Certainty over apprehension of common good

[91] Ibid., pp.13-14; 10. In Hordern's discussion of how to galvanise the renewal of 'theologically coherent, critically patriotic, localised civic participation', he locates the crux of the answer in the Spirit-filled local church's role in renewing localised, affective political wisdom. This is expanded with reference to Wannenwetsch's understanding of ecclesial vocation in society in terms of the Lutheran notion of transposition, which yields 'the strange stability of provisional rest and peace amidst shared, hopeful, joyful praise.' The 'back and forth of *simul iustus et peccator* is shown to energize the active life of churches as the movement between law and gospel strengthens the churches' marriage to Christ and transposes them outwards in joy towards the world.' Ibid., p.10.

[92] Ibid., p.9.

[93] David McIlroy, 'Oliver O'Donovan, The Ways of Judgment (Review)', *Political Theology* 8 (2007): 373–80 (p.375).

[94] O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgement*, p.54.

[95] Ibid., p.128.

Hordern, then, ends up much more positively urging loyalty to a particular instantiated social project than O'Donovan would seem to encourage, and so the extension of this project does not as fully reflect O'Donovan's prophetic edge. Tim Gorringe highlights in particular how Hordern's exegesis of Deuteronomy gives rise to the following summary of the task of the people of Israel: 'to conduct intersubjective affective participation which verifies the goodness of the land and its fruit as aspects of the created order in a way that empowers reflection and deliberation concerning righteous action towards those who may, if neglected, cry out for justice'.[96] This is then combined with a reading of Edmund Burke and Roger Scruton which leads Hordern to argue for a politically conservative world where 'people live lawful lives under the authority of their representatives.'[97] Gorringe compares this with Ton Veerkamp's exegesis of Deuteronomy, which argues for a world 'construed otherwise', distinctive in its repudiation of hierarchical relations (not least slavery).[98] Yet, whilst going beyond O'Donovan's account, it is perhaps the ambiguity around the emotional, ritual, and providential elements of political order in this vision that allows for Hordern's more prescriptive account of the socio-cultural setting in which authority is exercised. For example, Hordern cites O'Donovan's claim, noted above, that 'God raises up those who will bear authority. The mysterious alchemy of the affections elicits recognition, a people see itself in the face of an individual thrown forward for the occasion, and representation occurs'.

So, whilst 'a boisterous but reasonable conflict of affective understanding' should be expected in political life, for Hordern, confidence in the fundamental rightness of the prevailing political order is never truly under question.[99] This is in part, as Gorringe argues, because Hordern accepts O'Donovan's argument for 'an objective moral order' without questioning how we apprehend this order and therefore what aspects of it can be identified.[100] So, whilst O'Donovan affirms that a people is 'a community constituted by participation in the common good', this community is nonetheless called forth in response to a conception of the common good that is received from the political authorities above (rather than through common deliberation). For both, then, the chief role of the Christian citizen is ultimately as a subject *or* as one exercising judgement (but not, either way, as one engaged in robust, quotidian civic deliberation).[101] In this way, O'Donovan and Hordern display some of the same tendencies as

[96] Tim Gorringe, 'Political Affections: Civic Participation and Moral Theology. By Joshua Hordern.', *The Journal of Theological Studies* 64, no. 2 (October 2013): 868–70 (p.869), referencing Hordern, p. 148.

[97] Hordern, *Political Affections*, p. 163

[98] Gorringe, 'Political Affections: Civic Participation and Moral Theology', p.869.

[99] Hordern, *Political Affections*, p. 80.

[100] Gorringe, 'Political Affections: Civic Participation and Moral Theology', p.869.

[101] Inevitably, such a system leaves very little recourse to the citizen should the content of the judgements delivered by political authorities be unjust. However, a point of ambiguity does emerge through O'Donovan's elevation of the act of judgement above any particular institution: O'Donovan concludes that, 'where institutions have failed, whoever finds themselves in the

Temple and Milbank in imagining political life as the exercise of top-down government by a small circle of office-holders.

This minimal account of significant civic participation also arises partly from a separation of the architecture of political processes and political ethics, whereby when citizens do participate politically it is primarily with an acceptance of existing power structures. Related to this is O'Donovan's account of ethical and civic formation taking place at the 'pre-political' level of social life, within associations such as the church and the family. Citizens chiefly influence their community, O'Donovan argues, 'by exercising the pre-political social virtue on which any good community is founded'. [102] We can see a similar sense of Christian civic formation here to that identified in Temple, Milbank, and Ward: the Christian citizen is formed in the church, and out of this formation flows action that serves the public good.

Additionally, as noted above in relation to Hordern's reading of Deuteronomy, confidence in the underlying order is not seriously troubled by instances of injustice. For Hordern, the cries of the oppressed are to be interpreted by the church and mediated to those in authority: the oppressed are not to act on their own behalf in seeking to reshape (or even overthrow) an unjust system. It should be noted that in O'Donovan's account too, there is no sense that the whole system could be corrupt, perpetuating kyriarchal oppression in ways that we do not yet even fully see (and, indeed, will never fully recognise).[103] This would entail a profoundly destabilising acknowledgement that our emotional and

position to carry out the act should do so.' This interestingly blurs the line between ruler and subject, such that the civic duty would compel the citizen to take on the act of judgement. David McIlroy notes that the subject's duty to be conscientious - to 'bear within himself the full self-consciousness of the church's communicative vocation' - could give rise to a situation in which demurral is the only proper response to the demand by the political authority to something 'which is beyond its authority'. However, having established the space for a form of disruption in the political order, it is far from clear what form this would take. McIlroy, 'Oliver O'Donovan, 'The Ways of Judgment (Review)', pp.376-377, referencing *The Ways of Judgement,* pp.136-7.

[102] 'Living in a society that deliberates about its common good, they may contribute vigorously to its deliberation. And if their political role is no more than that of "recognizing" political authority without playing any active part in the machinery that sustains it, we can at least be sure that they will do that much with freedom and discernment.' *The Ways of Judgement,* p.138. What is problematic here is the suggestion that society would not be the poorer for not having the active deliberative participation of these citizens. This non-participative role is underwritten by a distinction between culture and politics. This arises from a separation of architecture and political ethics, by which the citizenry's defining role is really as subjects. I am not quite content with the space left for political ethics in this model; I want political ethics to shape the architecture, not just exist within a pre-determined structure.

[103] O'Donovan does admit the possibility of 'facilitating the emergence of new authorities where old ones have failed'. This possibility arises from O'Donovan's view of authority as belonging 'to those who, embodying the identity of the community, enact right on its behalf'. Therefore, those who fail to enact right no longer retain the authority with which they were entrusted. McIlroy, 'Oliver O'Donovan, The Ways of Judgment (Review)', p.377, referencing *The Ways of Judgement,* pp.135; 140.

ritual recognition of authority could be mistaken, enacted on the basis of malformed reasoning. This emphasis on the apprehendable nature of moral order means that, despite the pneumatological emphasis, the Spirit does not actually have a very important role to play in political ethics. The Spirit certainly does not appear in the kind of prophetic mode discussed earlier in Chapters 3 and 4: leading the Christian citizen into deeper recognition of the fallenness of the political order, and of their own responsibility for this order, in hitherto unanticipated ways.

Conclusion

Having surveyed these accounts, we can say that Temple, Milbank, and O'Donovan each, in different ways, affirm the good of Christians being politically engaged as Christians. Each gives an account of how Christians are formed *for* political engagement, and the kinds of political action this engagement will involve.

However, this has run alongside a shared tendency to speak of Christians being formed as such exclusively in the church, out of which they then undertake this political action. This is related to a tendency to err on the side of a predetermined form of political life, rather than one that is contingent upon wide, diverse participation and common deliberation. The picture of civic life conjured by all three schools of thought is not one strongly marked by common deliberation, through which citizens (including Christian citizens) might be formed.[104]

Moreover, the church, in these accounts, is very much in charge of the political conversation. We see this in Temple's social principles, Milbank's theological democracy, and O'Donovan's retrieval of the Christian thinking underpinning the liberal democratic polity. So, there is very little suggestion in any of these accounts that the church's political vision should be formed through engagement with the world – or, more fundamentally, that there might be a need to receive from the world in order to more fully become what the church and its members are called to be.

[104] As Papanikolaou puts it: 'Christians do not stop performing ascetical practices once the liturgy is over. Both Hauerwas and Milbank [and, we can add, Ward, O'Donovan, Hordern, and Temple] fail to tell us what difference that makes for political theology.' Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, p.134.

7

Encountering the Spirit in Democratic Life:

A conversation between radical democracy and theology

We have identified, then, a tendency in Anglican political theology to overlook the ways that discipleship could take place *through* civic participation. There is need, therefore, to account for the possibility Christians might be positively formed *as Christians* (and the church *as the church*) through participating in the political practices of the world, not simply working out in those political practices a formation they have already received in the church's worship. Here we are concerned with how the Christian's political identity is formed through belonging to their wider political community, and with the concrete political practices by which discipleship can take place in this wider community.[1] So, this entails talking about a positive relationship with the political as part of discipleship.

We will explore this further in this chapter, thinking about what it could mean to encounter the Spirit in formative ways in public life. My engagement with the work of Ben Quash and Dan Hardy has highlighted that we should expect to encounter the Spirit's work in unexpected and disruptive 'findings'. We should therefore seek to foster in ourselves an anticipative openness to surprise through attention to the particular, and an openness to rethinking the familiar. Here, I bring this work, along with that of Rowan Williams and Aristotle Papanikolaou, into conversation with the radical democratic thought of Romand Coles and Sheldon Wolin to explore what it might look like to be formed by the Spirit through political practices - particularly through democratic structures and institutions. This exchange illustrates how other disciplines, in this case political theory, can bring something theology needs to receive so that it might become more fully itself. In like manner, I am arguing that Christian and ecclesial formation *can and should* take place through engaging with, and receiving from, that which is not the church,

[1] As not all political practices are positively ethically formative, obviously.

7.I. Introducing the conversation

Radical democracy is a broad movement, but my interest here is particularly in the direction in which Sheldon Wolin and Romand Coles have taken radical democratic thought.[2] Wolin, in particular, has been described as turning political theory away from 'scientific' models which focus on economics, psychology, sociology, and the natural sciences (as seen particularly in behaviouralism and evolutionary psychology), and returning it to a focus on political action. So, this strand of radical democracy is theoretical but closely informed by, and oriented towards, practice. This can be seen in Wolin's description of political theory as 'primarily a civic and secondarily an academic activity.'[3] Wolin's work is thus centrally concerned with the possibilities and limits of popular democracy: with 'the possibilities of collectivity, common action and shared purposes'.[4] Coles too describes radical democracy as referring to 'political acts of tending to common goods and differences'.[5]

Here we will briefly consider some fruitful areas of shared concern, as well as some of the points of tension in this conversation around how one is formed through belonging to and participating in political community. This initial dialogue with radical democracy will be brief, but will continue to inform the remainder of Part III as it offers resources to fill out that which was identified as lacking in Chapter 6: namely, an account of how the church and the individual Christian might continue to be formed *through* civic participation.

We begin, then, by identifying some of the central points of traction in this conversation.

7.II. Tending and surprise

[2] Wolin is particularly associated with the 'agonistic' strand of radical democracy - as against the 'deliberative' and 'autonomist' strands, as they have been characterised by Lincoln Dahlberg in Eugenia Siapera, ed., *Radical Democracy and the Internet* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). He is often also grouped with The Berkeley school of political theory, which has also been characterised as having revitalised political theory by making its history relevant to an analysis of the present.

[3] Sheldon Wolin, *The Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and the Constitution* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p.67.

[4] Ibid, p.35. He cast himself and his profession in activist terms, concerned with 'the being and well-being of collectives'. Ibid.

[5] Romand Coles and Stanley Hauerwas, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations Between a Radical Democrat and a Christian* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2008), p.3n4.

Wolin and Coles' work is centrally animated by a commitment to a more diffuse and local form of politics. This form of politics is the 'first best hope' because of the way ordinary people, not systems or institutions, are understood as the primary political actors.[6] So, local and contingent settings are where they expect the heart of political life to be unfolding. Accordingly, this democratic project invites us to attend to our own local ways 'of knowing and naming the political' – to attend to 'the politics of everyday'.[7] Indeed, Molly Farneth characterises Wolin's proposal as a '"politics of tending" in which citizens attend to a political culture that cares for the habits, dispositions, practices, and forms of life worth sharing and sustaining'.[8]

This attention to political culture is predictable and stable in certain ways: it will involve voting; participating in school governing bodies; being part of broad-based community organising through one's church, mosque, or other member institution; belonging to a union; and so forth. Yet, it is also profoundly destabilising, with 'tending' leading to surprising discoveries to which one must respond in ways that shape the individual citizen and the institutions to which they belong in ways that could not have been foreseen. Tending to the world involves learning to pay close attention to what is truly going on in the community around us (rather than just holding onto our prior narrative of how things must be). Coles writes that 'a discipleship of tending works … between the preconceptions and the stories of a tradition, on the one hand, and the surprising substantial textures of the world we encounter, on the other.'[9] This strongly chimes with Quash's language of the given and the found, and the invitation to relate each to the other. Further, the language of attention to 'the surprising possibilities of the present moment' in the work of Hardy and Quash is used in strikingly similar ways by Wolin and Coles, in their proposal of a politics of tending.[10]

7.III. Encountering the other

[6] Wolin, *The Presence of the Past,* p.78.

[7] Chad Pecknold, 'Migrations of the Host: Fugitive Democracy and the Corpus Mysticum', *Political Theology* 11, no. 1 (2010): 77–101(p.97); Coles and Hauerwas, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary,* p.4.

[8] Molly Farneth, 'A Politics of Tending and Transformation', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 32, no. 1 (n.d.): 113–118(p.114). See Sheldon Wolin, 'Tending and Intending a Constitution', in *The Presence of the Past* and also Romand Coles, *Beyond Gated Politics: Reflections for the Possibility of Democracy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

[9] Coles and Hauerwas, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, p.59. Coles describes this as working at 'the intersection of the teleological and the ateleological'. Ibid.

[10] Quash, *Found Theology,* p.282.

Coles and Hauerwas write of listening to voices 'that may seem speechless, believing that they have something crucial to say to us if we are to escape the politics of speed.' This kind of listening 'not only takes time, but also requires a trained vulnerability that does not come easily', for it means 'that our life is not under our control, which means we must learn to trust others if we are not only to survive but to flourish.'[11] So, whilst far from easy, this training in vulnerability is necessary if we are to respond with openness to that which we are learning to see around us. In this way, formation in practices of attention allow for the other half of a politics of tending: openness to surprise by the other, whom one lives alongside.

Williams writes of this in terms of experiences where we sense the depth of otherness in the person or group encountered. Sometimes, in these experiences we recognise familiarity in those depths of difference.[12] At other times, we recognise depths of otherness in what seems familiar: I become a stranger to myself. Either way, Williams argues for the importance of seeking out these encounters. For it is in these experiences that we meet what we do not own, and, moreover, learn that, in fact, it is from what we do not own that we truly live. Williams contends that this is preeminently so in our relationship with the otherness of the divine: God is indeed that most uncontrolled of realities (who can never be exhaustively captured or contained in language), and yet it is also true that all that we are is oriented towards God. He outlines a patterning of back and forth in the relationship between encountering otherness in those around us and encountering otherness in God. Learning to contemplate and encounter the otherness of God will allow us to learn to recognise the strangeness outside as life-giving, and so to invite the uninvited and the uncontrollable and to live from it. Fundamentally, for Williams, '[t]o be human is to live in a readiness to be gifted and enlarged and enriched by what is not us - to move into that territory we do not control'.[13]

Williams relates this to the need for the church to be receptive to encountering deep otherness if there is to be what he calls 'civic vitality'.[14] He notes 'the dangers of reducing that vision to the claim of an institution […] which constantly slips into treating itself as one community among others that must struggle to establish its power or supremacy over others.'[15] Rather, all potential civic voices must be

[11] Coles and Hauerwas, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, p.5.

[12] Rowan Williams, 'Encountering the Other' (Autumn 2018), https://www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org/rowan-williams-encountering-the-other/ [Accessed 16.09.19].

[13] Ibid.

[14] Higton, *The Difficult Gospel*, p.56.

[15] Williams, *Lost Icons*, p.116.

allowed to engage in the dialogue so that it might be enriched.[16] As we saw in Part II, learning to attend to one another involves being interrupted by one another in order to see more clearly how we are each involved in holding others back from participative flourishing. So, this praxis should reshape and disrupt the practices and identity we have. Learning to attend in this way therefore also allows gifts to be brought by each to the body. So, training oneself in vulnerability is not just about loss of control, but also about surprise and delight.

This posture of openness to seeing and receiving unexpected gifts is central to being formed for political action that seeks common flourishing. So, this sense of discipleship as a practice of tending involves tending not only to the church but also to the world. Learning to attend to the findings to which the Spirit leads us in the world is an important part of Christian political formation. So too is learning to see the church and our Christian identity in the light of these findings, as we relate the given to the found and vice versa. This is all part of seeking to discern how the Spirit is at work in the wider political community (of which we are members) and the possibilities offered there for more fully inhabiting our calling as disciples.

7.IV. The fugitive provisionality of institutions

We see in this a strong echo of the dialectical relationship between institutions and political life set out by Wolin and Coles, in which tending to the world will surprise disciples, including in ways 'that transform them and reform the Church'.[17] In this way, radical democratic theory can help us to recognise the proper provisionality of any concrete form of ecclesial polity, as well as the provisionality of all other political institutions and structures.

Wolin's sense of the necessary restlessness of political life is to the fore here. Following his diagnosis of the close and complex relationship between the state and capitalism, Wolin's democratic project seeks to decouple liberalism and democracy. He calls for a 'fugitive democracy': a vision of 'unmanaged' democracy, fleeing from the manipulations of liberalism.[18] The restlessness of Wolin's democracy derives from the need to perpetually flee from the fallen powers that subjugate people, and so avoiding any political form which would restrict human beings' freedom as political animals.[19] Any

[16] Rowan Williams, 'Saving Time: Thoughts on Practice, Patience and Vision', *New Blackfriars* 73 (June 1992): 319–26(p.323).

[17] Farneth, 'A Politics of Tending and Transformation', p.116.

[18] Chad Pecknold, *Christianity and Politics: A Brief Guide to the History* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010), pp.133-134.

[19] Ibid, p.137.

political form that collects consent but rejects participation is therefore deemed to be dehumanising, and politics cannot, by this account, be tamed into a settled, over-arching system.[20]

In Wolin's view, democracy is not defined by a fixed state form, but is rather a political experience in which ordinary people are active political actors. So, more positively, this restlessness means that the political is located in a quality of relationality (interacting and negotiating together to discern common life and flourishing), not in any fixed institution. Such political acts, Coles writes, 'are always dynamically responsive to a world that always exceeds our terms and settled institutional forms. They always exceed state formations that claim to be the exemplary shape of democracy'.[21] This sense of excess and ongoing unfolding of new forms of common life resonates with the generative dynamic of 'ever more' that Hardy and Quash see as the grain of creation.

This 'ever more' means that institutional forms are never finalised – and this includes the polity of the church. Farneth argues that the participation of Christians in The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (one of the major Civil Rights Movement organisations of the 1960s) work changed the meaning of the liturgies of the church itself: '[n]ew social formations—including non-dominating social roles, relationships, and practices—enable the possibility of new significance for liturgical formations'.[22] This develops, then, the argument put forward in Part II regarding the character of ecclesial polity. Whilst, as Papanikolaou writes, for the church, 'the eucharistic gathering is the Church par excellence', it is also the clear that 'the community is in movement to participate [in political life] and, hence, realize the body of Christ more fully.'[23] This does not allow, then, for 'hard and fast borders between the political community and the idealized form of the eucharistic community'; rather, being a community in process makes the borders of the church 'much more porous to all that surrounds it.' [24]

Putting hard and fast borders around the church can be understood as an attempt to prematurely escape the proper restlessness of the Christian life. Williams argues that we all too often try to assuage this properly fundamental restlessness ('that is *constitutive* of our human creaturehood') by seeking '[t]he guarantee of a place in the human story, gained by active participation in the public realm … offering us the glamour of an assured historical future.' Yet this quest for reputation and secular immortality represents a denial of the temporal, and so holds dangers for both common life and for the Christian's spiritual flourishing. It is, Williams argues, '[f]or our soul's sake' that we need to resist the struggle to

[20] Pecknold, 'Migrations of the Host', p.97.

