Article Review

Church, State and Society in England

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As Robert Morris points out, the United Kingdom is wrongly believed by many to be a ‘secular democracy’. In fact, both England and Scotland have established churches. Establishment not only confers privileges and responsibilities upon the Church of England but also requires the Sovereign to ‘join in communion’ with it. In the context of twenty-first-century Britain this situation inevitably prompts calls for change – at least to detailed aspects of the constitutional position (current examples include the exclusion of those married to Roman Catholics from the throne and the place in Parliament of 26 bishops).

In order to decide how to respond to calls for change in a changing context, governments need both accurate factual information and policy advice that is academically rigorous, politically astute and impartial. Unfortunately *Church and State in 21st Century Britain*, though edited and mostly written by a former Home Office civil servant with a doctorate who became an honorary senior research fellow in a university department of political science, meets only the first of these tests.
Chapter 2 very usefully surveys developments since 1800. England moved from religious toleration to religious freedom, and Church and state became identified as separate structures and distinct organizations. The state expanded into spheres (especially of social policy) that were previously the Church’s province and withdrew from involvement in church affairs. Only minor corrections are needed: in 1800 clerical discipline was not ‘entirely of internal concern to the Church of England’ – Church and state were not yet that separate; the last significant state subvention (£500,000 for new churches) was in 1824 not 1821; and, despite its name, the 1974 Worship and Doctrine Measure gave the General Synod authority not to determine (change) Church of England doctrine but merely to decide how assent is given to it.

Chapters 3 and 4 consider the elements of establishment: monarchy (focusing largely on the exclusion of Roman Catholics from the throne), Parliament (church legislation and the parliamentary roles of the Second Church Estates Commissioner and of bishops in the House of Lords), Crown appointments, the ecclesiastical courts, special licences, notaries public and Lambeth degrees. That Morris’ account of changes to the appointments system that were in train when he was writing is incomplete and somewhat speculative is understandable; the lack of reference to the effects of the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 on the ecclesiastical courts is not. Precision is occasionally lacking: the Sovereign’s obligation to ‘join in communion with the Church of England’ (ie receive holy communion) is explained correctly but then repeatedly mis-described as a ‘requirement to be “in communion...” ’ (ie belong to a church in communion). The Crown does not ‘appoint’ diocesan bishops but ‘nominates’ candidates for election by the college of canons. Crown appointments are exempt from many but not all provisions of the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986.

Chapter 5 (‘Financing Establishment in England’) may cause the reader to wonder whether Morris’ approach is sufficiently dispassionate and rigorous. One section is entitled ‘Direct funding’ but demonstrates that there is none. (The conclusion that in Continental Europe there is ‘state facilitation/subvention far more extensive than in the United Kingdom’ lends credence to the Bishop of London’s claim that ‘The Church of England is, in financial terms, one of the most disestablished churches in Europe.’) A lengthy discussion of chaplaincies under the heading ‘Indirect funding’ offers no evidence that the churches benefit financially from the state’s employment of clergy (trained largely at the churches’ expense) to serve state employees and the residents of state institutions. Morris nevertheless