

Preface

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND (C of E) has featured frequently in the media in recent years. The dominant references have been to its slow and painful progress towards recognizing that women and gays can and should be priests and bishops. Headlines have highlighted predictions of schism, as reactionary elements claim that they cannot remain part of an institution which takes even these faltering steps. Consequently, there is a public perception of an institution being dragged kicking and screaming into the twenty-first century, still hankering after a patriarchal society with misogynistic and homophobic undertones.

I will argue in this book that these perceptions are a consequence of the relationships between the institution of the C of E and certain movements within it. To further their specific aims, the latter have taken full advantage of the institution's relatively democratic structures and procedures, while enjoying the use of its resources. The consequence for the C of E has been a huge expenditure of time and effort to keep movements within the institutional fold, when it could have been doing other much more important things. Furthermore, the compromises that it has made in doing so have resulted in major reputational costs.

How have movements consisting of a relatively small proportion of the regular C of E worshippers and priests succeeded in achieving this impact? Having chosen two movements from the Evangelical wing of the C of E, the Calvinists and the Charismatics, I first briefly outline their origins and histories. Then I explore how they are organized, revealing a dynamic mix of leadership formation, leaders themselves, large congregations, and specific organizations and pressure groups within them. Next I analyze the nature of their respective cultures—their beliefs, values, and norms of behavior—using their talks, articles, practices, and websites as

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examples. These may surprise readers by their aggressive tone, or by their resemblance to contemporary entertainment products.

Why are these two movements the most “successful” elements in the C of E at present (excepting cathedrals)? The Calvinists provide a highly distinctive and dominant social identity that consciously reacts against the C of E’s perceived surrender to secularism and heresy. Such an identity provides certainty in an uncertain world, and the self-esteem that comes from knowing that you are right and are one of God’s faithful few. The Charismatics, on the other hand, incorporate many of the products, practices, and values of contemporary late modern culture. However, their preference for ecstatic forms of worship, claims of miraculous healing, and pre-modern worldview are sufficiently counter-cultural to limit their attractiveness to many modern people with complex identities.

How will the C of E deal with each of them? I conclude that making concessions to the Calvinists has been disastrous. The leadership, I predict, will in the future concentrate on the world outside the C of E more than on its own internal affairs, addressing issues of justice, poverty, and climate change. It will regain control of the agenda so as to relegate the favorite issues of the Calvinists to a proper place. They may continue politicking in the Anglican Communion, but the C of E will manage its continuing conflict with them so as to reduce their public profile.

The Charismatics, on the other hand, will be more fully incorporated. Their evangelistic skills and motivation and their recently increased concern with community issues render them potentially powerful allies in the C of E leadership’s strategic direction. But they will have to moderate their emphasis on individual congregations and personal celebrity “ministries” at the expense of the responsibilities of institutional membership.

There is, however, an elephant in the crypt—globalization. Every social institution now has to take into account the three basic features of globalization (connectivity, “glocalization,” and global consciousness) if it is to survive. What are the implications of globalization for the C of E’s future direction? I conclude by arguing that the necessary internal reform of organization and finance will not be sufficient. Nor will its laudable attempts to address national injustices. Only a global influence will do.

I am an outsider in many senses to all these issues. I am not a theologian but a social psychologist, and try to wear that hat, taking a social science perspective throughout. And I am not an Anglican but a Methodist, though hopefully retaining some insight into the realities of denominational life

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in an established church. I am deeply grateful to David Calvert and Linda Woodhead for their generous help, advice, and encouragement, without which the book would be littered with theological and sociological errors. The many which doubtless remain are all down to me.

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