[21] Coles and Hauerwas, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary,* p.3n4.

[22] Farneth, 'A Politics of Tending and Transformation', p.9.

[23] Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, p.84.

[24] In speaking of idealised eucharistic communities, Papanikolaou has in view the ecclesiologies of Vigen Guroian and William Cavanaugh. Ibid., p.85.

escape the constraints of time and recognise 'there is no guaranteeable future'. For, 'real temporality is more vulnerable, and so also more open to radical hope … It is the awkwardness and provisionality, the endlessly *revisable* character (morally speaking) of our social and political relationships, that … keeps us faithful to the insight of humility – that we are timebound in everything here below, that our love is an unceasing search.'[25]

Charles Mathewes also sees the task of the Christian citizen as 'enduring virtuously', learning to 'accept the gift that time most basically is', as having spiritual as well as political import.[26] To endure in this way is not only 'to refuse to let the world have the last word on what it means', but also 'to refuse also presume to know what the last word will be.'[27] It is in this way that 'present participation in this [civic] liturgy can fit us for our parts in that greater liturgy to come'.[28] So, we can say that participation in political practices helps us to see and better inhabit this temporality. This is true both for the practices of the church, and for the individual Christian citizen.

7.V. Participation and the transformation of the individual

This discussion of the restlessness of radical democracy has led us to a second insight offered by Wolin and Coles: that it is not only institutions that are contingently formed by their participation in civic life, but that the same is true of people. Coles illustrates this with reference to how the civil rights movement changed the people, in particular the Christians, who participated in it. In his consideration of the 'prophetic Christian discipleship' modelled by Ella Baker's community building and organising, Coles sees the Church's role in her early education and formation as significant but not as final, continuing on 'through practices of tending to the people, relationships, and goods of the diverse communities in which she found herself.'[29] As he writes:

[25] Rowan Williams, 'Politics and the Soul: A Reading of City of God', *Milltown Studies* 19/20 (1987): 55–72(p.68-69). Williams is in dialogue with Hannah Arendt's neo-classical political vision here, seeing the temporality of the saeculum as contra to Arendt's account of our vocation to inscription of ourselves with a transgenerational political conversation.

[26] Charles Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.12.

[27] Ibid, p.15. Virtue in public life therefore lies, for Mathewes, in 'habits of resisting "making" anything of ourselves', rather than in moral achievements. Ibid., p.11.

[28] Ibid, p.23. It is worth noting Mathewes' strong refutation of the suggestion that he is offering an apologetic for democracy, or seeking to use faith to support a particular democratic culture (and its structures). Indeed, it is against the self-destructive accommodationism of public theology that Matthewes frames his project as a theology of public life. On the other side, Mathewes is equally adamant that the work should not be seen as an 'in-house ressentiment' against contemporary public life or modernity. Ibid., p.27.

[29] Farneth, 'A Politics of Tending and Transformation', p.115.

> [D]aily activity in and around co-ops [through the Young Negro Cooperative League in Harlem] functioned as a sort of liturgy: a regularized public practice in which the most crucial work done was the formation of a public in the sense of people capable of tending to each other and the possibility of common goods… It was during this time that Baker came to understand transformation in terms of the effort to proliferate dialogical practices and spaces in which more hopeful selves and communities might be engendered, supported, and sustained.[30]

Farneth likewise understands Baker to have remained open to the possibility of transformation through participation in this form of political life: 'through practices of tending, through the emergence of goods held in common, and through dialogue with people often radically different from herself.' In this, openness to surprise is central: an openness to the way that 'new ideas and ways of being emerge in our engagement with the world', reshaping 'what we thought we understood.' Coles fills out this account of ongoing Christian formation in engagement with Williams' understanding of discipleship, by which, as we saw in Chapter 2, 'Jesus grants us a solid identity, yet refuses us the power to 'seal' or finalize it, and obliges us to realize that this identity only exists in an endless responsiveness to new encounters with him in a world of unredeemed relationships'.[31]

Civic participation as ascesis

This account of the challenge of discerning and responding God in an unredeemed world displays the more difficult side of the task of civic participation. For, we are, as Christians, not only to respond to the gifts and hopeful possibilities for common goods brought by those we encounter in public life, but we are also called to respond to the challenges of living in political community. This understanding of formation through difficulty has been brought out by recent political theological engagements with the ascetical tradition, with Aristotle Papanikolaou's Orthodox reading of political life offering a particularly rich way of understanding civic participation.[32]

[30] Coles and Hauerwas, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, p.61.

[31] Ibid., p.84, referencing Williams, *Resurrection*, p.76. Papanikolaou likewise writes that the way of discipleship 'is beyond our concept of an object that has been made by a fixed law'. Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, p.181.

[32] Mathewes also approaches discussion of the virtues through asceticism, arguing that an 'ascetics of public life built on a program of 'enduring' uses engagement in public life to discipline one's dispositions'. Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, p.11.

Papanikolaou describes the ascetical tradition as 'one of thinking on how to acquire the virtue of love, which is to grow in deeper communion with God.'[33] Therefore, the central question of the ascetic life is 'what are the practices that one needs to perform in relation to oneself and the other in order to make oneself more available to love both oneself and the other in the way God does?'[34] The 'ascetical struggle to learn how to love', then, is always 'inescapably' in relation to the other – 'family, friends, strangers' - as well as in relation to God.[35] Papanikolaou sees the encounter with the stranger, in particular ('more than blood or ecclesial kin'), as provoking a challenge and opportunity for the Christian to learn how to love.

Whilst there is no space in which the ascetical struggle does not take place, in confronting the stranger, Papanikolaou argues, 'we are much more likely to come face to face with the magnification of how much learning to love we have ahead of us, since it is much easier to justify anger, hatred, resentment, and demonization of those who threaten our identities.' [36] Therefore, political life can be understood as 'one of the deserts where the Christian confronts images of demons that provoke demonization of the stranger' (with one such demon being anger).[37] It is in this light that Papanikolaou argues that Christian political participation must be reconceived as an ascetical practice. This understanding of politics goes beyond 'simply what legislators do' in their respective institutions, to include 'the forms of practices in and through which strangers relate to one another'.[38] As such, it resonates with the restless radical democratic location of political life not in any fixed institutions (including the church), but in a quality of relationship: in negotiating together to discern common life and flourishing.

[33] Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, p.197.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid, p.198; 84. He notes how, all too often, the Christian 'possession' of absolute truth has been used to justify a politics of demonization and oppression. Ibid., p.84.

[37] Ibid, p.83. For, '[i]n no other field is the temptation to demonize the neighbor more compelling or more seemingly justifiable than in the field of politics; in no other space than in the political, then, is the Christian to fulfil the commandment to love'. – Ibid., p.4.

[38] Ibid, p.83. It is not clear quite how deep the need for learning goes in this vision. Papanikolaou does not make explicit whether it is that in encountering the stranger we put into practice practices that we already know we should do (i.e. strengthening muscles we already have), or whether it is that that we know our Christian vocation to love in outline, but this is filled out through encounters with strangers.

Conclusion: Tensions and ways forward

Whilst fruitful in the ways outlined above (and in many other directions), there are also tensions in this conversation between radical democratic theory and theology. These cluster around questions of ultimate teleological orientation. As Papanikolaou notes: 'From the perspective of the Christian affirmation of divine-human communion, the notion of the common good would not be immanentist, even if affirmed by those who have different convictions about the divine, including denial of the divine.'[39]

However, Papanikolaou does not see this lack of a shared moral orientation and grounding as ultimately problematic. Instead, he sees this notion of the common good as one that 'emerges through civic-engagement-as-dialogue' (rather than as following from natural law principles, for example). By this rendition, 'such engagement *is* the common good, which means that the common good entails the unequivocal equality among all citizens as co-participants in the dialogue or the "community of dispute." '[40] Therefore, 'what constitutes the common good is, in part, a tentative, always contested, "increasingly adequate but always revisable understanding of the good life."'[41] Papanikolaou see this profoundly contingent vision of human flourishing as in fact allowing for 'a measure of acknowledgement of transcendence, of there being more than oneself, even if, paradoxically, it is a common good that is affirmed by those who deny the transcendent.'[42] So, 'Christians must affirm a common good whose content is not identical with, though also not inconsistent with, their deepest convictions.' So, tensions remain in this vision of political life, yet they are worth living with (and are, ultimately, creative rather than paralysing). True politics, in fact, is in living with these tensions.

We have seen then, that whilst the possibility of discipleship through civic participation outside of the church tends to be overlooked in Anglican political theology, this dialogue between Hardy and Quash, on the one hand, and Wolin and Coles, on the other, offers resources to address this lacuna. Learning to attend to the findings to which the Spirit leads us in the world is an important part of Christian political formation. So too is learning to see the church and our Christian identity in the light of these findings, as we relate the given to the found and vice versa. This is all part of seeking to discern how the Spirit is at work in the wider political community (of which we are members) and the possibilities offered there for redemption. So, the way learning to attend is understood shapes in turn the way we

[39] Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as the Political*, p.158.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid. As Papanikolaou continues: particular visions of common flourishing are 'by virtue of the diverse voices … never reified or settled', but rather always 'tentative and contested, and, as such, subject to revision.'

[42] Ibid, p.159.

understand participation in the body of the church and in the wider body politic, and the kinds of formation that can and should take place through membership of these bodies.

With this vision of discipleship through participation in common life in mind, we now turn to consider more concretely what this looks like in relation to civil society and the state. How can political participation in these structures form Christians and the church into becoming more fully what they are called to be?

8

Formation through Civic Participation

I have outlined, then, a picture of ongoing discipleship through encounter with the Spirit in forms of common life. With this in mind, we now turn to consider more concretely what this looks like in relation to participating in civil society and the state. How can participation in these political structures be part of how we are formed as Christians? We begin to answer this question by looking at civil society.

8.I. Civil society and the Christian calling to neighbourliness

We have seen from Papanikolaou that politics can be fruitfully understood as the process of strangers learning to relate to one another. For the Christian, this means that the ascetic task in the public sphere is of learning to love 'the neighbour, who may also be the stranger.'[1] We can also turn this around and understand the political as the struggle for strangers to become neighbours. This struggle has a particular claim upon Christians, as the Christian tradition has a strong understanding of being called to be good neighbours. Indeed, Stephen Backhouse argues that we should understand the Christian vocation to neighbourliness as foundational to discipleship because of the way the incarnation fundamentally disrupts all prior relations and loyalties. To be formed as a disciple, then, is also to seek to become a neighbour to all.[2]

8.I.i. Bretherton on neighbourliness

We begin by exploring Bretherton's in-depth account of neighbourliness, as perhaps the most fully developed political theological treatment of this theme. Through this engagement we come to identify shared points of agreement, and also of tension.

In a similar vein to Coles and Wolin, Bretherton locates the political in communication, which he sees as most fully expressed in civil society. This communication is oriented to the identification and pursuit of common goods. In a liberal democratic polity, this means that Christians should associate together with non-Christian 'others' in civic life towards these end, and '[i]n doing so the Church, simply by attempting to be itself, will help foment a faithful worldly politics; that is, a process through which to maintain commonality and recognize and peaceably conciliate conflict with others in the pursuit of shared goods'.[3] However, as we have seen in the previous chapter, we must go beyond Bretherton's argument here and also account for the way that the church, by helping foment a faithful worldly politics, will also learn to be itself.

Bretherton explores the church's calling to associate together with other groups primarily in the form of broad-based community organising (hereafter BBCO). He sets BBCO within a consociational democratic framework, in which power is shared between the state and civil society groups and

[1] Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, p.4.

[2] Stephen Backhouse, *Kierkegaard's Critique of Christian Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[3] Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p.221.

institutions, which collaborate to seek to make democracy work for all.[4] Bretherton sees the relationship between congregation and *demos* in a consociational democracy as a mutually disciplining partnership. In participating in BBCO to identify and pursue common goods, the congregation has to 'listen to and learn from its neighbours'. In return, the congregation's cosmic vision of the good 'brings a wider horizon of reference and relationship to bear on the immediate needs and demands of the demos'.[5] Through this exchange, neighbours are formed.[6]

So, Bretherton sees neighbourliness as involving forming alliances in civil society, for the sake of the common peace. Whilst Bretherton speaks of the church learning from its neighbours, it is worth noting that there is no detailing of what might be learnt and how the church might be re-formed through its civic participation. Bretherton claims that, in this vision, '[t]he congregation and the *demos* are echoes of each other', yet there is an asymmetry to this relationship in terms of moral authority: with 'the church, as a congregation listening to and proclaiming the Word of God, brings an opening horizon of reference and relationship to bear upon the immediate needs and demands of the *demos*.' For Bretherton, it is sufficient for the fomentation of common flourishing that the church simply continues in the attempt 'to be itself', with the implication being that this is something it already knows how to do.[7] The language of 'bringing to bear' highlights this, with its implications of possession and use of what is possessed.

With the relationship remaining more or less at the level of alliance, Bretherton is not arguing that for the congregation to become more fully what it is called to be (*qua* church) it must listen to and learn from its neighbours. Rather, for Bretherton, the church's cosmic horizon seems to be already fully-formed and gifted as such to the *demos*. So, here again, my engagement with Quash and Hardy leads me to push further than this. The church's view of its 'cosmic horizon' should not remain unchanged through this mutual listening, but rather it should learn to see the wider horizon more clearly through this engagement. Additionally, Bretherton argues that the Christian is able to undertake this task of neighbourly alliance-building only through having been formed for civic participation through prior participation in ecclesial practices, which mirror certain democratic practices. The ability to identify

[4] Luke Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp.6-7.

[5] Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*, p.99. Bretherton understands this mutual disciplining as helping to ensure 'that when it comes to earthly politics, both congregation and *demos* remain directed towards merely earthly ends'. Ibid., p.116

[6] Ibid., p.97.

[7] Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, p.221. This picture becomes more nuanced in *Christ and the Common Life*, but, as mentioned previously, it was unfortunately published too close the submission of this thesis for it to be fully engaged here.

and pursue goods in common depends, for Bretherton, on this prior ecclesial formation.[8] Thinking back to Coles' discussion of tending and listening in the previous chapter, it is clear that this goes beyond what is advocated by Bretherton here.[9]

We can see, then, that, whilst Bretherton is notable in concretely addressing the form of Christian political practices in civil society, his account of the church's neighbourly relationship with civil society in terms of alliances and mirrored practices is not quite sufficient for an understanding of Christian formation *through* political participation. Bretherton ends up implying that Christians already know securely what it means to relate to someone as a neighbour, and that we need only exercise this already known vocation in relation to grow in it. I believe we must go further than this: we know only in outline what it means to relate to someone as a neighbour, and need to be taught over time more of the true shape of the practice – and, furthermore, we only learn it in encounter with others. So, we do not yet know what 'neighbourliness' means. As Andrew Rumsey puts it, the Christian's calling to love the 'other' is 'a universal command that only becomes particular when placed within a 'neighbourhood' of proximate relations that allow for peaceable encounter with those who differ from us.'[10]

8.I.ii. Neighbourliness as shared towardness and betweenness

Returning to Hardy and Quash can help us to formulate this more richly formative account of neighbourliness, by which participation in in civil society helps us to learn anew neighbourliness as our Christian vocation. In the thinking of both, the 'betweenness', or connectedness, 'of creatures in the creation's movement towards glory is bestowed on them all the more precisely by the fact that they have a shared towardness.' 'Towardness' can be understood here as a fundamental attraction to God, which is embedded in the grain of creation. So, creatures advance, vertiginously, 'towards a divine consummation that is, disconcertingly but headily, more than they previously knew.'[11] Politically, this means neighbourliness can be understood as an expression of this foundational belonging together, rather than being something created through alliance-building. Williams reminds us that because we are being called to a common future, we do indeed have a common good whether we learn to recognise it or not. This means, as Higton writes, that '[t]his belonging together provides the ground on which our negotiating and arguing can go to work.'[12]

[8] Ibid., pp.96-99;103 – with respect to the way the discipline of listening in the church forms an ability to listen in public life.

[9] Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*, p.78.

[10] Andrew Rumsey, *Parish: An Anglican Theology of Place* (London: SCM Press, 2017), p.85.

[11] Quash, *Found Theology*, pp.255-256.

[12] Higton, *Difficult Gospel*, p.124. There is also of course, ultimate hope, for 'the gospel free us from fear and fantasy', through Christ's disarming acceptance. It is this disarming acceptance that also tells us that there is a place where all belong together;

By this account, the Holy Spirit 'is *both* betweenness … and towardness … *[Towardness, in other words, can serve betweenness].'*[13] So, the idea of 'betweenness' as a result of 'shared towardness' can also help to move us away from hierarchical understandings of the relationship between church and world (with gift being all on one side and reception on the other). On the contrary, this account of shared advance means mutually encountering the Spirit at work in the 'towardness' of all creation. Being open to encountering the Spirit requires that the church becomes, as we have seen earlier, a 'walking church': 'Whoever and whatever turns up as they walk, whatever they find as they go along, these become the found realities in response to which [Christians] think and act.'[14] So, the church must 'be prepared to imagine what it would be like to engage with others in the land, rather than shying away', and in this way the ecclesial imagination is stimulated and awakened. In this, the first step, for Hardy, is 'rational frustration': 'a sense that we are not doing what we ought to do', 'which leads us to search within our experience for signs of new patterns of order and unity' – searching in the land in which we are placed. There is a recognition here that the church is not yet (nor will it ever be, this side of eternity) all that it is called to be – *and* that it needs to receive the Spirit through its neighbours to more fully become what it is to be. The church's understanding of itself, and so also of its praxis, is therefore reshaped by ongoing encounters in the world, through which it receives 'new images of what this order and unity might be'.[15]

Wannenwetsch too understands neighbourliness to be characterised by a form of attention that is open to disruption: neighbours are able to enter into '[different functional] spheres with an ability to perceive the need of others, an ability that has to be further refined.' He understands this 'perceptive power' as 'the capacity for identification'. Yet this too is a capacity which must always be open to challenge and deepening perception of the need of others, for, as Wannenwetsch argues '[t]he priest and the Levite are prevented from becoming the neighbour of the person in need precisely because they thought they knew already who their neighbour was'. Wannenwetsch further argues that Christian ethical identity '*comes into being* through identification, in the course of which one person becomes the other's neighbour.' He goes on to argues that neighbourliness does not exist as a prior known category, for whilst we 'may *be* people who act more or less in solidarity with others, … as 'neighbours' we are

this promise of a common future assures us that, whilst we will never learn to see it fully, there is in each moment, a common good. Ibid., pp.17-18.

[13] Quash, *Found Theology*, p.263 (italics original).

[14] Hardy et al., *Wording a Radiance*, p.86.

[15] Ibid., referencing Coleridge. Hardy relates this 'Jesus' walking-healing in the Holy Land', and to the contemporary practice of Scriptural Reasoning. Ibid, p.87.

always still becoming.'[16] So, there is a deep contingency and provisionality to this neighbourly identity. This reminds us that, as we saw in the previous chapter, we are called to a politics of vulnerability and ongoing surprise.

8.I.iii. Learning to be a neighbour through BBCO and ABCD

So, this kind of neighbourliness – marked by an openness to receive from the other in often unexpected ways – should mark neighbourly relationships at an interpersonal level *and* at the level of the church's relationships with other civil society associations. We will now consider how participation in asset-based community development (ABCD) and broad-based community organising (BBCO), in particular, can develop this vocation to neighbourliness in the church. As we saw in the previous chapters, there is no practice that is a guarantor of good formation. However, we can assume postures that make us more open to receive from the Spirit, and I suggest here that the methodologies of BBCO and ABCD can help us to assume such postures.

