
I wanted to like this book – and there is much about it to like. It is driven by a passionate concern for the well-being of the Anglican Communion. It calls Anglicans to profound spiritual renewal before they confront institutional reform; in particular it argues that unless there is spiritual and personal work before the Covenant comes into force, it will be harmful rather than helpful. Many of the values Cavanagh articulates – hospitality, transformation, reconciliation, dynamic rather than rigid theological convictions – are absolutely pertinent. It stresses the profound Anglican conviction about the God-given unity of the Church, which it is our responsibility to embody. It offers a rich theology of the dynamic nature of God’s interaction with the Church, thus attempting to take seriously the crucial but often veiled issue of development in Anglicanism. It does all this with particular focus on the work of Hooker – his method of allowing Scripture and Tradition to mutually inform and critique each other, under the primacy of Scripture, thereby allowing for theological and ecclesial development; and also F.D Maurice – his stress on the primacy of the ‘spiritual society’, which is the Church, over specific convictions (those familiar with Maurice will know his contempt for theological and ecclesial ‘systems’). And it does all of this from a strong scholarly basis, (a Cambridge PhD under the supervision of the rightly revered Professor Dan Hardy), commended with a warm preface from the Archbishop of Canterbury, one of the doctoral examiners – an extraordinary compliment! Why then my reservations?

Given the current tensions in the Communion and in the Church of England, I think it incumbent on an Anglican author to be clear about where they stand, not so that they are pigeon-holed but rather to show that they are aware of their own locatedness; that they are not imagining themselves to be ‘impartial’. Cavanagh does not do this. Indeed she attempts to present herself as concerned for both ‘sides’ in the disputes. From the opening page: ‘the unconditional acceptance and honouring of all those who seek to know Jesus Christ and to belong to his Church forms the basis of what it means to be a Christian and an Anglican’ (we will reflect on this statement later). And again: ‘... the issues surrounding sexuality and gender roles in the Church are perceived by many to threaten the very foundations on which the hospitality of God’s Church is built – the holiness of the word
of God in scripture and the holiness of the human person as loved and accepted by God in his Son.’

This looks wonderfully even-handed, but in fact Cavanagh is clearly of the progressive persuasion, as the first quoted sweeping and historically contentious sentence makes clear. Classic Anglicanism was not marked by ‘unconditional acceptance’ but rather by welcome to the repentant sinner: see A. Null *Thomas Cranmer’s Doctrine of Repentance* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000). To be of the progressive persuasion is fine, but it needs to be acknowledged.

Further, because Anglicans use the medium of history to argue about their identity and current problems, good Anglican scholarship will be rigorous and ruthlessly honest with itself about its historical judgements and where it is arguing for difference to former accepted positions (this is the point of several essays in S. Platten (ed.), *Anglicanism and the Western Christian Tradition* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003)). Above all, it will not make sweeping anachronistic claims. So Cavanagh writes:

> The existence of the Church of England depended on the willingness of all parties to respect the integrity of those with whom they disagreed so that the Church of England came into being, and relied for its continued existence, on dialogue, understanding and an implicit recognition of a shared need for forgiveness.’ (p.12)

To which the response must be: this is an account of the very best of nineteenth century Anglican insights (F. D. Maurice?) but it is difficult to see it embodied in the centralising theology and liturgy of the Reformation or the expulsions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Thomas Cranmer (not cited in the index), Queen Elizabeth I and Richard Hooker had a different method of maintaining church unity, based on a clear and relatively simple set of fundamentals allied to disciplined liturgy and the weight of state authority. A symptom of Cavanagh’s eisegesis is her account of the *via media*. She describes it (p.14) as the ‘ability to hold together extreme views’, whereas in fact it is the ability to avoid extreme views by holding to the wise middle ground: a quite different thing, which would have very different consequences if applied to modern Anglicanism. In brief, Cavanagh has such a fixed view of how Anglicanism ought to be, that she reinterprets its history to make it agree with her (she is not alone amongst Anglican scholars in doing this).

I summarise Cavanagh’s very strong interpretative historical framework: she argues that the Early Church and Reformation Church became