

Introduction

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This short book aims to appeal to anyone with an interest in Anglican history and identity. It does not examine institutions, or structures, or the rapidly changing winds of ecclesiastical politics. Instead it explores the teaching of sixteen individuals – significant men and women who have been part of the Anglican movement, spread over many centuries. These vignettes are not mini-biographies and do not focus upon their careers (which can be found in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and many history textbooks), but rather ask questions about their theological passions and convictions. How did they understand their relationship with God, the incarnation and atonement of Christ, the role of the Holy Spirit, the authority of the Bible and the mission of the church? What was driving them? What did they teach? What was their vision for God's people? How did they work out their Christian discipleship in practice? In short, this book aims to get to 'the heart of faith' of these famous Anglicans.

Of course, a volume which is dominated by 'dead white men' cannot claim to be representative of worldwide Anglicanism, which is a vibrant international phenomenon. The focus of this book is limited to the Church of England, which is but one small part of this diverse movement. The centre of influence in the Anglican world has shifted in the last generation from Britain and North America to the Global South, where dynamic evangelism and exponential church growth are most often seen. It is no longer Canterbury which calls the tune. Nevertheless the history and roots of the Church of England go back much further and much deeper than most other Anglican provinces. The 'Anglican Communion' is a new concept and the earliest known use of the phrase dates from only 1847. 'Anglican-ism' was also coined in the early nineteenth century. But *Ecclesia Anglicana* (the church of the English) has been in existence for a millennium and a half, since the Roman and Celtic missions under Augustine and Columba respectively, which established Christianity on

British shores in the early middle ages.

The sixteen men and women examined in these chapters lived and worked, preached and wrote, over the many generations since that time – from the late seventh century to the early twenty-first. They witnessed the widest range of political, cultural and ecclesial developments and traumas, from Viking Invasion to Peasants' Revolt, Renaissance to Reformation, Civil War to Enlightenment, and beyond. The English worlds which they inhabited were in many ways unrecognisably different. Their life situations were also diverse – from the celibate monk to the married mother of eighteen children; from the innovative scientist to the captivating poet; from the urbane scholar to the popular preacher to the tenacious politician. Yet they held in common their loyal membership of the Church of England.

What of their theological diversity? This book does not claim to reflect the full range of opinions held within the Church of England, in all their colourful confusion. Evangelicals predominate, though by no means all can be categorised in that way. Think for example, of the Venerable Bede, Archbishop John Peckham, Richard Hooker, Robert Boyle, Susanna Wesley or C.S. Lewis, who came from different streams of Anglican thinking. Furthermore, those evangelical Anglicans who do make an appearance were far from homogenous – contrast, for example, the divergent attitudes of J.C. Ryle and Frances Ridley Havergal to the holiness movement of the nineteenth century; or the disparate approaches to the charismatic movement and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as represented by John Stott and David Watson. Nevertheless, for all their theological diversity and distinctives, the men and women introduced in these pages showed by their lives and teaching a clear commitment to a generous Christian orthodoxy. They disagreed, sometimes sharply, on many secondary issues, but they held the Christian essentials in common. They force us to think afresh about what it means to be a member of the Church of England, and about what lies at the heart of Anglican identity.