Reimagining ministry in a receptive mode

There is an increasingly widespread sense in the Church of England that the inherited model of Anglican social ministry requires major reform.[17] As we will address in more detail in Chapter 9, the Church of England's commitment, through its parish network, to being tied to particular places has often given rise to territorial tendencies, leading the parish to often become something inward-looking and nostalgic. This concern with territory is closely tied to another typically Anglican preoccupation: power. Ministry has often been understood in terms of going into new places, and fixing the problems found there, bringing the people there something they previously lacked. Whilst it is certainly true that the church is made up of those who have encountered the good news of the gospel and wish others to know this truth more fully, this model allows the church to remain in control of God's mission in the world. So, it is worth noting here that this conversation about reimagining ministry is not undertaken with the aim of offering BBCO or ABCD as a technique or strategy through which the church can regain its power and relevance. Rather, the concern is with how community organising and development can help us to see the Church of England's new status as a small member of the wider community as an opportunity to receive from that community: God is at work outside the church, and we are to be hungry for more of God, delighting in the eruption of God's manifold life in the world.

[16] Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship*, p.232.

[17] For a much fuller discussion of this, see Al Barrett, 'Interrupting the Church's Flow' (thesis).

One of the ways in which community organising allows this to happen is by pushing church members to go out and listen to those in the parish, to find out what is going on in their lives and what they both value and want to change about their local community. Central to community organising methodology is the one-to-one: a conversation between two people who belong to the same local area in which they engage deeply - discussing key moments in their lives; their ambitions; how they spend their time, money, energy - with the intention of identifying shared areas of 'self-interest'. This means identifying those areas in both people's lives where the hopes they each have for themselves, their families, and their neighbourhoods overlap. So, in the context of the ministry of the Church of England, one-to-ones offer an opportunity to get to know one's parish.

This concern with beginning with the community in which one is embedded is even more strongly brought out by the methodology of ABCD. As Barrett says:

> If, as Rowan Williams has put it, 'mission is finding out what God is doing and joining in', then, as local churches, we are called to be 'insiders' in our communities. That means being bodily present, walking their streets and making our home there. When it comes to community development, we are perhaps more familiar with the service-delivery approach in which 'experts' identify a need and deliver a service to meet it. The ABCD approach, on the other hand, invites all of us to spend time with people, patiently getting to know them and discovering their passions and gifts.[18]

This approach emphasises beginning not with shared problems (as BBCO conversations tend to) but with the gifts or 'assets' already present. As Barrett continues:

> ABCD begins with a shift in vision: from seeing the world around us, our neighbours and our neighbourhoods, for what they are lacking, to seeing them for what they have … ABCD invites us to practise the same liturgy of abundance [that we practice in church] in our own neighbourhoods: to open our eyes to the ways God has blessed *this* place and *this* people with goodness, vitality and fruitfulness. It may be in the place itself, in the stories that it contains or in the webs of relationships that knit it together. It certainly begins by recognising the wealth

[18] Al Barrett, 'Asset-Based Community Development: A Theological Reflection' (Church Urban Fund, 2013), http://www2.cuf.org.uk/sites/default/files/PDFs/Research/ABCD_Theological_Reflection_2013.pdf [Accessed 16.09.19], pp.2-3. See also: Mary McClintock Fulkerson, 'Receiving from the Other: Theology and Grass-Roots Organizing', *International Journal of Public Theology* 6 (2012), 421-434.

> of gifts of the people who inhabit it and the marks of the 'image of God' that define each and every one of them. [19]

So, there is an expectation that through encounters in this community one will also encounter the work of the Spirit, just as Christians expect to encounter the Spirit at work within the gathered practices of the church. In this, community organising and development return us to the true concern of the parish. The Greek word *paroikia*, from which we derive 'parish', can be parsed as 'the people outside the walls'. So, the parish was originally conceived of in terms of a relationship with those outside the church's walls. Core to reestablishing this relationship is listening.

We can see, then, how community organising and development can help us to be attentive to opportunities for the church to receive from those outside its membership. The language of asset-based community development, in particular, can help us to see how the people we encounter in our neighbourhoods bring gifts to be received, not primarily problems to be solved. This is reflected in the practice of one-to-ones, in which there is an expectation that one will encounter in the other person distinctive experiences and gifts which will enable both to better pursue a common good.

Developing lay leadership

Having suggested that community organising and development can helps us to understand and reimagine the Church of England's ministry in our local communities, we now turn to look at the way in which community organising can help the Church of England to encourage lay participation and leadership in ministry.

As we saw in Chapter 4, the Church of England's imagination can often be marked not only by territorial tendencies but also by a tendency towards clericalism. Too often, the priest has been seen as the central figure in the life and ministry of the church. This has implications for the ability of the church to participate in democratic structures: as Coles asks, 'Might not institutional hierarchy vitiate the liturgies of radical ecclesia – and therefore its authority?'[20] Additionally, as noted above, with the shifting social position of the church, this top-down model of being 'chaplain to the congregation and public servant to the neighbourhood' is increasingly no longer viable.[21]

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[19] Ibid., p.2.

[20] Coles and Hauerwas, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, p.326.

[21] As described by Angus Ritchie at a Citizens UK symposium on Anglican ministry and community organizing: Angus Ritchie, Reimagining the Ministry of the Church, Leeds (23 November 2018).

Andy Griffiths writes of the need to 'endanger vicarhood' (by which he means an ecclesial model where the life of the church centres on the activities of the priest).[22] He argues that community organising offers a way to think about reshaping the polity and ministry of the church away from a priest-centric model towards a model of organised communities. This is possible, in part, because community organising poses problems for the way leadership tends to be understood in the church. In community organising, leaders are defined as those who have a following. This is a challenge to understandings of leadership based on position or qualifications and expertise, as this kind of 'relational leadership' is not limited to particular roles (such as priest or church warden). This form of leadership also involves a willingness and ability to turn followers into leaders themselves. As Bretherton writes, '[i]n BBCO the apogee of citizenship is conceptualised as leadership', and so the focus when 'cutting an issue' is always partly on whether it develops leaders.[23]

Here the methodology of one-to-ones is again able to help us, in encouraging attention to one another's formative life experiences ('key moments'), hopes, and ambitions. To attend to someone's self-interest (meaning, in community organising, the composite of these concerns) is to recognise that they have a God-given vocation.[24] So, clerical leadership in a reimagined Anglican polity is about lovingly attending to needs and vocations in order to unlock lay people's gifts and energy, which enables them to take on leadership responsibilities.

A further formative organising practice is the power analysis, which is undertaken when beginning any action (as the success of any campaign depends on the involvement of those with the power to bring about the desired change). In the context of the church, this practice also has the benefit of bringing power into the open: for power must be acknowledged if it is not to be aggregated and abused, as we saw in Chapter 4. During a symposium on community organising in the Church of England held in 2018, several lay leaders reflected on how their community organising training in analysing power and meeting for one-to-ones had equipped them to build power with others and make change – and to use the structures of their church to do so. One church warden spoke about how her parochial church council had used the tools of community organising to coordinate a listening campaign during an interregnum, as part of the process of putting together a parish profile in such a way that they were able to open the

[22] Andy Griffiths, *Refusing to Be Indispensable: Vacating the Centre of Church Life* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2018).

[23] Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*, pp.140-141.

[24] Whilst also recognising that this vocation will be overlaid with a great deal of sin and self-deception. This second truth must not be overlooked if we are to avoid colluding with the power imbalances and vested self-interest that are encoded in the ambitions we each nurture.

Church up to appointing a female priest for the first time.[25] We can see, then, that drawing on community organising thinking can allow lay leaders to more fully participate in the life of the Church and to significantly shape ecclesial polity.

Griffiths believes that this model of organised communities expresses a confidence that God has given each local church all the gifts they need to join in the mission of God, in the way they are being called to (without requiring someone to come in from outside and bring what is needed).[26] So, priests are to encourage, train up, troubleshoot, and sometimes intervene (when things are being done that are unjust or unkind), but they do not run everything. This approach means that, rather than trying to be involved with all of the church's ministry, the priest is allowed to rediscover the joy of their own distinctive calling. This in turn allows them to attend more fully to the callings of others. In this way, community organising and development have the potential to foster the kinds of practices identified in Chapter 5 as necessary for a flourishing ecclesial polity.

However, we should also recognise the potential for organising methodologies to reinforce the problems of church polity – for example, through shoring up ecclesial hierarchies. As we have seen, leadership, in BBCO, is defined in terms of having followers. Leaders are those who have 'relationships of trust and loyalty with a number of others in their locality or institution', and who have relationships with power: 'they are taken seriously and listened to by those in positions of authority, whether within the hierarchy of their church, union, or school or by local officials and business leaders'. Bretherton concludes, therefore, that leaders 'have an earned trust, respect and loyalty'.[27] This means that 'everyone has relational power, and it is normal to interact with those with more power'. Bretherton does recognise some of the dangers lurking here, and argues that 'such interaction needs to be habitual, public, analysed, and evaluated so it can occur more effectively and constructively'. However, even with this caveat, he still largely overlooks how relationships of trust, loyalty, and power are formed

[25] Jackie Ashmenall, 'Organising Among Anglican Churches in Ealing: A Reflection', Reimagining the Ministry of the Church, (23 November 2018).

[26] The language used by Griffiths here sounds very much like the kind of language used by Sam Wells, critiqued in Chapter 1. So, how does Griffiths' meaning differ from Wells'? The crucial difference is that, for Griffiths, the gifts are not already contained in the extant practices of the church and in the church's understanding of its overarching story (as they are for Wells). Rather, the gifts given by God here are understood to encompass the particularity of the members of the church and its neighbours, and the ways their gifts will joyfully interrupt and re-form the practices of the local church.

[27] Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*, pp.136-137. This is also quite a content-free vision of citizenship, given that leaders are defined here as those who have followers. We should note that Bretherton does also draw out how, within BBCO, the sustained authority and legitimacy of leaders rests on their ability to negotiate both their sustained trusted position within their institution and performing well BBCO political actions. Ibid., p.141.

through a kyriarchal matrix, and so are often not earned at all but simply bestowed (by those who are like them).[28]

There are also other challenges to developing leadership in this way. There is the danger of power shifting only in short term or tokenistic ways, and so simply collapsing back into the priest's role following an interregnum, for example. Alternatively, power can end up being wielded in obstructive or domineering ways by a small number of lay people. It is out of an awareness of such dangers that community organising methodology describes an ongoing cycle of organising, disorganising, and reorganising. This is important if power is not to end up concentrated in the hands of just a few, whether lay or ordained.

Summary

These dangers notwithstanding, there is demonstrable scope for community organising and development to aid in developing a more receptive church polity and in strengthening lay leadership. This is one way in which participation in civil society can help the church to become more fully what it is called to be, by entering more deeply into the ongoing mission of God in the world. We have also seen that the Christian calling to be good neighbours is a vocation that can only be fully understood and grown into through participation in civil society, with the opportunities this brings for living alongside and receiving from those who are strange to us (that is, those whom we first encounter as strangers).

[28] This failure to fully attend to the power dynamics in civil society is also evident in Bretherton's discussion of relational power, whereby the aim of relational forms of coercion used in BBCO 'is to gain recognition and respect and therefore parity in the relationship, thereby establishing a common world of meaning and action.' Yet Bretherton does not address how the practice of this kind of relational coercion could also be used to shore up or exacerbate oppressive power relations – including between and within member institutions. Whilst this kind of relational coercion may be necessary for negotiations with political office holders (although there are also other ways to establish a common world of meaning and action), given the Church of England's historically dominant social position, its relationships with its neighbours in civil society should not be marked by this kind of regard for retaining reputation. *Resurrecting Democracy*, pp.139-140. For a fuller discussion of the power relations encoded in theological accounts of community organising see: Vincent Lloyd, 'Of Puzzles and Idols', *Syndicate* (blog), accessed 23 September 2019, https://syndicate.network/symposia/theology/resurrecting-democracy/#vincent-lloyd.

8.II. Formation through participation in the democratic state

We have seen, then, how discipleship can and should involve receiving from the other in civil society. We have also seen how this is necessary for Christians to better fulfil their vocation to neighbourliness. We now turn to consider how discipleship can be more fully understood and inhabited through participation in the democratic state. In speaking of participation in the structures of the state, the kind of practices that are in view include the basic democratic activities of voting in local and national elections, and serving as an elected representative at local and national levels. However, what is included in the state apparatus often goes beyond what we narrowly think of as the government. Therefore, these kinds of participative practices also include working as a member of the civil service (as, although state structures typically have ministerial oversight, they are operationally run by civil servants), and, at the other end of the spectrum, involvement in party politics.

The ways in which political participation in the structures of state shapes us as disciples can be understood through consideration of Bonhoeffer's understanding of responsibility. Through this engagement, I come to argue that participation in the structures of a representative democracy can, in fact, illuminate Christian responsibility. In this way, participation in the structures of the democratic state, as well as in civil society, can be understood as part of our discipleship. This is not just in the sense of it being a duty of discipleship (i.e. something our Christian formation has taught us to do), but also as something that teaches us what our discipleship can be.

However, first we must begin by exploring why such an account of the scope for positive formation through participation in the state has not previously been articulated by those undertaking political theology in the Church of England. This entails acknowledging and exploring the gap in Anglican thinking around the practices that express and constitute the moral purpose of the state.

8.II.i. State practices in Anglican theology

It is perhaps counterintuitive that the question of how Christians should understand the ethically formative implications of their interactions with the state has tended to receive little attention in theology produced by an Established church. We can understand this more clearly through exploring the accounts of the purpose of the state present in the work of Williams and Bretherton.

Anglican political theology and pluralist theories of the democratic state

The thinking of both Williams and Bretherton on the character of the democratic state is strongly influenced by the early twentieth-century strand of 'political pluralism' associated with F.W. Maitland, Harold Laski, and J. N. Figgis (and their more contemporary follower David Nicholls).[29] This group of theorists emphasised that persons are not primarily, and certainly not exclusively, members of the single comprehensive community of the state, but rather first of all belong to what Williams terms 'first-level associations'. These associations are larger than the individual but smaller than the state. These are the primary locations in which people learn to act corporately to govern their own internal affairs, and so are also the primary locations in which they are formed as persons and from which position they negotiate their social identity.[30] For the Pluralists, then, the state is not, as Williams puts it, 'the all-powerful source of legitimate community life and action', but, rather, 'the structure needed to organise and mediate within a "community of communities"'.[31] He goes on: 'State authority simply means that, in an association of such associations […], power is delegated to the unifying structure in order to balance the claims and order the relations of the smaller units.'[32]

The political climate leading up to the First World War led the English Political Pluralists to fall out of favour, as stronger accounts of the role of the state became more attractive in the conditions of wartime. Whilst the political philosophy and theology of the interwar years still bore the influence of Pluralism, William Temple's more classical liberalism came to dominate Anglican thinking on the state for much of the latter half of the twentieth century. Whilst still influenced by Figgis, Temple saw the state in a more benign light, as a body that could be accommodated alongside the church, and certainly not as an active force of counter-formation. This confidence in the comfortable relationship that is possible between church and state has attracted much concern amongst theologians over the past several decades.[33] This concern has been further fed as, whilst, as we saw in Chapter 6, Temple places a strong emphasis on the importance of civil society associations for forming good citizens, the significance of civil society is not reflected in the governing power he accords to it. It is to Temple's neglect of the role of civil society that Bretherton and Williams are partly offering a corrective. This retrieval of the Pluralists is also undertaken in the context of Britain becoming an increasingly multicultural society, as a resource for seeking to maintain conversations about national goods in common amidst deep difference.

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[29] Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp.50; 81; 126.

[30] Ibid., p.50.

[31] Ibid., p.126.

[32] Rowan Williams, 'Liberation Theology and the Anglican Tradition', in *Politics and Theological Identity: Two Anglican Essays*, ed. David Nicholls and Rowan Williams (London: The Jubilee Group, 1984), 7 - 26(p.17).

[33] See Spencer, 'William Temple and 'The Temple Tradition'', pp.90-9; 94 – 95, and Suggate, 'The Temple Tradition', p.12; 38; 112 – 113.

Interactive pluralism and hospitable consociationalism

In Williams' thought, this takes the form of 'interactive pluralism': which he differentiates from the 'static pluralism' produced by 'Balkanizing' versions of multiculturalism, which offer only the 'juxtaposition of mutually non-communicating groups'.[34] In contrast, interactive pluralism requires a public framework in which groups are prompted to cooperate with each other in action and to engage with each other in civil but critical dialogue. This requires a body capable of initiating 'brokerage' (or 'mediation') between communities where conflict arises or when groups become withdrawn into themselves, and, more positively, where facilitation is necessary for mutual cooperation. This body is the state, which through law 'provides the stable climate for all first-level communities to flourish and the means for settling, and enforcing, "boundary disputes" between them'.[35] In sum, Williams' state 'confers space, protects the vulnerable, and encourages dialogue, without determining the content and character of that dialogue, nor the precise details of the teachings of the 'first-level associations'.[36]

This role as broker is framed by an account of the state as 'procedurally secular', with Williams drawing on Charles Taylor's distinction between programmatic and procedural secularism. Procedural secularism, in contrast to programmatic secularism's consignment of religious and moral commitments to a private realm, is 'secular' in the sense that it refuses to 'seek legitimacy by simple appeal to one tradition of faith'. So, the procedurally secularist state neither actively promotes or prefers any one of the worldviews adhered to by its morally and religiously diverse citizenry.[37] Yet this refusal of cultural-historical nepotism goes along with remaining open to active cooperation with religious communities: '[the state] can move into and out of alliance with the perspectives of faith, depending on the varying and unpredictable outcomes of honest social argument, and can collaborate without anxiety with communities of faith [in the provision of public services]'.[38]Again, we see that the state plays the role, for Williams, of an authoritative legal mediator, balancing and managing real difference in this 'crowded and argumentative public square'.[39]

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[34] Williams, *Faith in the Public Square,* pp.61, 81; 58.

[35] Ibid., p.50.

[36] Mark Chapman, 'Rowan Williams' Political Theology: Multiculturalism and Interactive Pluralism', *Journal of Anglican Studies* 9, no. 1 (2011): 61–79(p.76).

[37] Williams, *Faith in the Public Square,* p.135.

[38] Ibid., p.33.

[39] Ibid., p.27.

Bretherton, meanwhile, bases his understanding of the relationship between the citizen and the state on consociationalism (as we have previously noted), which he defines as a system of 'mutual fellowship between distinct institutions or groups who are federated together for a common purpose'. This account of associational life strongly emphasises the need for groups to be protected from the power of the state, and to have their own power. This is important to Bretherton because associations are, for him, where the heart of politics beats. Fullness of citizenship is understood to be realised in associational life, with being embedded in an intermediate association understood to be central to the citizen's formation.[40]

Bretherton's vision of associational life is, as with Williams', set within a particular vision of public discourse. Whilst for Williams interactive pluralism functions within a procedurally secular public sphere, for Bretherton consociational democratic practices are made possible by a hospitable public square (so constituted by the practices of listening and faithful reception).[41] Nevertheless, whilst somewhat differently described, Bretherton's vision of life in the democratic state closely resembles Williams' interactive pluralism in its central aspects.

Lacuna around the ethics of state participation

We have seen, then, that Williams and Bretherton both come to an understanding of the state as the mediator or broker of associational life as part of a move to emphasise the moral agency of associations in civil society and also because of the complexity of seeing the state as a moral agent in a multicultural age. However, whilst there is much to welcome in this thinking, it leaves the state as a somewhat abstract and amorphic presence in the background of associational life.

So, the problem is not so much with how the state is conceptualised in these accounts, but with what is *not* done with it. There remains ambivalence in Williams' thinking, for instance, regarding the rich practices that constitute the moral purpose of the state. What Chaplin calls Williams' 'rich and dynamic account of persons' is not quite consistently worked through in relation to state institutions.[42] Williams argues that dismantling the notion of the state as a monolith and instead seeing it as a broker of different kinds of creativity will mean understanding it to be '*negotiating* with its citizens', not acting as a 'single block'.[43] However, the state is ultimately left as a somewhat monolithic structure in Williams' thought,

[40] Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*, pp.219-284.

