
The author of this study of the place and role of the Church of England in the public sphere and in relation to the state seems to be pulled in two directions. On the one hand, he is not ashamed to give credit where it is due: ‘in an age dominated by economic consumerism and short-term political pragmatism, establishment has served as an important institutionalized reminder that alternative values and dimensions of life still exist’ (p. 184). That consideration seems to me not negligible: it goes to the heart of why many religious leaders in England who are not Anglicans are favourably disposed towards establishment. This tract for the times may have misjudged the times – or perhaps the times have moved on since it was written. The multicultural agenda in Britain has been called into question by recent developments. Rampant secularism and religious fanaticism are widely seen as the dangers (strange bedfellows though they are). There is a widespread desire that the Church of England should be robust in defence of the Christian faith and of traditional values. There seems to be little public sympathy for further undermining the position of the established Church. I judge that there is support for an hospitable establishment, one that is ecumenically collaborative, without being patronising. Weller almost goes as far as this and it is his sympathy for the beneficial effects of the present arrangements, in spite of themselves, that inhibits him from driving home his thesis.

On the other hand, the author believes that the established position of the Church of England enshrines all sorts of privileges and inequalities. Although he acknowledges that these privileges are mainly exercised in harmless ways, he feels that they smack of paternalism and put other faith communities at a disadvantage. The established church is plumbed into national symbols of self-definition that were forged in a different age and are now (Weller believes) inadequate. The author, a Baptist, embraces the increasingly questioned multi-faith perspective for the United Kingdom and seeks a level playing field for all. Although he acknowledges that the tiny Buddhist community is the only non-Christian religious group that has come out against establishment, he seems to believe that he speaks for the interests of all other faiths in advocating a change to the legal and constitutional position of the Church of England. (However, his assertion that various circumstances have
conspired to create a *kairos* moment for these issues to be tackled seems to be whistling in the dark.) It is not all manifestations of establishment that he deplores: he seems to be content with the Scottish form of establishment and with the post-2000 arrangements in Swedish, which fall far short of disestablishment.

Weller soundly points out that establishment is not something fixed and static, but rather is a relationship that is constantly evolving. It should not be identified with ‘The Establishment’ in the sense of some shadowy group of ex-public school cronies who pull strings behind the scenes and live off the fat of the land. Rather, as he suggests, establishment refers to the recognition given by the state to a particular religious body and to the faith for which it stands. In the United Kingdom the established church (in England) is embedded in a complex constitutional matrix and has deep cultural roots. This makes him reluctant to advocate wholesale disestablishment and his recipe for the future is not easy to discern. I am not clear what alternative he is proposing or what the ‘change’, that is said to be so urgent, concretely consists in.

The book’s use of statistics (particularly the 2001 National Census results) to support its arguments is generally well-researched, with useful reference to the Home Office studies. However, the attempt to nuance the figures into ‘community membership’, ‘church membership’ and ‘church attendance’ is confusing and is confined to Christian Research’s Religious Trends figures, which need to be handled with care. The three measures are not defined, but it is assumed that each of them measures the same phenomena across the various denominations. Church attendance and adherence for the Roman Catholic Church and for the Church of England are rather different. Attendance at mass should not be equated with the membership of the Roman Catholic Church; and Church Electoral Roll figures are not intended to indicate Church of England adherence. The Church of England is bound to come out comparatively unfavourably if church-going is limited to usual Sunday attendance and ‘membership’ is based on the Church Electoral Roll. Only brief mentions are made of the European Values Survey, of David Hay’s research and of the British Social Attitudes material. Attitudinal surveys (by Gallup and Opinion Research Business) endorse the Census results and point to about half the population of England being Anglican (this assessment is supported by David Voas’ demographical analysis of baptism rates). The Church of England website provides attitudinal surveys alongside analysis of statistical data. It is excellent to deploy empirical