[41] Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, pp.20;79-80;104.

[42] Chaplin, 'Person, society and state in the thought of Rowan Williams', pp.7-8.

[43] Rowan Williams, 'From Welfare State to Welfare Society: The Contribution of Faith to Happiness and Wellbeing in a Plural Civil Society' in *Crucible: The Journal of Christian Social Ethics*, January - March 2009, p.52.

with little attention paid to the kinds of practices through which the work of the state is done or the ways in which these involve people (as opposed to just structures). There is no explicit suggestion that one might participate in the state, or that it might form a site for the working out of one's discipleship.[44]

Chaplin notes a similar area of oversight in Bretherton's concern with upholding the priority of social relations over economic and political ones, as this leads to a failure to fully account for political life – including the scope for citizenship to involve participation in the full gamut of democratic structures, as well as in their disruption and reform. [45] So, the civically formative nature of participation in Broad-Based Community Organising is emphasised to the detriment of other political structures, particularly those institutions outside of civil society. This is especially the case with respect to interactions with the state, which is presented primarily as representing a given economic system and is treated as a somewhat looming and homogenous edifice.[46] So, whilst the necessity of the state is affirmed (primarily in order to distribute and maintain a balance of power between groups in society), it is treated as 'other': a generally hostile and monolithic presence to be confronted, held accountable, and disrupted in its exercise of power by an organised civil society.

In sum, then, both Bretherton and Williams tend to focus positive discussion of the political outworking of human relationality, and the scope for discipleship to take place through this, at the level of civil society. Rich though their accounts of associational democracy are, both fail to fully extend that account of participation in pursuit of the common good to the structures of the state. Both see government as necessary for community flourishing, yet seem to assume (or at least tacitly imply) that the practices of government in state structures simply provide the framework that allows for this flourishing. There is little suggestion that participation in state structures could be part of this flourishing. So, whilst disruption and confrontational negotiation are necessary aspects of the citizen's relationship with the nation state, they are not sufficient. An account of relations of participation is also needed.

We can approach filling out this lacuna through further extending the logic that is already present in Bretherton and Williams' accounts of social flourishing in a participatory civil society. For, the corollary of both accounts of associational democracy is that social flourishing is contingent upon

[44] This may be, in part, because state participation is taken for granted by Williams – writing as he is as a member of the House of Lords.

[45] Chaplin, 'Person, society and state in the thought of Rowan Williams', pp.7-8. Anna Rowlands has likewise characterised Williams' reworking of the Anglican covenant with political community as unfinished. Malcolm Brown et al., 'Fraternal Traditions: Anglican Social Theology and Catholic Social Teaching in a British Context', in *Anglican Social Theology: Renewing the Vision Today* (London: Church House Publishing, 2014), 133–74, p.161.

[46]Jonathan Chaplin, 'Book Review: Luke Bretherton, Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 30, no. 2 (2017): 228–32.

participation at *all levels* of common decision-making. We see this understanding of the way flourishing is bound up with participation in decision-making structures in Higton's description of Williams' interactive pluralism by way of analogy with participation in an orchestra. This analogy clearly shows how no group – including the church - can claim to have access to knowledge of the common good; rather, such a common good (so far as it can be known) is inherently diffuse, requiring wide and diverse participation in deliberation.

Yet, as we have noted, this vision is without reference to citizens' interactions with the state. If social flourishing is radically contingent on participation in decision-making, based on a profoundly interdependent account of what it is to be human together, then in a liberal democratic polity participation in structures of the state (at a national as well as local level) must surely comprise an important part of this flourishing.[47] This also opens up the possibility of a richer account of Christian political formation in which discipleship can encompass participation in the structures and work of the state; and, moreover, in which such participation can be positively formative for disciples.

8.II.ii. Forming Christian responsibility through participation in the political structures of the state

So, can participation in the state positively form the Christian participant? We can begin to answer this question through seeking to understand democratic participation in the light of our broader responsibility as Christians. This entails first interrogating the understanding of responsibility which underpins much our contemporary political life. I will then offer, in dialogue with Esther Reed and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, an understanding of Christian responsibility as something received from both God and neighbour. Finally, we will continue the engagement with Bonhoeffer to think through how responsibility, understood in this way, can be illuminated and grown into through participation in the structures of a representative democratic state.

Problems with responsibility: refusal of culpability and individuation of collective responsibility

Our contemporary political climate is often marked by a refusal of culpability. Political actors often seek to separate their participation in political decision-making processes from responsibility or culpability for the results of those decisions. This tendency goes hand in hand with a popular tendency

[47] As Rowlands argues, 'finding an alternative to a narrow statism requires us not just to rethink civil society – or even risk turning civil society and civil associationalism into the new *corpus mysticum* – but to continue rethinking our soteriology of the state and our practical theology of government.' 'Fraternal Traditions', pp. 170-171.

to avoid those forms of participation that entail participation in concrete decision-making processes through institutional structures. Instead, there is a trend towards popular political participation in the form of protest or online activity (such as petition signing).[48] This trend can be read in continuity with what Esther Reed describes as the contemporary tendency to individuate collective responsibility.[49] Reed draws attention to the particularly problematic nature of this individuation in the light of the difficulties in tracing the relationship between agent, act, and consequence in our globalising era.[50]

Against these prevalent approaches to responsibility, Reed argues that the work of Bonhoeffer challenges 'individualist concepts of agency, exposing the autonomy of the 'liberal subject' as a myth to be debunked': 'He exposes the self-generating ''I'' or isolated individual as a fiction, thereby preparing the way for an unmasking of the illusion of responsibility as something belonging exclusively to the individual subject.'[51] There is the promise, then, of Bonhoeffer offering resources to address both the refusal of responsibility and its individuation.

Reed argues that Bonhoeffer's account of responsibility allows us to move from understanding responsibility as a personal capacity (what Reed calls an 'I-You-I' structure) to understanding it as something that is called forth in response to the other ('You-I-You'), whereby 'You hold the meaning of responsibility for me'.[52] Reed explains that this understanding is grounded in responsibility being understood as originating in Christ and being found also in one's neighbour (both 'near and far').[53] So, it moves from being a problem understood as being 'mine' to manage to 'a relationship with You that is given in Christ and learned responsively'.[54] Responsibility is something to be *received* in relationship, not something to be individually refused or possessed.

This requires the kind of attention to particularity that we identified above as a mark of neighbourliness: as Bonhoeffer writes, '[t]he attention of responsible people is directed to concrete neighbours in their

[48] For more on party membership see: Lukas Audickas, Noel Dempsey, and Philip Loft, 'Membership of Political Parties', Standard Note (House of Commons Library, August 2019). We should note, however, that whilst generally decreasing, party membership has risen since 2013. For more on the growth in e-petitions see: Jon Kelly, 'We, the Undersigned', *BBC News*, accessed 23 September 2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/extra/SZS0zzeSOh/Petitions. Encouragingly, Jon Kelly's article suggests that participation in an e-petition can lead to other forms of political participation.

[49] Esther Reed, *The Limit of Responsibility: Engaging Dietrich Bonhoeffer in a Globalizing Era* (London: T & T Clark, 2018), p.3.

[50] Ibid., p.5.

[51] Ibid., p.121.

[52] Ibid., p.205.

[53] Ibid., p.121. See also p.87.

[54] Ibid., p.122

concrete reality.' It is only through practising this kind of attention that we are able to learn from our neighbour what our responsibility is, and, furthermore, to receive this learning as a gift.[55] So, our vocation to neighbourliness involves learning to attend to our neighbour and receiving our responsibility from them.

Bonhoeffer on responsibility

Bonhoeffer restructures responsibility in this way through setting out three modes of selfhood in community: *Meitnander*: being 'with-each-other as appointed by God' (including in sin); *Fureinander*: being 'for-each-other'; *Stellvertretung:* the principle of vicarious representation, which brings these together and 'becomes the lived meaning of responsibility'.[56]

Being for and with

We will consider first the notion of *Fureinander* – of 'being for' the other. This form of responsibility is rooted in Christ's self-abandonment for us. For Bonhoeffer, there is nothing in Christ of defended, isolated self-regard: Christ has no anxiety that being in solidarity with others will destroy his own identity. Therefore, to be in Christ means seeing the full extent of one's solidarity with others in the light of the solidarity of Christ with us.

In such solidarity, *Fureinander* is thus closely related to *Meitnander* – 'being with' each other. Bonhoeffer urges us to recognise that we can and ought to be aligned with the life of God – with God's solidarity with us – in the ordinary forms of human sociality. Bonhoeffer calls these forms of human sociality 'mandates', and they are formulated as: church; family; work and culture; and politics (or government).[57] As these routine prosaic forms of human life are arenas in which we can align with the life of God, Bonhoeffer argues, they can be for us the life of grace. [58]

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[55] Ibid., pp.88-89, citing Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Ilse Tödt et al., New ed., Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, v. 6 (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress, 2009), p.257. As Reed explains: '[t]he problem of responsibility is not 'mine' to resolve but is learned from You and received again as gift.' Ibid., p.88. As Hardy also argues, learning to attend to the 'huge panoply' that is the fullness of God's work with the world means both being swept up in the perfecting movement of God and also acknowledging the responsibilities involved in this participation. Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, p.32.

[56] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p.261; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio,* Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), p.178. See also: Reed, *The Limit of Responsibility*, p.122.

[57] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1955), pp.73 - 38, 252 - 259. Bonhoeffer's mandates theology continued to be a work in progress throughout his life. So, whilst he names four mandates, these should not taken to be an exhaustive list, but rather as examples. For more, see: Stephen Plant, *Bonhoeffer* (London: Continuum, 2004).

[58] Again, one might wonder why Bonhoeffer's usage of the language of 'being with' is found to be generative here, when Wells' similar language was earlier critiqued? The difference lies in where Christian's are understood to be able to 'be with'

The principle of vicarious representation

Bonhoeffer extends this account of responsible solidarity to argue that the mandates also display a form of *Stellvertretung*. In explaining how vicarious representation is basic to the life of the mandates, Bonhoeffer gives the example of the father in the family: by working, providing, interceding, struggling, suffering for them, he stands in the place of the family.[59] In this way, the father takes on some of the risks involved in creating together a stable and flourishing family life – for example, economic risks, which he shoulders on behalf of the family. It is clear from the language Bonhoeffer uses (particularly that of struggling and suffering) that *Stellvertretung* should not be used to excuse relationships of dominance and subjugation, but rather requires that we are to be vulnerable to what the other is vulnerable to and to risk what the other risks. There is also a note here of being vulnerable so that the other need not be, and risking so that the other need not risk. For Bonhoeffer, this solidarity with others in our representation of, our being for, others also involves a responsibility to liberate others into their own responsibility: I represent their need in order to make them more free to participate in decision-making themselves. Therefore, Bonhoeffer understood representation as not necessarily entailing a denial of agency on the part of the person being represented.[60]

Vicarious guilt in the form of political resistance: The ultima ratio

So, what does this mean for the way we understand Christian responsibility in relation to the structures of the state? We can bring all of this together, and say that because Bonhoeffer sees social life as a context for alignment with the life of God, and because for Bonhoeffer representation and responsibility should characterise our participation in social life, we can therefore see that he views this mutuality of representation and responsibility in mandated social forms, including in the state, as the normal state of affairs. Yet, famously, we also have the fact of his resistance to the mandate of the state. So how are we

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God. For Wells, there is a very strong accent on companionship with God taking place through participation in the practices of the church. We can see that Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, has a much broader sense of the places where Christians can encounter and be with God.

[59] Ibid., p.194.

[60] Ibid, p.204. Nonetheless, we cannot fully escape the paternalism that is present in this advocacy of acting on others' behalf. However benignly this is intended, his writings still display a failure to deeply interrogate how this vision the exercise of responsibility within mandated social structures might shore up oppressive power relations. For instance, Bonhoeffer's insistence that the divine authority for extant social structures must not be taken advantage of by those above to enforce obedience upon those below is somewhat undercut by the example with which he illustrates his study on truth-telling. In this illustration, it is understood to be right for a son to deny to his teacher that his father is regularly drunk, as this loyalty to his father is what is owed within the mandate of the family. So, we should keep in mind questions raised about the extent to which representative action is open to abuse and really engages the agency of the person being represented.

to hold these together? How, in this Lutheran framework, could resistance to the state fit within a broader affirmation of the representation and responsibility encoded in the mandates, including state institutions?[61]

We can answer this in terms of appropriate authority claims: if, for Bonhoeffer, the authority of the state lies in its position alongside other mandated forms of human sociality, then any move by the state to undermine the authority of these other social forms calls into question the legitimacy of the state. In these conditions, with one social form claiming the authority to disrupt the other mandates, the possibility of breaking the law for the sake of preserving the law must be confronted.[62] Yet Bonhoeffer is clear that, in the nature of the case, you can never turn this into a new generalisation, a new law, by which you can be sure that you were right.[63]

As one can never be sure that one acted rightly, the readiness to accept guilt is required, and it belongs equally to the person who decides to abide by the law and the person who decides actively to resist.[64] In the extreme situation, there is no human possibility of absolution. Bonhoeffer's own political biography illuminates what is meant by this: the final years of his life were marked by precisely the deep guilt, shame, and loss of honour of which he writes. In addition to his affirmation of government authority, Bonhoeffer's pacifism also meant that he saw his involvement in the attempt to assassinate Hitler as a sin.[65] This is expressed in his poem on Jonah (written a couple of days before being transferred to the Gestapo cells), which, as Stephen Plant argues, communicates Bonhoeffer's sense that he has incurred guilt on behalf of the German people, is under the judgement of God, and as such has been thrown into the water. He made no attempts to justify his actions as a means to a greater good that has been secured through acting in this way, and which somehow therefore absolves the ethical

[61] It is worth noting here that this is not necessarily a dilemma for other theopolitical approaches: for example, a Thomist can have a theory of resistance to law, whilst also upholding law, in a very different vein.

[62] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (1955), pp.312; 315; 316. Yet even in these conditions, Bonhoeffer refuses to say that breaking the law then becomes necessary, let alone necessarily virtuous.

[63] Ibid, p.236. For, 'An ethic cannot be a book in which there is set out how everything in the world actually ought to be but unfortunately is not; and an ethicist cannot be a person who always knows better than others what is to be done and how it is to be done'. Ibid.

[64] The distinction between active and non-active incurral of guilt, as highlighted by Christine Schliesser, is relevant here: *Everyone Who Acts Responsibly Becomes Guilty: Bonhoeffer's Concept of Accepting Guilt* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008). Whilst this paper is primarily concerned with the active incurral of guilt, the category of non-active incurral also helpfully illuminates the 'always-already' fact of our membership of a political community.

[65] We should note that whilst Bonhoeffer's membership of the *Abwehr* as historically well-established, the extent of his involvement in the Canaris/Dohnanyi conspiracy is slightly less clear.

agent of guilt. The poem on Jonah makes this clear, ending as it does with the waters becoming still, rather than with rescue by the great fish.[66]

In this, Bonhoeffer is facing the possibility that the mandates (the normal order of things) could become so distorted that extreme action must be taken to restore the balance of mandated life. Such action is undertaken so that mandated life can become once again free to be what it is meant to be: 'the arena of God's involvement in all aspects of human connection'.[67] The guiding concern is for what will ground a restored society (not assent to abstract democratic principle). So, we could say that active resistance, for Bonhoeffer, is a disruption of the normal order of things undertaken in response to a disruption of the normal order of things (i.e., a response to a disordering of the state).[68] Attention to the particularity of state institutions and their various purposes and practices, rather than speaking of the state as a monolithic edifice, is therefore necessary if we are to discern where the state should be acting to facilitate associational life and where it should be actively fostering the common good.

Responsible action and the state: The ethics of participation in representative democratic institutions

The legitimate, limited state

From this we see that far from connoting a low view of political authority, it was Bonhoeffer's affirmation of the legitimacy of government that led him to see his resistance as rendering him parlously guilty. Bonhoeffer's view of the state along these lines is centrally shaped by Augustine and Luther.[69] Bonhoeffer's mandates can be read in continuity with Luther's three estates of family, economy/work, and government, with the third estate of government therefore understood to be one of the means by which God acts within the penultimate to preserve creation.[70] Under normal circumstances, therefore,

[66] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. John de Gruchy (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), pp.547-548. See also: Plant, *Taking Stock of Bonhoeffer*, pp.59-70.

[67] Rowan Williams, 'Bonhoeffer's Ethics: Representing Humanity in Christ' (2016), https://vimeo.com/185991351 [Accessed 26.02.2019].

[68] This framing of active resistance is important to note given the way Bonhoeffer's political theology has sometimes been read, in a way that emphasises the call to resistance of state authority, rather than to participate in state institutions.

[69] Plant, *Taking Stock of Bonhoeffer*, pp.74 - 77.

[70] Stephen Plant, 'The Evangelization of Rulers: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Political Theology' (April 2012), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6--CXvgP5xw [Accessed 26.02.2019].

we owe obedience. Government is 'an institution of God', and an 'ethical failure' on the part of government does not therefore automatically strip it of 'its divine dignity'.[71]

From his reading of Luther and Augustine, Bonhoeffer not only affirmed the legitimacy of governing authorities but also discerned a possible Christian duty to participate in governance (for example as judge or magistrate) for the restraint of evil. As Plant notes, Bonhoeffer's attention to both Old and New Testament (and increasingly to the Old Testament towards the end of his life) meant that his political theology was concerned with situations where God's people are called to make governing decisions, rather than simply seeing political power as something exercised by those outside the community of faith (whether legitimately or for persecution).[72] I suggest, therefore, that Bonhoeffer can help us to see how belonging to, and participating in, one's political community can be part of Christian discipleship. In a democratic context, this work to make government more just for the sake of a common peace will include participation in the structures and institutions of the state.[73]

Reconsidering the ethics of state participation

As we saw earlier, for Bonhoeffer, all of human sociality, not just the act by which one incurs guilt vicariously (the *ultima ratio*), requires responsible action on one another's behalf. As Williams explains, living faithfully under mandate means, 'prosaically performing the ordinary obligations of

[71] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (1955), p.304.

[72] Plant, *Taking Stock of Bonhoeffer*, pp.71 - 83.

[73] However, we should also recognise here Bonhoeffer's insistence upon the limits of the state, even to the extent of arguing that the main role of the church in relation to the state is to remind the state of its limits. The role of the church is thus bound up with a strong affirmation of the importance of associational life (in civil society). A play written by Bonhoeffer in prison diagnoses the cause of Nazi ideology's totalising sovereignty as its rootlessness, disconnected from the lived realities of civil society and simply asserted from above, which stands in contrast with the rootedness in the ordinariness of local community life of the character generally taken to represent Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer,*Ethics* (London: SCM, 1955), pp.310 – 315; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Fiction from Tegel Prison*, ed. Clifford J. Green (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999); p.68. Plant, *Taking Stock of Bonhoeffer*, p78. As Plant argues, Bonhoeffer's political milieu looked to the second estate, in the form of German middle-class life, for social stability and continuity, and mistrusted liberal democracy, seeing it as having failed in the form of the Weimar Republic. Stephen Plant, 'The Evangelization of Rulers: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Political Theology' (April 2012), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6--CXvgP5xw [Accessed 26th February 2019]. In using Bonhoeffer to support a stronger ethical account of democratic participation I am, therefore, going beyond the forms of government thought by Bonhoeffer to best reflect the mandated order of society. Nonetheless, I think we can still find considerable resonance in our own times with the underlying questions animating Bonhoeffer's writings on the state around whence power derived, and the proper character of power and authority. We can remain true to this account of staking oneself for the sake of one's political community and find in it resources for political participation in our time, whilst going beyond what Bonhoeffer saw as socially and politically desirable.

culture, family, and politics.'[74] Living according to Bonhoeffer's ethics means practical labour in service of the security and wellbeing of the other, seeking 'the conditions for living and living well so that they can grow into responsibility.'[75] It is worth noting that the solidarity we are called to express is also transgenerational. Bonhoeffer famously considered '[t]he ultimate question for a responsible man to ask' to be 'not how he is to extricate himself heroically from the affair, but how the coming generation is to live'. As such, solidarity requires institutions that will perdure and support common life in years to come. Strengthening these institutions is therefore also part of faithful living under mandate.[76] We can see how this practical labour for the wellbeing of the other (both in the present and for generations to come) could be performed at the ballot-box, in the local government chamber, or even in the committee rooms of parliament.

Whilst these civic actions, like voting and so on, will often be quotidian to the point of being almost automatic, the particular call of each person must, according to Bonhoeffer, be received and worked out in this area of life as in every other sphere. This is drawn out in his sermon on Gideon, which makes clear that whilst political authority comes from God each person is also responsible for their own actions.[77] Further, in seeking to describe this mode of political agency, it is worth recalling again that responsible and representative action is undertaken without certainty of virtue. As Plant makes clear in his presentation of Bonhoeffer's political theology, there are no easy answers about what we must render, to whom, and under what circumstances.[78] For Bonhoeffer, creating an ethical system that allows one to pin down one's obligations in advance and to be sure of the righteousness of one's decisions is the very opposite of faith.

Nonetheless, he is clear that we are called to continue in the attempt to try and 'make sense', as Williams puts it; that is, to keep on speaking and acting for the good of the other, whilst suspending any narration of our actions in terms of ultimate meaning.[79] Such 'making sense' implies a radical loss of security, and means making judgements that are, necessarily, provisional and risky.[80] Yet, as Quash also affirms, '[t]he provisionality and risk of error that attends this process [of imaginatively engaging with the world

[74] Williams, 'Bonhoeffer's Ethics: Representing Humanity in Christ'. This obedience trains one in alertness so that if and when the *ultima ratio* comes, we will know what to do.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1971), p.7.

[77] Plant, *Taking Stock of Bonhoeffer*, p.75. See also: *Ethics* (1955), p.314.

[78] Plant, 'The Evangelization of Rulers'.

[79] Bonhoeffer cautions against the search for certain types of meaning. So, we can act out of obedience without having to project forward an assessment of the virtue of the action.

[80] Volpe, *Rethinking Christian Identity*, p.58.

and seeking to 'find' the Spirit] is part of life in the Spirit; part of the call to human responsibility that marks human vocation.'[81]

This vocation to responsibility can be more fully understood and inhabited, then, through participative political practices, such as voting. Voting for your preferred party – or even for the least worst option - in an election is an action in which you risk your fallible ability to 'make sense' of what will best allow for common flourishing and stake yourself on that choice, despite being unable to foresee how it will play out. Voting almost inevitably means, then, implicating oneself in a party or politician who will go on to take actions that are ethically questionable, whether in government or opposition. This renders unsustainable any sense of responsibility as something to be either individually exercised or refused. Ceding control in this way therefore challenges false understandings of selfhood that underpin the individuation and/or refusal of responsibility in political life.

Yet, we have also seen in Bonhoeffer's account of responsibility a deeper level of loss, which we might name as loss of moral integrity. This deeper level of loss of moral integrity can be more fully understood through considering the kind of decisions made by elected representatives. In the aftermath of the referendum to leave the European Union, for example, a Member of Parliament who is personally opposed to leaving the EU might feel an obligation to represent the decision made by the majority of their constituents in favour of leaving. This could be done on the basis of a felt need to recognise their constituents' agency, and with the recognition that failing to do so could significantly undermine the prospect of future electoral participation by those already feeling overlooked and disempowered. In Bonhoefferian terms, we might understand this as representing in the hope that a group of people might themselves be enabled, through this expression of solidarity, to continue to participate and take responsibility themselves. In this scenario, then, we can see how the MP who seeks to faithfully represent an opinion they themselves view as damaging to common flourishing will bear deep tension and guilt within themselves.

I do not mean to present this as the only way in which a parliamentarian could ethically act in such a situation.[82] However, I hope this helps to illustrate the kinds of loss of self that are involved in belonging to, and therefore participating in, a democratic polity. For the Christian disciple in particular, it requires

[81] Quash, *Found Theology*, xvi. Our wandering 'genuinely involves our own decisions and mistakes, and yet it takes place within what Hardy calls a "pre-estimation", which grounds and accommodates the wandering in such a way that the wanderers come to genuine new insights and move forward.' Indeed, for Hardy and Quash, '"this entire creation" is a pre-estimated space'. Ibid., pp.286-287.

[82] Although, it must be noted that the possibility of breaking a mandate in order to restore what is disordered (i.e. the common good) might also come in here.

letting go of personal sovereignty and being ready to die to one's own self-constructed identity; for, the same uncertainty which characterises the *ultima ratio* act of political resistance runs through all political action (indeed, through all ethical action). By this light, refusing to participate in a non-tyrannical state could be understood as a form of clinging to personal sovereignty.

The ground of participation in the democratic state: Unified eschatological identity

In considering these forms of loss of self, it is also important to hold in mind Bonhoeffer's sense of our unified eschatological identity. This sense of ultimate personal unity is brought out by Williams in his reading of Bonhoeffer, for whom understanding oneself as finite and incomplete should drive one to depend more deeply upon God for one's sense of wholeness.[83] For Bonhoeffer, our ultimate worth as a child of God is beyond doubt because the fact of our Christian identity is not something that falls within our purview of responsibility.

Therefore, we can risk disunion with God without achieving it, as this is not something that humans *can* achieve. This can perhaps help us to make sense of Bonhoeffer's suggestion that becoming compromised yields a paradoxical deepening of community with God through renunciation. To risk ultimate disunion in this ethically agonised way, is, by this reckoning, to express and strengthen one's trust in God. As we saw in Chapter 2, Williams expresses this paradoxical deepening of communion with God in these terms: 'Real dependence on God's grace, real apprehension of God's free action to make us righteous in his eyes, is more evident in the unconsoled endurance of inner turmoil and darkness than in bland confidence that all has been achieved, since the sense of inner darkness turns our attention away from what our minds can register, contain, and be confident of, towards the utterly mysterious love of God.'[84]

With this in mind, we can return to the poem on Jonah with new eyes, seeing that being under the judgement of God is, yes, total loss, but also the beginning of life. It was this assurance of an ultimate identity held by God that enabled Bonhoeffer to face both worldly and spiritual diminishment this side of eternity.[85] Recognising this has the potential to free the Christian to act politically in a way that takes personal responsibility seriously, but without making an idolatry of the individual conscience.

[83] Williams, 'The Suspicion of Suspicion', pp.192-193.

[84] Williams, *Love's Redeeming Work*, p. 8.

[85] This may offer a contribution to ongoing theological discussions around Christian discipleship entailing the imitation of Christ's *kenosis*. Bonhoeffer offers a way of understanding the Christian life as being necessarily costly, without a reifying of *kenosis* in which selfhood becomes unimportant. By this account, fragmentation and diminishment risk being understood as good or aspirational rather than necessary and always penultimate. So, diminishment of self should not be sought for its own

Bringing all of this together, we see that ethical responsibility in pursuit of common flourishing, which all are called to exercise, cannot be reduced to any single template of political action. [86] The call to solidarity and shared risk (both bearing risk on behalf of others, and the risk of staking oneself on a provisional and fallible way of making sense of what our life together demands) cannot be predetermined and made comfortable.[87] In the face of trends towards refusing or individuating political responsibility, the forms of loss involved in staking ourselves exposes the futility of trying to construct one's own pure identity as an ethical agent. Yet, whilst following this call to responsibility will mean we can never justify with certainty the virtue of our actions, we can still be assured of the necessity of action.[88]

8.II.iii. Discovering the shape of ecclesial responsibility *from* the state

We can see how, in this way, Christian formation can take place through participation in the structures of the state, as well as in civil society. In particular, participation in the structures of a representative democracy can enable us to see dimensions of our moral responsibility as Christians that we would otherwise struggle to glimpse. In the light of Bonhoeffer's work, we can understand political participation in the structures of a democratic state as bringing to light important dimensions of Christian responsibility: a responsibility that one both receives from one's neighbour and bears on their behalf. Learning to receive and bear this responsibility is part of growing in discipleship.

Yet, there are also limitations to the extent to which Bonhoeffer can illuminate Christian formation through political participation. Arguing that the state is an arena of rich Christian responsibility is a matter *both* of claiming that we are not just formed in the church for participation in the state, and that

sake, but neither should fragmentation be feared as complete fragmentation is never possible, with our identity always held by God.

[86] Whilst he does not give us a template, we can more fully understand what it might mean to more deeply inhabit our political communities and seek their flourishing through looking to Bonhoeffer's own life. As Plant notes, in our 'cultures of self-justification, blame and excuses', 'a man prepared to accept the consequences of his actions' is to be admired. Plant, *Bonhoeffer*, p.148.

[87] The task of the citizen is, to quote Williams, 'not to conform to some measurable standard of satisfactory public behaviour, but to practice a steady scrutiny of the ongoing habits of social order, in the light of the question of what does and does not stand in the way of solidarity and shared risk.' He goes on, '[m]ore specifically, the believing citizen is challenged to recognise what it is in the social order that in the extremest cases undermines the fabric of solidarity itself.' Williams, 'Bonhoeffer's Ethics: Representing Humanity in Christ'.

[88] We see that discipleship means being exposed to see the reality of what confronts us, moment by moment, and is as such the opposite of complacent ideological commitment.

we can even be formed in the state for participation in the church.[89] Bonhoeffer helps us with the first claim, but does not quite reach the second claim: his thinking remains at the level of further inhabiting a responsibility we already know, through seeking to obey a commandment we have already received. So, whilst the particularity of one's responsibility is received from one's neighbour (and borne on their behalf), this is the content of a preknown shape of responsibility that is learnt from the church.[90]

In this final brief section, then, we must go beyond Bonhoeffer to address how formation for responsible practice in the church also takes place through participation in the state. In this, I am arguing that this is not only a case of learning that the responsibility we have already been told to fulfil requires participation in the state, but also that we can in fact be formed in new ways as Christians and as the church through our participation. It can teach us something new about ethical responsibility *as Christians* and form us to practice responsibility in other areas.

In *A Brutal Unity: The Spiritual Politics of the Christian Church,* Ephraim Radner discusses the church's indebtedness and responsibility to the state (as well as liberal democracy's indebtedness to the church).[91] In line with the argumentation we have followed so far, Radner argues for a liberal and pluralistically ordered civil space, protected by the state.[92] He grounds this account with reference to the failure of the church in Rwanda to fulfil its 'moral responsibility to form individuals capable of ordering a liberal state.'[93] Following this, he contends that 'churches must orient their practice more fully, not less so, to the needs of a stable and accountable liberal democracy', and as such has a role (in certain ways) as 'servant' of the state.[94]

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[89] Political theologians have not tended to be good at talking about either of these dimensions of formation in relation to the state, but the gap is definitely bigger in the latter direction (being formed in the state for participation in the church).

[90] Moreover, Bonhoeffer is primarily concerned with how this functions within the church - understandably, given his pastoral and seminarian responsibilities.

[91] Smith, *Awaiting the King*, pp.118 – 120.

[92] Ephraim Radner, *A Brutal Unity: The Spiritual Politics of the Christian Church* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2012), p.50.

[93] Ibid., p.53. Radner continues: 'Had [the church] done so, this would not only have served a corporate good but also saved the Church from the suicidal scandal of her own sins.' Ibid.

[94] Ibid, pp.53; 55. Papanikolaou likewise contends that 'Christians who shape their lives toward the realization of communion with the divine will ultimately act in such a way as to work toward a political community that affirms, in a broad sense, the basic axioms of liberal democracy.' Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, p.80. The approach Papanikolaou advocates (and identifies as that taken by Eric Gregory and Charles Mathewes) is an 'indirect Christian defense of democracy', which 'does not take the form "because Christians believe *this*, political community should look like *that*." The focus is on Christian existence in the world created for divine-human communion; as Christians work toward tapping creation's sacramental potential, the political form of community that such work reinforces is democratic.' Ibid., p.156.

Radner understands this inhabiting of pluralist settings '[a]s a providential shadow of true self-giving', by which 'liberal political engagement presses the Church towards its true vocation.' From this it follows that '[t]o reject this engagement in practical terms robs the Church of her internal and external prods and thereby obscures the true nature of the Church.' So, the church's ability to be the church, when situated in the context of a liberal democratic polity, requires engagement with that polity.[95] It is not enough simply for the church to not actively seek a culturally or politically privileged status for Christianity in their national polity. Rather, 'the churches have a moral responsibility to further their own liberalizing polities and to support and engage those forms of liberal civic polities in which they either already live or might potentially live'.[96]

This is not just in order to ensure universal freedom of religion, but, more profoundly, so that the church, through its practical engagement in democratic life might receive the 'prods' of external scrutiny and accountability. Radner explicitly urges a two-way dynamic of formation between church and state, arguing that the church needs the liberal state, 'not so much to protect it from itself … as to provide a framework for self-accountability'.[97] He contends that the moral accountability of religions is enhanced rather than injured 'by their being embedded within liberal political institutions.'[98] Of Rwanda, Radner argues that 'the dynamics of order and accountability undergirding the liberal state ought to have also informed the shape of the Church's own life'.[99] So, Radner is clear that the meaning of responsibility cannot be fully learnt within the church. The church does not only have a responsibility 'to encourage within her own sphere a kind of "civil society" of Christian interaction', but also to learn the meaning of its responsibility from the world outside its own sphere.[100] As we noted in Chapter 5, there is an extent to which we do not yet know the particular ecclesial practices required for common flourishing. These must be learnt through encounter with the Spirit, both within the gathered life of the church and

[95] Radner, *A Brutal Unity*, pp.461–462. Radner continues: 'antiliberalism leaves the Church in … the realm of complicity with political failure and violence by declaring her irreformability, on the one hand, and … denying the essential quality of self-giving to the enemy that the Church's location within pluralist settings necessitates.' Ibid, p.461.

[96] Ibid., p.462.

[97] Ibid. The other side of this is that 'the liberal state needs the churches in in order to wrest from her any illusion of holding moral monopoly, or indeed any moral standing of its own apart from the values it is able to receive from her citizens, many of whom will inevitably be religious'. Ibid.

[98] Ibid., p.22. For Radner, 'there is also a sense in which the emergence of liberal constitutionalism was a providential chastisement of the failures of the church to live as the alternative *polis* it is called to be.' Ibid., p.55.

[99] Ibid., p.462: 'while the Church herself should have provided the encouragement to the state to transform itself in a parallel fashion'.

[100] Ibid., p.53. Papanikolaou expresses this in terms of the scope for political life to point forward to ultimate union: 'If the political is a community of dispute, in which civic engagement involves not simply tolerating the other but seeing her as an irreducibly unique creation of God, the political community can be a "proleptic communion". Ibid., p.156.

outside. From Radner, then, we see how state structures can also be a realm of redemptive encounter for the shaping of church polity in new and unexpected ways.

Therefore, the Christian response to secularisation within 'modern economically diversified societies' cannot simply be that 'we must try harder to do what we have already said we should do, that we should get back to basics'. Rather, 'Christian ecclesiology should not fear looking at these secular "civil" alternatives to the Church but also should positively learn from them as perhaps examples of things that the Church has simply been unable to fulfil in herself… The lesson for the Church, at any rate, is this: let us look at … the secular world, and … gain a glimpse of our better self.'[101] There is, then, an important sense here in which the church is not just regaining an identity it once knew but forgot, but also that the church comes to know and to become what it is called to be through encounters with the Spirit of Christ in the world.

[101] Ibid., p381n52.

Conclusion to Part III

In Chapter 6 we saw that Anglican thought has tended to emphasise the Christian citizen being formed in the church for participation in society. I suggested that these understandings of the Christian citizen and the political role of the church fail to account for a) how Christians are formed as both Christians and citizens through participation in secular political practices, and b) how the church might need to work with (and be challenged by) other associations and state institutions in order to know itself, its social vocation, and what the good of both consist in. To draw on the language of attention, the possibility of learning to attend to, and be formed by, the ways of God outside of the church has tended to be overlooked in Anglican political theology. In Chapter 7, I argued, therefore, that we also need to think about being formed in society for participation in the church. There are things about being a Christian that we must learn outside the church, and this is so because of the way the Spirit works to redeem all things.

In Chapter 8, we have also seen that the Christian calling to be good neighbours is a vocation that can only be fully understood and grown into through participation in civil society, with the opportunities this brings for living alongside and receiving from those who are strange to us (who we first encounter as strangers). With a focus on the practices of community organising and development, we explored how these can form Christians and the church into becoming more fully what they are called to be.

In the second half of this chapter we saw that recent Anglican political thought has tended to highlight the Christian citizen's participation in civil society. I have argued here that we also need to think about participation in the state, as that too is an arena of rich Christian responsibility. Going further, I have argued that we can also learn the *shape* of Christian and ecclesial responsibility, not just the content, through participation in the state. This understanding of political responsibility can, therefore, help us to better understand the nature of responsibility in the church. Affirming that we receive our responsibility from our neighbour means that the form this responsibility will take cannot simply be preempted from within the church and then learned more deeply in political life. Rather, the state too is an arena for learning to discover and grow into Christian responsibility, and so is needed to 'prod' ecclesial life towards greater accountability. It is not only a case of more fully growing into a responsibility of which we already know the shape, but also of coming to understand the shape itself more fully through this participation in the liberal democratic state.

A touchstone of political theology from Augustine onwards has been the assumption that 'a person nurtured in the Church and in the ordered *caritas* it inculcates is uniquely qualified to take responsibility

for wielding political power.'[102] Yet here we have seen how we must also consider how our ability to become who we are called to be *as Christians* can be shaped by discerning and taking on our political responsibilities. There is, therefore, a two-way dynamic involved in Christian civic formation: being formed in the church to participate in civic life, and being formed as Christians and the church *through* participation in civic life (in ways that we could not have anticipated in advance).

As Quash puts it, 'the Spirit comes to us from that new world, the world waiting to be born,' and so 'yields to us a perspective in which consummation can be hoped for and imagined, even if, at times, the hope seems nearly fantastical.' Yet, we should not forget that we 'belong less fully to God if our anticipation of the future leads us to belong less fully to the world.'[103] So, learning to attend to the findings to which the Spirit leads us in the world is central to Christian ethical and political formation. So too is learning to see the church and our Christian identity in the light of these findings, as we relate the given to the found and vice versa. This is all part of seeking to discern how the Spirit is at work in the wider political community (of which we are members) and the possibilities offered there for redemption.

In the concluding chapter, I explore the scope for the Church of England to learn to better attend to the workings of the Spirit (and to enable others to learn to attend) with its neighbours in the particular places in which it is embedded, and in public discourse. The understanding we have come to of how responsibility is received from one's neighbours can help us to more fully understand (and inhabit) the Church of England's responsibility to the parish and to the national polity. As with Bonhoeffer's experience of receiving and bearing responsibility, it is a vocation that is often conflicted, but ultimately hopeful.

[102] Williams, 'Politics and the Soul', p.68.

[103] Quash, *Found Theology*, p.278. Quash also notes that '[o]ur imagination of future consummation [should be] resourced in such a way that we live differently *now*.' Ibid., pp.278 – 279.

9

Forming Common Civic life

Introduction

This thesis has been centred on the question of how Christian ethical and political formation takes place, with a particular focus on how this happens for members of the Church of England.

So, the central concern has been with how one is formed by belonging to, and participating in, the polity of the church *and* the wider civic community. The central argument I advance is that Christian and civic formation cannot be disentangled from one another, and, moreover, that this is how ethical and political formation *should* happen.

This exploration has been structured in three parts.

Part I was concerned with the location and flow of Christian ethical formation. In Chapter 1 I engaged with how Graham Ward and Sam Wells (as two expressions of a popular account of Christian ethical formation) both concentrate on formation inside the church and are weak on formation outside the church. This has to do with sin, as both fail to take it seriously enough as a formative force and think that that the church already has all the resources it needs to overcome it. In Chapter 2, my engagement with Rowan Williams drew out a fuller account of ethical formation involving an ongoing awareness of the presence of sin in the Christian's life, and of the scope for ecclesial practices to distort as well as positively form identity. I also drew out a positive flipside to this, showing that this ongoing unsettling is reflective of the abundant dynamism of the life of the God, as disclosed to us through God's ways with the world which continually bring us to new understandings of what it means to live as a Christian. In this way, I ended up pushing away from the idea that there is a ready-made, or easily available source of good formation available in the practices of the church.

Part II then asked: if we do not have such a picture of a basically finished church, what do we put in its place? How can we think about the church itself as a body needing to be formed (and to go on being formed), especially at the level of polity? So, instead of focusing on the political formation of

individuals within the Body, the focus shifted here to the ongoing formation of the Body itself. In answering that question, I set out an ecclesiology: an account of the basic dynamics and structures that the church needs if it is to be formed in this way. I imagined the church we need – but not in an idealistic way. Instead of looking at the sinfulness and brokenness of the church as an afterthought, or as a topic that comes as a caveat *after* the description of what the church should be, I placed it right in the heart of my account.

So, Chapter 3 set out some basic positive dynamics or parameters: the church is (or can be) a *polis* that is also an *oikos* (and vice versa); it is (or can be) marked by humble confidence and confident humility; its life does (or should) take place in gather and scattering, intensity and extensity. That already painted (at a fairly high level of generality) a picture of a church in which we both say that the church is called into being by God *and* that the church is always learning, and that is never finished or complete. Indeed, we say the latter *because* we say the former.

Chapter 4 then turned directly to sin: this confident and humble, gathering and scattering church is, at multiple levels, marked by sin – including in the very ways it works as *oikos/polis*. That is, I showed that sin is pervasive, and deep-rooted, not just in individual believers but in the practices and structures and relationships that constitute it, including in those elements of its life that are meant to help us identify, confess, and turn away from sin. In Chapter 5 I then gave my fullest description of the polity of the church, precisely as a response to what Chapter 4 has shown. I showed that what the church needs is precisely a polity capable of going on identifying its own sin and repenting of it. The church needs to be structured so as to put it in the way of the convicting work of the Spirit, which will mean openness to receiving the distinctive gifts of every member.

From Parts I and II, then, we saw that the church is not sufficient for Christian ethical and political formation, and that engagement with the world is necessary. So, I asked, what kind of engagement is that?

In Chapter 6, I asked, more specifically, of Anglican political theology, what relations surround that formation, and that political engagement? That is, what position does this put them in vis-a-vis the world? And what conversations and exchanges are they engaged in as they are formed? In this chapter I showed that Anglican theologians have tended to speak as if Christians are formed in the church, and that out of this flows the form of their participation in public life. This is related to the tendency to see the church's relationship with society as one in which the church *gives* what is needed for flourishing, and has nothing that it needs to *receive* in return. So, I show that the idea that Christian and ecclesial formation *can and should* happen through political engagement is not one that has received much attention in recent Anglican political thought.

In Chapter 7, therefore, I identified resources from theology and political theory for exploring an alternative at a conceptual level to these dominant Anglican accounts: making theological sense of a church that is continually engaged in civic life, and shaped by this constant participation, and making political sense of political life emerging through such engagement. Chapter 8 continued this exploration, making it more concrete, by looking at engagement with civil society *and* the state (this being an arena of political participation that is often overlooked theologically). I made the argument that Christians are formed (as disciples, as church, as citizens) by their engagement with civil society and the state, as well as by their ecclesial liturgies and Christian practices: they are formed in the interaction of all these. So, the Christian's ethical and political vocation includes participating in the civic community outside the gathered practices of the church, with the expectation that through this civic participation one will be formed *as a* Christian. I showed that civic life is not only an arena for working out our Christian calling, but is also a site of the Spirit, where we can and should be formed as disciples.

A central thread running through this argument has been the question of how we learn to attend (to God, to one another, and to ourselves), with attention identified as a key driver of formation. In Part I we saw that the practice of attention is understood by Ward and Wells as formative of Christian ethical identity. Their accounts tend to focus on the way that learning to attend to God and those around us is made possible by, and flows out of, participation in practices taught by the Church. The account of the formative nature of attention offered by Williams, in contrast, has a stronger emphasis on the way that receiving God's attention and the attention of those around us should reshape and disrupt the practices and identity we have. Williams underlines this posture of openness (to receiving unexpected gifts through being the object of attention) as central to being formed for ethical action.

In Part II we saw that learning to attend to one another in the polity of the church involves sociality – being interrupted by one another in order to see more clearly how one is involved in holding others back from participative flourishing. In fact, we can understand this as a work of grace: being led into new findings of conviction by the Spirit. Learning to attend also involves recognising the gifts each brings to the body. This delight in munificence expresses our participation in the manifold life of God.

In Part III we saw that learning to attend to the findings to which the Spirit leads us in the world is an important part of Christian political formation. So too is learning to see the church and our Christian identity in the light of these findings, as we relate the given to the found and vice versa. This is all part of seeking to discern how the Spirit is at work in the wider political community (of which we are members) and the possibilities offered there for redemption. So, learning to attend involves recognising our finitude *and* God's abundance, manifested in social relations. This involves the recognition that we do not have, in any fixed individual or institution, much less know, what we need to flourish together.

Yet we trust in the manifold unfolding of the triune life, in which we participate, in those with whom we live. So, the way we understand learning to attend shapes in turn the way we understand participation in the body of the church and in the wider body politic, and the kind of formation that can and should take place through membership of these bodies.

Chapter overview

In this concluding chapter, I will consider where all of this leaves us in thinking about the Church of England in relation to society – or, more narrowly, in relation to how the Church of England could be forming civic identity and belonging in an interactive, receptive polity, and the extent to which this is reflected in current practice. This takes the form of reflection on ecclesial and political practices, at a range of geographic levels (from parochial to national). This account of practices is not offered as a blueprint for Anglican polity: Jenkins rightly describes Anglican polity as an ongoing social settlement, that we should not expect to ever be perfected.[1] Rather, I am trying to describe and encourage practices that we may not notice but that are already going on. This leads to recommendations to better shape civic belonging, in a polity oriented to pursuing the flourishing of common life.

Jenkins sees the distinctiveness of the Anglican relation to the national polity as lived out in the form of its 'territorial embeddedness' (in parish, diocese, and nation) and a 'conversational mode'.[2] I will flesh out these categories in what follows and use them to structure these concluding thoughts.

This chapter begins with an exploration of the proposal that 'territorially embedded' Anglican practices have the capacity to configure well civic belonging.[3] However, this argument is offered with an awareness of the troubled history of Anglican territorial embeddedness and the ways it can shore up exclusivist and binary civic practices and understandings of civic belonging. Resisting these tendencies will entail a different way of understanding the intertwining of geographical identity and Anglican polity than has often been the case.

In the second half of this chapter, the focus is on the need for richer deliberative conversations within the churches of the Anglican Communion, and between the church, the academy, and public policy

[1] Timothy Jenkins, 'Anglicanism: The Only Answer to Modernity', in *Anglicanism: The Answer to Modernity*, p.196.

[2] Ibid., pp.197 – 198.

[3] Donald McFadyen notes that polity can be understood as the way provenance and placing are practised in church life. McFadyen, 'Towards a Practical Ecclesiology for the Church of England'. In §9.I we will address further this sense of polity as the way the placing of the Church of England is practised in its life.

makers. This includes consideration of the scope for the Church of England to contribute to national life by fostering deliberation in a 'conversational mode'.

I then conclude this chapter by setting out some possible avenues for further exploration that have grown out of this research.

9.I. Anglican territorial embeddedness

The geographer Doreen Massey has noted that not only is space socially constructed, but that society is also spatially constructed.[4] For this concluding consideration of the Church of England's relationship with particular places, or 'territories', this raises the following question: if place shapes those who exist in it, how can this be oriented towards forming a mutually flourishing civic life? This will entail challenging certain modes of inhabiting Anglican geography and proposing other modes.

In theological literature on place, the incarnation is often invoked as underscoring the importance of the local. As Rumsey writes of the disciples' encounter with the risen Christ on the Emmaus Road, 'God's self-disclosure was a local affair, and still is.' Jenkins too sees the Anglican priest's responsibility for the cure of souls in their parish as corresponding to the doctrine of the incarnation: 'God is to be found embodied in a particular place, locality, people; the materials of time and history can show him forth (which is why any ministry is an experiment in Providence, finding out how God is present in a place).'[5] In this light, the church's commitment to a local place can be seen as faithful imitation of the form of Jesus' ministry.

Yet, we must also note that not all expressions of commitment and belonging to a particular locality are oriented towards the kinds of practices that we have identified as positively formative of Christian and civic identity. The parish, in particular, should be understood as a space of complex interaction – one in which the church could play, and often has played, a really poisonous role. Therefore, we must start by unearthing some of the more problematic visions of Anglican 'territorialisation' that are at play in contemporary theological and ecclesial discussions before we move on to look at how the Church of England may offer more positively formative understandings and practices for shaping civic life.

9.I.i. The troubling tendencies of Anglican territorial embeddedness

[4] Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005).

[5] Rumsey, *Parish*, p.6. See also Jenkins, 'Anglicanism: The Only Answer to Modernity', p.200.

The ‘turn to place’ in human geography in recent decades has highlighted the always provisional and contested nature of place.[6] Taken alongside Massey’s work on the relational nature of place, noted above, we can see that this contested nature means it can become an opportunity to impose a particular will or agenda to the exclusion of others. The way in which we shape and inhabit places can express competing visions of who that place is for: of who belongs to it and who does not. As we saw in Chapter 4, the Church of England’s ways of inhabiting and shaping places has all too often expressed a vision of belonging that mirrors, compounds, and instigates forms of social exclusion and marginalisation.

As Rumsey notes, ‘there is a deep moral ambivalence about the parochial record that has to be acknowledged.’[7] Core to this ambivalence, for Rumsey, is the bounded nature of the parish, which he sees as both its strength and its weakness. The use and abuse of boundary in social structures has been extensively explored by Massey, who argues that territorial boundaries are inevitably ‘exercises of power’, which ‘establish outsiders – those who do not belong’.[8] David Fletcher, too, has identified the way the parish boundary in particular has historically been a simultaneous agent of ‘territorial threat and social cohesion’, such that, paradoxically, social inclusion has tended to be generated in the parish by a measure of social exclusion.[9]

A notable example of this generation of cohesion through social exclusion can be seen in the Poor Laws. Raymond Williams is amongst those who have argued that the parochial arrangement of poor relief was often, despite seeming to be oriented towards neighbourly care, largely indifferent to the needs of the poor – including their need to be able to move across parish boundaries.[10] Here the problem arose in a particularly potent way because of the way belonging to the Church of England and belonging to a particular geographic territory were overlaid with one another in the policing of the civic space. This meant that religious and geographical belonging dictated one’s civic rights and responsibilities. The Church of England’s mottled history in this respect can also be seen at the geographic level of national territory – perhaps most strikingly in the Test Acts. These remained on the statute book until 1829, and

[6] See, for example, Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015) and Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

[7] Rumsey, *Parish*, p.143. He is, however, principally concerned with detailing the parish’s ‘extremely long tenure […] as the archetype of English neighbourhood’ and its resilience and adaptiveness in reconfiguring its blend of territory, community, and Christian ethics at successive stages. Ibid.

[8] Doreen Massey, *Spatial Divisions of Labour: Social Structures and the Geography of Production* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), p.99. Referenced in Rumsey, *Parish*, p.143.

[9] David Fletcher, ‘The Parish Boundary: A Social Phenomenon in Hanoverian England’, *Rural History* 14, no. 2 (2003): 177–96(p.187). Referenced in Rumsey, *Parish*, p.146.

[10] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), Ch. 4. Referenced in Rumsey, *Parish*, p.144.

essentially served to exclude non-Anglicans from entry to certain public institutions (including, famously, the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge) and from holding public office.

So, we can see that, in talking of the Church of England's relationship with place, we need to be aware of the danger of understanding one's Christian identity as very closely overlapping with belonging to a particular denomination and nation state.[11] Such understandings give rise to practices (at both a local and a national level) that civically marginalise those who do not fit the mold denominationally. In this light, it is hard to deny that Anglican territorial boundaries have disabled as well as enabled the formation of Christian community – and, we can add, of civic community. Nonetheless, as Rumsey sums it up, 'despite its significant drawbacks – wistful exceptionalism and reactionary jingoism not least among them – the 'England-ness' of the parish [and other Anglican geographic footprints] must be reckoned with', for the sake of understanding both the Anglican and national vocation. He goes on: 'At heart, [the parish] expresses a vision for common life that is an integral strand in the complex weave of contemporary English identity…'.[12] With this in mind, we turn to consider the Church of England's constructive contribution to understanding and practising civic belonging in a particular place.

9.I.ii. The Church of England and non-competitive belonging to place

Whilst we have seen how all too often the Church of England's 'territorial embeddedness' has given rise to exclusionary and hierarchical modes of determining civic belonging, this is not the whole story. There are resources within Anglican theology and practice that have fostered, and can continue to foster, a participative and interactive civic life. I will outline here a non-competitive mode of belonging to particular place, drawn from Anglican resources.

The distorted nature of Anglicanism's sometimes possessive relationship with place comes into particularly sharp contrast when we consider the calling of the church to be a place free of competition for power and control. This calling is rooted in the person of Christ, described by Jennings as a place that is also a person.[13] Williams likewise describes Jesus as a place, in which God and humanity can belong and dwell together without fear or rivalry: 'a place where a love abides that is vulnerable and unprotected', and 'from which no one is excluded in advance'. Christians are called to follow this way of being in the world, a way that begins with 'not possessing him in whose name we would move

[11] Or to a particular ethnic group, also.

[12] Ibid., p.111.

[13] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination,* p.249.

beyond being competitors in this world.'[14] As we saw earlier, the way of discipleship 'is beyond our concept of an object that has been made by a fixed law': we are granted 'a solid identity' by Christ, but this identity 'only exists in an endless responsiveness to new encounters with him in a world of unredeemed relationships'.[15]

In this way, Jesus offers, as Coles puts it, a new 'socio-political possibility beyond historical and spatial territoriality.'[16] Coles describes the church's task as cultivating 'a community in relation to the memory of Christ's trial, cross, and resurrection such that Christians might gradually conform themselves to his generous and vulnerable cultivation of becoming, at and through the edge of life.' [17] This call to dwell at the 'edges' of life, rather than seeking to control it from the centre, is true both of the gathered practices of the church (for example, in seeking to be receptive to gifts to the body coming from unexpected quarters), and of the church's relationship with particular geographical territories (such as the parish). Williams believes the eroded nature of the Church of England's social and constitutional status has something distinctive to offer here, being peculiarly well-placed to communicate something of the central vision of an 'undefended territory created by God's displacement of divine power from heaven and earth.'[18]

This attempt to dwell in a particular place without possessing it chimes with Massey's argument that space is never finished: it too cannot be sealed or finalised, and there is no single definitive account of any space.[19] In like manner, the Church of England's relationship with England cannot be oriented towards sealing or fixing an identity interior to territorial boundaries (whether parochial, diocesan, or national). As Hardy argues, to have a homeland is a very different thing from possessing or restricting it. So, rather than seeing national belonging in terms of dominance and ownership, we are to see homeland as a 'gifting of responsibility'. [20] As we saw in Chapter 3, Hardy finds the proper relationship of the Church of England to its 'homeland' in the imitation of Jesus: 'walking around, embodying a presence on that actual land'.[21] It is only in this way that the church can hope to understand its responsibility for everybody in the land it shares.

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[14] Rowan Williams, 'Epilogue', in *Praying for England: Priestly Presence in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Samuel Wells and Sarah Coakley (London: Continuum, 2008), 171–82(pp. 175 – 179; 186).

[15] Williams, *Resurrection*, p.76.

[16] Coles and Hauerwas, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, p.185.

[17] Ibid., p.178.

[18] Williams, 'Epilogue', p.176.

[19] Massey, *Spatial Divisions of Labour*. Referenced in Rumsey, *Parish*, p.71.

[20] Hardy, *Wording a Radiance*, p.30.

[21] Ibid., pp.30;85.

9.I.iii. Citizenship in the light of constructively complex belonging

We have seen, then, that there are dangers to the Church of England's territorial embeddedness, and that these temptations to a possessive relationship with the land run counter to the church's vocation to non-competitive responsibility for the people of the land. Nonetheless, the church is still in need of place. For the dangers of attachment to place are not removed by detachment, but are rather compounded. We see this in Jennings' work: having exposed the detachment and distortion of human relationship with place through the colonial moment, Jennings nonetheless avers that 'Christianity is in need of place to be fully Christian.' He argues this on the basis that, '[t]he moment the land is removed as a signifier of identity, it is also removed as a site of transformation through relationship.'[22] This kind of transformation is understood by Jennings as 'Christian faith receiving its heretofore undiscovered identities, which are found only through interaction with the social logics of language, landscape and peoples.' Right relationships are understood as 'those that invite new patterns of life woven through and by means of the deep structures of Christian faith slowly opened through ongoing interpretation and struggle.'[23]

So, we will now consider the potential for the Church of England's territorial embeddedness to be the site of this kind of transformation for the national civic polity. This will involve considering what this way of understanding how we are to inhabit 'territory' might mean for ecclesial practices in the particular geographic footprints (parish, diocese, nation) in which the Church of England operates, and what these practices might offer to civic life. In focus here are ways of inhabiting 'territory' that resist the impulse to possess or dominate place and instead allow it to be genuinely shared.

Particular but non-possessive relations of belonging

Negotiated and federated neighbourhood identities

The Church of England (and the wider Anglican Communion) is sometimes described as a federated church. This is a form of collective identity that is formed out of the relationship between individual things, but where something more is created than the collection of individual things. Yet the whole that is produced also does not entirely define or subsume the identity of the individual things. So, the

[22] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, p.248.

[23] Ibid., p.248-9. Jennings explains that such 'relationships involve deep joining, the opening of lives to one another in love and desire.' Ibid., pp.264-265.

component footprints of Anglican territory (parish, diocese, nation) emerge in this light as networked constituent parts, forming something bigger than themselves through their relationship to one another. The Church of England, in other words, is something that appears through federating together.[24]

This diffuse character of Anglicanism – as a federal body across the communion, and through the parish network – offer resources for approaching the tortured question of how we are to understand national identity and belonging. Taking this federating approach, we can say that there might be forms of density and overlap between neighbourhoods, but that a reductive search for an identifiable essential shared set of values that define what it means to be a citizen of a national polity should be resisted. As Rumsey argues, we should attend to local notions of nationhood as, '[n]one of us knows our country (our town, come to that) as a whole; we know the parts of it with which we are familiar, projecting from there our wider senses of belonging. Any idea of England, or Britain, or the world as a whole, is at heart an extension of one's local experience…'. For, 'places are 'of England' not by starting with the nation, but primarily by being 'of' (rather than merely 'in') their immediate locality': 'England, in other words, is what you end up with, not begin with.'[25]

So, the Church of England can help to shed light on a how a federated national community can be formed by people associating together locally. Rumsey's distinction between boundaries imposed from without versus those formed from within is useful here. The former, such as imperial lines, 'tend to end in communal dismemberment', whilst it is through the latter, formed by 'people pulling together', that '[e]nduring community is internally conceived and exists as the product of a shared imagination'. The danger of this shared territorial imagination being narrowly oriented inwards is ameliorated through what Rumsey argues has been a significant historical understanding of the parish boundary as 'a locally enacted reality, often contested and open to a degree of adjustment'. This has happened, for example, through the practice of 'beating the bounds' at Rogationtide.[26] This ongoing negotiation reflects the conviction that no one person or group owns the territory (be it parish, or nation): it is common ground. In relation to the parish, for instance, there are times when the church is host, and also times when it is guest within this civic common ground.

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[24] Assemblage theory helps to illuminate this relationship between the particular and the whole. Manuel DeLanda defines an assemblage as an 'irreducible social whole produced by relations of exteriority, a whole that does not totalize its parts' Manuel DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016) , p.11. It should be noted that I am not making a historical claim about the process by which the Church of England was formed. Additionally, we should note that there are obviously also centralising structures and dynamics at play in Anglicanism – particularly in the relationship between the Church of England and the rest of the Communion.

[25] Rumsey, *Parish*, p.180. See also pp.83-84; 96. Rumsey proposes that working with grain of Anglican localism in this way can offer 'a partial check on the more imperious and damaging aspects of national loyalty'. Ibid., p.180.

[26] Rumsey, *Parish*, pp.145–147.

Contestation of non-participative and alienating accounts of civic belonging

This account of learning to share place through a non-possessive attachment to particularity stands against prevalent political conceptions of belonging to a nation and being formed for that belonging. The Church of England's enactment of non-competitive, federated belonging should therefore include public contestation of state policies which work with a contractual understanding of civic belonging, and of the often hierarchical and exclusionary practices flowing from such an understanding. Recent examples of political decisions flowing from a distorted sense of what it is to belong to a national political community include the Government's ongoing reluctance to grant prisoners the right to vote (even after a judgement from the European Court of Human Rights), and the decision in February 2019 to strip Shamima Begum of her British citizenship.[27] Both of these decisions express a sense that when a person or group of people has failed to uphold the set of values on which their status as full citizens of the United Kingdom depends (in these cases, through violating the prohibition against threatening the welfare of others in society), that status can justly be diminished or removed from them by the state. Perhaps most troubling of all is the deliberate use of the state to create a 'hostile environment' for asylum seekers.[28] Their civic exclusion is expressed through alienation from participation in employment, in the economy (through the Azure Card system), and, crucially, in the life of particular localities. This final form of civic alienation is achieved through a range of practices, including through being held apart from society in detention centres and transported long distances at frequent intervals.[29]

At a parliamentary level, it is incumbent upon the Lords Spiritual to contest the vision of civic membership expressed in these policies. This is part of working to create a richer sense of civic belonging and common life (and in so doing, allowing life in our national polity to more strongly reflect the place of Christ).[30] The binary logic frequently displayed in state policies (whereby one is either a full legal citizen, or one has no place in civic life and nothing to contribute) can also be contested at the

[27] 'Shamima Begum: IS Teenager to Lose UK Citizenship', *BBC News*, 20 February 2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-47299907?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cd7klnzkyd3t/syria-schoolgirls-case&link_location=live-reporting-story [Accessed 23.09.19]. Owen Bowcott, 'Council of Europe Accepts UK Compromise on Prisoner Voting Rights', *The Guardian*, 7 December 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/dec/07/council-of-europe-accepts-uk-compromise-on-prisoner-voting-rights [Accessed 23.09.2019].

[28] Russell Taylor, 'Impact of "Hostile Environment" Policy Debate on 14 June 2018', Library Briefing (House of Lords, 11 June 2018), https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk › documents › LLN-2018-0064.

[29] Anna Rowlands has drawn attention to the role of temporality in the state's deliberate alienation of asylum seekers: Anna Rowlands, 'Temporality, Dispossession and the Search for the Good: Interpreting the Book of Jeremiah with the Jesuit Refugee Service', *Political Theology* 19, no. 6 (2018): 517–36.

[30] Coles and Hauerwas, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, p.208.

level of localised praxis. Barrett, for example, has highlighted how church involvement in forming common civic life can involve both collaboration with state structures and also the subversion of these structures. This subversion can take the form of the church and other civil society groups offering forms of civic belonging to those decitizenised by the state, creating 'underground' modes of participation in their neighbourhood. In a similar vein, Jeremy Morris writes that in order for the Church of England to resist the complacency so often characteristic of a state church, it must have 'open church buildings, welcoming liturgies, sustained public prayer, shelter, truth-seeking, resistance to prejudice, willingness to risk failure and loss'.[31] In this way, there is scope for the parish churches of the Church of England to undercut the state's understanding of civic belonging, whilst contributing to the creation of alternative forms of civic identity.

Anglican and civic identity as 'always already'

Alongside the possibility of fostering particular but non-possessive relations of belonging to place, the Church of England also holds the potential to illuminate civic identity as something that is 'always already'. That is to say, citizenship can come to be seen as an identity that is not at root something to be granted by the state, but rather as an identity that grows out of a set of already extant social relations. The Church of England is able to illuminate this characteristic of civic identity through its self-understanding as being a church for all the people of the land. So, wherever one stands in England one is always standing in a parish. As Grace Davies puts it, you were born in a parish whether you like it or not.[32] Likewise, one is always already a member of a political community. We can see the implications of this in relation to the above: prisoners and asylum seekers, for example, are members of our civic community, even if they are not legally recognised as such.

The bare fact of belonging to a parish can help us to understand the kind of collective responsibility that is necessary for the functioning of common life in the nation. Belonging connects us in responsibility not only to those around us in this particular place, but also to those who have gone before us. The public nature of this identity is perhaps especially the case because of the particular constitutional history of the Church of England. To be a member of the Church of England is to bear responsibility for the church's mottled history as intertwined with the nation state (for example, in the Poor Laws, as

[31] Morris, 'The Future of Church and State', in *Anglicanism: The Answer to Modernity*, p.178. Morris argues that only then can the Church 'claim honestly to be cultivating a spirit of honest attention to the practice of building Christian community'. Ibid.

[32] Grace Davie, 'Debate', in *Praying for England: Priestly Presence in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Samuel Wells and Sarah Coakley (London: Continuum, 2008), 147–70.

we saw above) and in the intertwining of the Anglican Communion and the British Imperial project (as we saw in Chapter 4), as well as for the many other forms of structural injustice both perpetuated and instigated by the church.

So, to be an Anglican is to accept that I am part of something that I cannot define – that I am entering into a story that is already being told, by others present as well as those past. The same structure is true of national belonging: as Kwame Anthony Appiah puts it, patriotism involves both shared pride and shame for national action in the world.[33] Understanding belonging in this light can help us understand that, as we saw in Chapter 8, membership of a political community involves the unmasking of the illusion that one's political identity is something that is self-determined. Put bluntly, the Church of England's territorial embeddedness means that both good and bad identities are received, but that even the bad challenge the ways in which political identity within a civic community can be delusionally understood as self-constructed and possessed.

This awareness of the corporate and historical dimensions of one's identity is therefore something Anglicanism could offer to the nation.[34] However, this is only something that Anglicanism can offer if the Church of England also learns to recognise it itself. This recognition is something it does with the help of others – allowing the Church's understanding of itself to be shaped by others. So, the Church can learn to give the gifts it has to give only through engaging with, and receiving from, those who are to be the recipients of this gift.[35]

This quality of being 'always already' is also true of how we can understand the Church of England's responsibility to particular places and people. Rumsey understands the ubiquity of the parish as preventing 'neighbourly relations being subject to mere arbitrary selection', and Peter Ochs likewise commends the church's responsibility for the citizens of their particular worldly polity, who are not 'determined *a priori*: they come as history has led them.'[36] As Ochs puts it, the Church of England 'attaches itself to a worldly polity and ... shares responsibility for the welfare of all citizens of that

[33] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (London: Penguin, 2007).

[34] For, whilst the Church of England's proximity to the powers of government has undoubted dangers, it is also, as Quash argues, a framework capable of 'sustaining responsible attention to the world and to history'. Quash, *Found Theology*, pp.10 – 11.

[35] Williams writes of the need for societies to become responsible in precisely this way, 'capable of seeing themselves critically and of acting and planning and organizing themselves with some degree of conscious awareness… societies with a sense of history … which can understand how they came to be what they are.' Rowan Williams, *The Truce of God* (London: Fount, 1983) , pp. 17-18.

[36] Rumsey, *Parish*, p.86; Peter Ochs, *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), p173.

polity'.[37] This chimes with the understanding, offered in Chapter 8, of how responsibility is received from one's neighbours: receiving the meaning of responsibility from the other, as Reed puts it. This sense of responsibility for all those who share one's locality could fruitfully inform how responsibility for one's fellow citizens is understood by local communities throughout this national polity, and, more acutely, by our elected representatives.[38]

Learning to practice responsibility in this way to a particular place also depends on *receiving* from others. As Quash argues, '[i]f Christians are worried that they cannot do it all themselves, cannot make the whole difference, or solve the whole problem, then that is probably a good lesson for them to learn. For in God's providence, Christians must trust that other agencies than theirs are working together for good […] and that it is not all just down to them.'[39] The need for a willingness to trust in other agencies is true of civic action more widely, if it is to be sustained and not given up in desperation at the seemingly insurmountable task at hand.

So, both this willingness to take responsibility for all who come 'as history has led them' and the concomitant awareness of the need for collaboration in the learning and shouldering of this responsibility are practices which the Church of England can, or could learn to, offer to national life. These illuminate the deeper character of civic identity - as a socially embedded identity that is 'always already', not simply invented by the state - and of national belonging. In bringing to light richer understandings of civic belonging, these practices also offer something to the imaginative horizon against which state policies are formed.

[37] Ochs, *Another Reformation*, p.173.

[38] As with Bonhoeffer's account of receiving and bearing responsibility, it is a way of understanding one's ethical vocation that is often conflicted, but ultimately hopeful.

[39] Quash, *Found Theology*, p.25. As we have seen in Part III, political participation is one of the ways in which Christians can learn this deep trust. This receptive trustfulness is needed at both parish and national level.

9.II. Anglicanism's conversational mode

We turn now to the second distinctive quality of the Church of England's relation to the national polity, as set out by Jenkins:

> And on the other hand, [the Anglican priest] has to engage conversationally, rather than authoritatively, or in an exclusive fashion. This is because no one voice, opinion or understanding can hold an exhaustive account of the glory of God, and only through conversation are our blindnesses remedied.[40]

The need for the Church of England to engage in this 'conversational mode' is true not only of doctrinal matters, but also of public discourse in pursuit of a flourishing common life. In this section we will consider some of the implications for deliberative conversations within the church, and for the church's engagement in processes of public deliberation.

9.II.i. Eschewing a position of superiority

Whilst Jenkins identifies the 'conversational' mode as a distinctively Anglican form of engagement, this is not to say the church by any means perfectly embodies this mode. If it is to offer this mode of discourse to civic life, the Church of England must begin by first attending to the ways in which it fails to engage conversationally: both internally and in wider public deliberative processes.

A failure to engage conversationally can be seen in the wariness about the motivations of others, which is often evident in the internal discourse of the Church of England. This can be seen, for example, in debates over human sexuality and women's ordination to the priesthood (and consecration to the episcopacy) in the Church of England, and, indeed, in the wider Anglican Communion.[41] Such wariness about motivations easily becomes a projected knowledge of the inner life of the other. As such, this kind of cynicism can be understood as a form of self-deception, which deadens and muffles our ability to attend to one another and protects against vulnerable encounter. As Higton puts it, '[w]e are finite, we are mortal, we are weak – and in the absence of any sure foundation, these truths are too bitter for us, and we hide them behind layers and layers of fantasy and illusion.'[42] When I am faced with real

[40] Jenkins, 'Anglicanism: The Only Answer to Modernity', p.200.

[41] This wariness is also frequently extended to politicians, in keeping with wider social tendencies.

[42] Higton, *Difficult Gospel*, pp.17-18.

disagreement with the claims and actions of others, I assume that the other person's difference from me can only be a matter of bad faith, because that means I do not actually have to attend to their reasons for action or to their perspective. My accusation of bad faith – which is a claim to know their motives and to be able to contrast them with my own - protects me from facing their difference, and so protects me from challenge.[43]

So, underlying this scepticism is the kind of confidence in the rightness of our own motives and perspective that has often been discernible in Anglican social theologians' understanding of the relationship between the church and policy-makers, and in the Church of England's conversations with the wider Anglican Communion (as identified in Chapters 6 and 4, respectively). The problem of mistrust is bound up, then, with our failure to extend doubt also towards our own ability to see and speak truthfully.[44]

9.II.ii. Proposing self-directed scepticism

If cynical discourse in the church derives from self-protecting delusion, then a trusting and honest common life (both within the church and in the wider civic polity) must involve practices that highlight and puncture such delusions. This will mean questioning our own ability to see and speak truthfully. So, the response to this socially corrosive scepticism (which encompasses both mistrust and over-confidence) in fact involves another form of scepticism, a form necessary to enable the growth of mutuality: namely scepticism directed towards our capacity for self-delusion. We have seen that the kind of scepticism that becomes mistrust and overconfidence is directed towards the other: it assumes knowledge of the other's motivations and an unimpaired ability to judge. Fruitful scepticism, meanwhile, is directed towards oneself: it acknowledges the opacity of ourselves to ourselves; and to others; as well as others to ourselves.

I draw on Williams, and particularly on the account of ethical formation set out in Chapter 2, to sketch this more fruitful scepticism – a scepticism about our grasp of own motivations and of our knowledge of what is in the common good. There are three theological forms of scepticism in focus here: those proper to an awareness of our finitude; our ongoing sinfulness; and the fullness of redemption that is yet to come.

[43] Cynicism is one of these ways in which we seek to deny our finitude, escaping into the delusion that I can see to the heart of another's reasons for action (and that, in their situation, I would have acted differently).

[44] As Williams argues, 'I shall not truthfully see the web of lies in which our public life buzzes away […] until I have recognised where the fissures of the same untruthfulness run across my moral vision.' Moreover, '[w]e can't deal with the illusions and distortions which shape our [foreign] policy without at the same time dealing with the illusions and distortions in which we ourselves are caught up. Rowan Williams, *Open to Judgement* (London: DLT, 2002), p.128.

Creaturely finitude and the limitations of any single perspective

We turn first of all to consider a scepticism proper to an awareness of our finitude. As we saw in Chapter 2, the limitations of any one person's perspective are positively assessed by Williams in his sense that in the web of relations in which we each stand, our identity is constituted by being *here* and not *there.*[45] We are, as Williams says, 'our limits', not simply in the sense of having a particular location, but in the sense of being material and historical - shaped by all manner of forces in a specific history, in a tangle far too dense for us to tease out our identity with any completeness. We inevitably see only some of the factors that shape our vision and our desire and make us who we are.

So, our identity and social relations as always inherently obscured and occluded. Yet, as we saw earlier, '[m]y obscurity to myself, yours to me, and mine to you, are not *puzzles*, waiting for fruitful suspicion to discover the real script […]'.[46] Rather, acknowledging both our finitude and our opacity to ourselves means recognising that we can only come to know who we are, and what our good consists in, by encountering those who are not us - who exist beyond our limits. We discover more of the tangle of our own identity not by introspection, but by interactions that bring different strands to the surface. Our obscurity to ourselves and to one another should result, then, in 'taking time' in our social relations, if we are to try to understand the other (and so also ourselves).[47]

Ongoing sinfulness

However, as we have already seen, Williams' concern with limitation also stems from our sinful condition, with one of the consequences being our all-too frequent failure to acknowledge the need for ongoing struggle against self-deception – particularly when it comes to our own desires and motivations.[48]

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[45] Chaplin, 'Person, society and state in the thought of Rowan Williams'.

[46] Williams, 'The Suspicion of Suspicion', p.199.

[47] Ibid., p.198.

[48] This can be seen in Williams' writings on spirituality, particularly his engagements with Bernard of Clairvaux, on illusion, and John of the Cross, whose 'question to the self-reliance of the manipulative human intellect' was spurred by his sensitivity to the risks of self-deception in the spiritual life. Bernard of Clairvaux's insistence on the need to conquer illusion. Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, p.116. John of the Cross' 'question to the self-reliance of the manipulative human intellect' is also credited by Williams as having spurred on his sensitivity to the risks of self-deception in the spiritual life. Ibid., p.173,

Williams contends that not only do we not know even the shape of our own desires very well (as finite creatures), but also that our desires are frequently disordered and will be misread by us until we are confronted with the desires of others. Our ability to perceive (what might be a common good) is purified through others, as 'the barriers of egotistic fantasy are broken by the sheer brute presence of other persons'.[49] The opacity of others, described just previously, thus also acts as a check on delusions that we can know the other person fully. Realising our need for others to illuminate ourselves, it also leads us to continually renegotiate our sense of who we are and how life together should be conducted. Yet, as we saw earlier, this is not a picture of negotiation that starts from clear and fixed positions; rather, we discover who we are together through negotiation.

Awaiting glory

We should also remind ourselves here of Volpe's observation that, for Williams, 'the uncertainty or ambiguity [of identity] carries with it a kind of eschatological reserve.' The always incomplete nature of the task of 'making sense' (of the shape of our common life) not only derives from the finitude of our perspective, and from our self-deception about our desires and identity, but also from Williams' sense of 'the incompleteness of selves': our view of ourselves is always fragmentary, and we must depend on God's view of 'the whole picture, and the way all the pieces fit together.'[50]

9.II.iii. The contribution of self-directed scepticism to common life

Revealing the limits of any existing understanding or practice of common life

These forms of doubt and scepticism are fruitful in two ways: first, in revealing the limits of any existing understanding or practice of common life, and, secondly, in gesturing towards the possibilities for shared ongoing discernment of goods.

We will address the limits the first. If, as we have seen, part of human existence is the impossibility of ever being sure that one is not deceived by oneself, this will inevitably generate uncertainty about political goods. The fact that I have only a limited grasp of my own interests, motives and desires, and of your interests, motives, and desires, means that I do not know what it would take for my real interests

[49] Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, p.107.

[50] Volpe, *Rethinking Christian Identity*, p.8.

to be met or for your interests to be met. I therefore do not know what we are aiming at; I do not know what flourishing looks like. In both the church and the civic polity, this means exercising an ongoing scepticism about our having achieved an existing and complete grasp of what is in the interests of every member of the polity.

Furthermore, if misrecognition of the common good is inevitable (whether through limitations inherent to our finitude this side of eternity or through the way evil is operative in our lives), then it follows that disagreement is also an inevitable feature of seeking to pursue a common life.[51] Yet, as we have seen, when disagreements arise we should not look to identify final resolutions (i.e. looking simply to win an argument, or find a resolution that leaves all sides intact), for to do so would be to deny the finite limitations of our perspectives *and* the often egotistical grain of our reasoning. Rather, we will look for ways in which the disagreement may challenge us, changing our perception of what we need and want - and we will leave space and time for that.

Additionally, we have seen that the limitations of our ability to recognise the good render all human judgements risky and provisional. Nonetheless, despite offering this profoundly destabilising account of human limitation, Williams is clear that we are called to continue in the radically insecure action of making judgements and attempting to 'make sense' in public (not least because to do so is part and parcel of trying to understand ourselves.).[52] Acknowledging the provisionality of human judgements must therefore shape what we hope for in terms of the forms of shared life, and the structures that undergird these.

Implications for ecclesial and civic life

Each of these three forms of limit – firstly, refusing the temptation of settling with what we take to be an existing and complete grasp of what is in the interests of every member of the polity; secondly, engaging in disagreements without hoping for final, stable resolutions; and thirdly, acknowledging that the provisionality of human judgements must therefore shape the forms and structure of the shared life that we hope for - run counter to a particular tone of disagreement in the Church of England.

[51] For, Williams avers, it is only in situations of oppression that people do not find one another difficult. Williams, *Lost Icons*, p.113.

[52] This sense of the political as always provisional is reflected in what Higton had identified as the often 'preliminary' nature of Williams' writings. We could attribute this unwillingness to commit himself on paper to specific proposals to a desire to performatively affirm the contingency of such proposals – which are best given in contexts of confession or direction. Higton, *Difficult Gospel*, pp.6-7.

These limits also offer a challenge to those modes of political theology that tend to suggest that the church has a certain immunity to what Williams calls 'the challenges of questions and resources which others bring' (as we saw in Chapters 4 and 6). We might think here of the Temple tradition of Anglican social theology, and of middle axioms in particular, which as an attempt to find a stable strategy for mediating between Christian ideals and particular social policies, seem to end up (whether deliberately or not) 'pos[ing] an overview' for social life.[53] This stands against what we have seen about the limitations, through finitude and egotism, of any given perspective. The limits identified above may also cause us to question more recent Anglican accounts of the discernment of public goods, in which a close relationship is drawn between certain theological commitments and a raft of specific policies.[54]

Related to this self-positioning at a superior vantage point are accounts of the church which locate Anglican polity as a host of national life.[55] This self-positioning as generous host overlooks the way the Church has been, and is still, complicit in oppressive social and economic structures. As Marika Rose argues, the Church should not delude itself that it is an impartial observer and critic of the neo-liberal market state: to the contrary, the Church of England is itself complicit in the very structures of which analysis is offered (and, she argues, this complicity blunts and distorts the political and economic analysis undertaken by Anglican social theologians).[56]

As we saw in Chapters 4 and 6, this self-understanding as host can also obscure attention to all the church can and should receive from wider society. There is a need, as I argued in Chapter 5, to better receive the perspective of the other within the church – for instance, from working-class church

[53] Higton, *Difficult Gospel*, p.121. Higton affirms that 'The vocation of Christians is *not* to pose an overview, and it is *not* to stand immune from the challenges of questions and resources which others bring.'. Ibid.

[54] This can sometimes be a risk in certain theological strands of recent movements for the common good (particularly within the Blue Labour and Red Tory movements). See also Rowan Williams, 'Saving Time: Thoughts on Practice, Patience and Vision', *New Blackfriars* 73 (June 1992): 319–26.

[55] Such an understanding can be found in the work of Milbank and Adrian Pabst: see for example, 'The Anglican Polity and the Politics of the Common Good', *Crucible: The Christian Journal of Social Ethics*, no. 1 (2014). We can also find this kind of understanding cropping up at times in Bretherton's account of the church as the 'host' of 'truly public space'. The church, for Bretherton, is not simply 'a constituent of civil society' but is itself 'a public constituted by its worship life', and 'as precisely this it is the free or truly public space in which civil society can be re- formed. It is from the church that contradictions to the dominant and oppressive dynamics of power may be forged'. For Christians, 'it is the prior experience of being the world reconciled in and through Christ that provides the church with the possibility of hosting the re-emergence of a genuinely political space in which human dignity is upheld and common objects of love may be deliberated over and acted upon'. Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, p.95.

[56] Marika Rose, '"It's Not the Money but the Love of Money That Is the Root of All Evil": Social Subjection, Machinic Enslavement and the Limits of Anglican Social Theology', *Religions* 103, no. 7 (2016).

members, and from other members of the Anglican Communion. There is, for example, much that might be learnt and received from non-national Anglican churches who have a minority identity, as a helpful corrective to Anglican complacency regarding the relationship between national and denominational identity. This all requires that we acknowledge the inevitability of the misrecognition of goods in the ecclesial community, as well as in the world beyond. This is particularly the case in a national church which has been historically dominant, both socio-politically and ecclesially (within the Anglican Communion). As well as fostering this form of scepticism, the Church also needs to be the recipient of critical attention.[57]

We can see then that certainty about the Church of England's clear-sighted apprehension of the common good stands in stark contrast to the commitment that the Christian vision 'is worked out only in passionate and argumentative engagement in the uncertainties and limitations of human political action.'[58] There is a need, therefore, for self-directed scepticism, firstly, toward the Church of England as a whole (and therefore the need to be always receiving from the world), and, secondly, particularly toward those in positions of power, who need to recognise the limitations of their own perspective. The practice of this kind of scepticism can therefore help nurture the mutuality proper to the relationship between the ecclesial communities and other forms of associational life.

9.II.iv. Conversational practices for shared ongoing discernment of goods

So, whilst the Church of England often particularly needs to practice self-directed scepticism (in its internal discussions *and* when it is acting as a body in public life), this is also a stance, or form of attention, that the church can offer to deliberative processes in the national polity. What, then, might all this mean for how we go about discerning the nature of common life? And, more particularly, for the practices of the Church of England to lead to a more profoundly confronting and challenging, but also more hopeful politics in pursuit of common life?

The need for all voices

[57] This also problematises certain strands of Anglican social thought that speak of common life as depending upon the self-sustaining practices internal to stable institutions. See, for example, John Milbank and Adrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue: Post-Liberalism and the Human Future* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016).

[58] Rowan Williams, 'The Ethics of SDI', in *The Nuclear Weapons Debate: Theological and Ethical Issues*, by Richard Bauckham and John Elford (London: SCM Press, 1989), 162–74.

Something we have seen regarding the need for receptivity in ecclesial and civic polities is the correlative need for scepticism about the sufficiency of any single perspective for the task of discerning common life. This suggests that the more voices we hear, the closer we come to truly discerning the good in common life. As Higton remarks of Williams: 'Almost the only thing we can know about the good we are to seek is that it is no-one's possession.'[59] This may sound like bad news. However, for those who feel there is something awry with the current state of democratic discourse and participation, this gives a language to describe what is wrong. It also shows what true conversation depends upon.

For, the flipside of acknowledging our opacity to ourselves and to one another is the need for any one voice to be challenged and supplemented by others.[60] Thus scepticism reveals the incompleteness of my own existing voice, the need for it to be brought into robust conversation with others, and the possibility that I might discover my own good as well as the good of others more deeply in the process, and thus hitherto invisible possibilities of mutuality. So, recognising the limits of any existing understanding or practice of common life should lead us to seek to develop deliberative processes in which any one voice is always challenged and supplemented by others. Acknowledging the opacity of both myself and others will also mean that we should look and work for a public discourse that is structured by practices of taking time to make sense together.

This has implications for the role of the Anglican social theologian in public discourse. As Malcolm Brown writes, '[i]n struggling towards answers and in seeking ways to live with uncertainties, the social theologian has a contribution to make that is less about being the representative of … [a] belief system and much more about being a fellow citizen who, like everyone else, is starting from a particular location but embarking on a journey towards what may be a shared destination.'[61] In this way, Anglican social thought, whether produced from ecclesial or academic institutions, should be both fostering and receiving this kind of scepticism, in service of 'dramatic' and interactive public conversations.

Participation in deliberation as part of human flourishing

If it is the case that we need the voices of others to discover our own good, then our common life is found most fully not in finding out definitively what the common good *is*, but in participation in the discussion of what comprises the common good. The fruitful forms of scepticism we have explored reveal human flourishing to be radically contingent upon participation in decision-making structures.

[59] Higton, *Difficult Gospel*, p.128.

[60] See also, for example, Williams on the need to read Scripture in company as discussed in Higton, *Difficult Gospel*, p.67.

[61] Brown, 'Anglican Social Theology Tomorrow', *Anglican Social Theology*, p.188.

Drawing on Walter Gallie, we could therefore describe the common good as an 'essentially contested concept': that is, a concept that is impossible to resolve through argument, but is rather sustained by such argument. In this light, a common good is so because it is discerned in common.[62]

As we saw in Part III, there is therefore a need for the Church of England to encourage greater political participation, and particularly to encourage lay Christians to take a leading role in the church's political involvement, whether in civil society (in heading up ecclesial involvement in asset based community development or broad-based community organising, for example) or in the structures of representative democratic government (whether at a local or national level). This could be undergirded by the development of structures to enable the discernment of political vocation as part of one's discipleship. An argument can be made that the House of Bishops' Pastoral Letter issued ahead of the 2015 election and *Reimagining Britain* tend in the direction, aiming to equip Anglican laity for political participation. However, more is required.

In a political climate marked by scepticism about others' motives, this self-directed scepticism also has something to offer to our wider civic life. The erosion of trust in public life has been much discussed in recent years. Whilst a single root cause cannot be pointed to (and to do so would perhaps be to feed into the narrative of there having once been a more innocent and trusting age), the symptoms are evident. This mistrust is particularly directed towards those in public positions of power, with a tendency to assume that politicians are acting mainly or only for their own ends. As Williams highlighted back in the aftermath of cash-for-questions: 'What we risk in our current situation is a default assumption that the ideal of 'public service' is an illusion: if we take it for granted that people habitually act from individual interest alone, it becomes unimaginable that anyone charged with representing the interest or long-term good of another will do so consistently or effectively.'[63] We can see, then, that wider participation in public life could also be fostered through the church's adoption of self-directed scepticism, in that this has the potential to mitigate against popular political apathy (stemming from mistrust of those in public life).

Being called to a common future

[62] Walter Gallie, 'Essentially Contested Concepts', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56 (1956): 167–98. These are concepts that are impossible to resolve deliberation through argument, but are rather, according to Gallie, sustained by such argument. Religion, art, science, social justice, and democracy are identified by Galley as amongst such contested concepts.

[63] John Bingham, 'Expenses Scandal Helped Shatter Faith in "public Service" – Rowan Williams', *The Telegraph*, 16 June 2012, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/mps-expenses/9335001/Expenses-scandal-helped-shatter-faith-in-public-service-Rowan-Williams.html.

Most hopefully of all, there is scope for the practice of this kind of scepticism to give rise to processes of deliberation in which our moment-by-moment mutual dependence points to a more foundational belonging together. As we saw in Chapter 8, because we are being called to a common future, we do indeed have a common good whether we learn to recognise it or not. As Williams argues, 'the awareness of a common human location and task […] limits our suspicions and our tendency to self-protection and allows us to compare with one another what it is like to be human – and so to clarify what we can and cannot do together'.[64]

The church has an important role to play in enabling the common human location and task to be recognised, and so also of intertwining of one another's flourishing. This concern for the way common life grows out of common participation means that the church ought to have a particular concern that unpopular voices (including those with whom it disagrees) are not sidelined. So, this commitment to common participation will mean that the church's task includes 'nourishing people who will continue to ask difficult questions in the wider public sphere'.[65] These difficult questions are not deliberately awkward or destructive, but rather grow out of the skill of seeing what contradicts vision of corporate life (with attending to ourselves with scepticism as a crucial part of this skill).[66] Asking difficult questions on behalf of those with whom one disagrees also fosters a deeper form of common flourishing, as it is through the discomfort of living in sustained disagreement that we can perhaps learn most profoundly to recognise others' actions as a gift to the body as a whole.[67] In this way, the discipline of sharing a church with those with whom we disagree can also be a gift to public life.

In this section, then, we have explored some of the ways in which the Church of England's 'conversational mode' might form, and indeed already forms, common civic life. I have argued that the kind of scepticism proposed here has the potential to contribute to forming the Church and wider society to discern and pursue common life. Such scepticism exposes our attempts to protect against the vulnerability that accompanies finitude and limitation: our attempts to escape the creaturely limits that cause us to need the perspectives of others to see more truthfully. Whilst we can never fully escape our egotism, it can be brought to our attention through confronting the reality of others, who bring a

[64] Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p.271.

[65] Ibid., p.270.

[66] Higton, *Difficult Gospel*, p.120-121;129.

[67] Ibid., p.137. See also Williams on sharing a church with those with whom we disagree: 'Catholic and Reformed' in *Living Tradition: Affirming Catholicism.*

different perspective to bear on ourselves, the world, and our place within it.[68] The ongoing need for this self-directed scepticism is not, therefore, a negative final judgement on our capacity for common life, but a positive attempt both to avoid self-deception, and to properly learn about who we are (and who we might come to be) through being confronted by the other. It is only in this way that we can hope to discern forms of life that enable the flourishing of all.

9.II.v. Conclusion

This chapter opened by building on Chapter 4, arguing that we must acknowledge the ways in which Anglican territorial embeddedness has been expressed in practices which reinforce hierarchical, possessive, and/or exclusivist understandings of what it to belong to an ecclesial and national polity. Against these territorial practices, I outlined what the Church of England can, and does already in some ways, distinctively contribute to understanding and practising belonging to a particular place. This was explored in terms of the church's calling to enact a non-competitive belonging to place. I then argued that this constructive complexity of belonging and participation, preeminently in the parish, can illuminate something about civic identity within the national polity more broadly. Here the central question was: how can the practices of the Church of England be part of forming an interactive and receptive common life that is embedded in a particular territory?

In the second half of the chapter, I noted that fostering a conversational mode in public life necessitates the Church of England eschewing the kinds of positions of superiority that have often marked its participation in dialogue within the Anglican Communion, in academic social theology, and in public policy discussions. Moving away from such a position of superiority requires, I argued, a certain quality of scepticism: one that is directed towards the self and one's own ability to discern what is in the common good. This self-directed scepticism is based on the acknowledgement that any single perspective is always limited by creaturely finitude; that there is inevitably ongoing self-deception about our desires and identity; and that there is an incompleteness to the task of 'making sense' of the shape of our common life this side of eternity. I then turned to address the contribution of self-directed scepticism to common life: namely, in revealing the limits of any existing understanding or practice of common life, and the implications of this for ecclesial and public deliberation. Finally, I proposed three dimensions of conversational practice required for the shared ongoing discernment of goods:

[68] However, I hope I have also been clear that I am not advocating scepticism about our capacity to be *brought to recognise* our own motivations (at least in part), or to be *brought* to see more clearly goods we might hold in common. So, I am not arguing for scepticism about a process of ongoing discovery – but rather for a scepticism about reaching what we take to be an existing and complete grasp.

recognising the need for all voices; seeing participation in conversation as part of human flourishing; and the recognition of being called to a common future.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, throughout this thesis I have been concerned with the way in which the formation of Christian ethical and political identity involves being drawn into seeing more deeply. In the first half of this chapter I explored the scope for the Church of England, as embedded in particular 'territories', to learn to better attend with its neighbours. We have seen that this involves practices of inhabiting place that foster attention to the particularity of a given social context; are open to challenge and disruption; and are able to be genuinely shared. I then addressed the possibility for the Church of England to learn to better attend (and to enable others to do so) through public conversations. In relation to the cultivation of an Anglican conversational mode, we have seen that learning to attend means recognising our inability to ever fully see by ourselves what is in the common good, and so fostering practices which open ecclesial and public deliberative processes to disruption and challenge by the voices of others.

On attention and negotiation

A second central strand that has run through this thesis is the need to resist accounts of identity in which what has been received is understood as fixed and finalised. In this concluding chapter we have considered how the Church of England can bring to light the always negotiated and revisable dimensions of civic identity. In §9.I this involved consideration of the way in which place is something both given *to* us and *by* us. The way in which Anglican territorial embeddedness is 'always already' also offers the opportunity to consider the way in which we are all, and properly should be, engaged in the ongoing negotiation of a received identity. This received identity incorporates both the good and the bad, and yet in grappling with the troubling history and current reality we have received (including through penitential practices) that we come to a deeper understanding of what it is to belong to a political community – and to bear responsibility for that community. In §9.II we see the way that the ongoing negotiation of the form of common life in which we find ourselves (both civic and ecclesial) requires self-directed scepticism, in order to open us up to receive the particular perspective brought by each individual.

9.III. Further avenues for research

There are several avenues for further research that this thesis points towards.

9.III.i. A richer theology of citizenship

In §9.I, we touched on the inadequacy of dominant political conceptions of citizenship and the way in which this identity is formed. Existing understandings of citizenship implicit in UK state policies reduce it to a binary legal status, and/or an assent to 'shared values'. The insufficiency of these understandings has been particularly exposed through forced migration crises in Europe and the Americas; the European referendum and its aftermath; and approaches taken to countering extremist ideology, amongst many other instances. Current policy responses mitigate against the pursuit of the common good, sowing division and mutual distrust and setting up a hierarchy of citizenship statuses. This can be seen in the creation of the category of 'non-violent extremism', by which whole strata of the citizenry become suspected of not being proper citizens unless they can demonstrate their assent to 'British values'.[69]

There is, therefore, a pressing need to work for greater civic participation and belonging. Richer conversations about citizenship in faith communities form a crucial part of this. However, this demands that we develop a richer theological understanding of citizenship. With notable exceptions, existing theological accounts either tend to see civic belonging and participation as incompatible with being a Christian, or see one's Christian identity as very closely overlapping with belonging to a particular nation state.[70] Anglican accounts of citizenship, in particular, have tended to fall into this latter camp and need to be much more alert to the Church of England's historic involvement in the British imperial project and in ethno-nationalist understandings of civic belonging, including the ways this heritage continues to form current ecclesial practices and attitudes.

In contrast to these extremes, we can better understand citizenship by approaching it as an identity that is primarily configured through local relations of belonging and practices of participation. This will mean starting with the local ties that bind: with the recognition, as we saw in §9.I, that each of us is 'always already' embedded in a network of relationships. As we have seen, this renders neighbourliness a central category for understanding our social and political ties. Here, the Church of England's ongoing

[69] So, whilst civic belonging is one of the most basic forms of equality, recent years have shown an erosion of civic participation and growing alienation from political life. These trends are not confined to one particular demographic group, but can be seen, for example, in asylum seekers struggling in the 'hostile environment' *and* in workers in post-industrial areas struggling with economic hardship in a rapidly globalising context.

[70] These exceptions include the work of Stephen Backhouse and Luke Bretherton.

commitment to particular localities may help to illuminate how to be a citizen grows out of and cannot be detached from being a neighbour.[71] Understanding civic identity theologically as *primarily* (although not exclusively) a neighbourhood identity in this way could provide resistance to a reductive search for an essential shared and replicable set of values, and to zero-sum discussions of rights versus responsibilities of the citizen in relation to the nation state.[72]

Pursuing such an approach will mean there is work to be done to root this work in rich accounts of local and regional belonging as part of a developing field on theology of place. From there it may be possible to talk about what that means in terms of participation in particular institutions, within civil society and state structures at a local and national level. For, this is not an argument for inward-looking parochialism, but rather for these neighbourly relations to be oriented towards participation in local and national political structures. These local networks of belonging also inform the mode and aims of political participation – as reflected particularly in asset-based community development and broad-based community organising (as Bretherton, Barrett, and others have highlighted).

9.III.ii. Attention to the concrete particularities of public institutions

Alongside the need for greater attention to local forms of political life, there is also a need for more granular discussion of national level institutions in political theology.

Morris argues that the church must have 'a grasp on actual policy and political conditions', and on 'the kind of State it might want to bring into being and be involved with.'[73] As part of this, there is a need for the church to think concretely about the state: moving away from a theological tendency to speak of the state as a monolithic edifice, towards thinking in terms of particular practices and institutions.
This is particularly pertinent to Anglican theology, where more close-grained understandings are needed of the institutions and individuals through which Anglican policy discussions take place.[74] Undertaking to describe and reflect theologically on this granularity will involve recognising a complex nest of working theologies living in different contexts formed by the intertwining of church and state,

[71] In this light, we can see that there is merit in Rumsey's argument that parochial space can contribute to the production of neighbourhood ('a virtuous practice especially required of, but not limited to, the priesthood of all believers'), and ought therefore to be 'inherently collaborative, an outworking of the Church's belief that, in Christ, God draws us into his ministry of reconciliation.' Rumsey, *Parish*, p.86. See also p.181.

[72] We should not, however, that civic identity obviously also comes with legal and state framework.

[73] Morris, 'The Future of Church and State', p.177.

[74] Morris resists the idea that one can be for or against a monolithic entity called 'Establishment'. Rather, he argues, to consider Establishment is to seek to address underlying questions about the nature and purpose of the Church and 'its vocation - in God's eyes – to model and bring forward the Kingdom of Christ'. Ibid, p.179.

with family resemblances between them. These include, for example: Canon law; Chaplaincy (including the chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons); Church schools; the Lords Spiritual; the Second Church Estates Commissioner and the Ecclesiastical Committee.

In particular, as argued in Chapter 8, there is a need for greater attention to the relationship between citizen (and non-citizen) and state. This entails discussion of proper participation in democratic structures, in polities in which citizenship is the basic unit. This is also important for the increasing numbers of those who live in relationship with the state, yet without a formal identity as citizens. In this way, political theology can continue to move from questions of legitimacy and jurisdiction to questions of coherently lived social flourishing and identity.

However, these are all questions for another day. For now, I hope I have shown that Christian ethical and political formation must and *should* take place inside *and* outside the church. This understanding of the need to be formed through participation in both ecclesial and civic life follows from a recognition of the ways of the Spirit, bubbling up in each of our lives in unexpected ways to lead us deeper into God's abundance.

This bubbling up takes place in both the church and civic life – and in both civil society *and* the state. All of these are arenas in which the Christian can be formed more fully *as a Christian* through their participation. In each of these locations, formation can take place by ongoing conversational practices. For, we do not yet know what we will be, and we do not yet know what the church or our civic institutions will be, but we trust in the abundance of God and the guidance of the Spirit. It is the hope, and the promise, of being drawn ever more deeply into the life of God that is at the heart of the Christian ethical and political formation.

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