

of doctrine. While the influence is no doubt the key to understanding Strong's theology, defining it is more difficult and readers may leave the work knowing ethical monism's significance, but left confused on what exactly it is. However, that could be due to the complexity of German idealism in general. Overall, Aloisi has broadened our understanding of the nuance of American Christianity's crisis between orthodoxy and modern thought.

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*Neville Figgis, CR. His life, thought and significance.* Edited by Paul Avis. (Anglican-Episcopal Theology and History, 7.) Pp. xviii + 260. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2022. €55 (paper). 978 90 04 50311 3; 2405 7576  
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John Neville Figgis (1866–1919) was a prominent scholar-clergyman of the early twentieth century, a pioneer of the history of political ideas and a leading figure in the 'pluralist' turn in British political thought before the outbreak of the First World War. While his training as an historian had been influenced at Cambridge by three leading historians of the Church and State – Acton, Creighton and Maitland – he followed an idiosyncratic route of his own. His wide historical canvasses were drawn across the medieval, early modern and modern periods, searching for a past that could assist his contemporaries in understanding the distinctiveness of their own era and the forces that had shaped it. One contributor, Robert Ingram, cites Figgis's arresting conception of the past as an 'unending transformation scene', the active threads of which the historian has somehow to master with incomplete evidence (p. 98). At the same time, Figgis was a Christian apologist, developing a theology of the incarnation and an ecclesiology centred on both the Word and the sacraments, reflecting the catholic Church's essence as the living body of Christ (p. 141). He did so through sermons and lectures, most of which were collected and published by Macmillan during his lifetime.

This volume of essays on Figgis marks the centenary of his death in 1919, and is the first full-length study of Figgis's life and thought since the biography by Maurice Tucker in 1950. Together, they bring out the breadth of his interests, both intellectual and spiritual, and draw on the range of his publications, some of which have not been used before. The latter is particularly apparent in Ingram's essay, which skilfully pieces together Figgis's 'English story' in the transition from the early modern to the modern world using writings from across the different categories of his *oeuvre* (p. 95). For Figgis, this period represented a struggle for authority between Church and State, from which the state – in its modern guise as a unitary, territorial sovereign – emerged strengthened rather than weakened through pursuing a policy of toleration (p. 119).

As James Alexander emphasises in another trenchant essay, Figgis's historical predisposition was anti-Whig, rejecting suggestions that the present exists in a relationship of seamless continuity with the past, a past that has been read from standpoints infused with political partisanship. Alexander coins the suggestive term

'Figgist' to capture a form of history writing that is neither Whig nor Hegelian in affirming any finality in the present. Instead, he emphasises Figgis's achievement both in recovering aspects of the past that have been lost and making them meaningful to the present, though in a way that undermines confidence in the permanence of existing society. One of the consequences of Figgist history is the need for a greater recognition not only of the 'minor' figures that have shaped political argument in history but – as Alexander makes clear – the anachronism through which the canon of 'major' figures has been constructed and taught in modern universities (p. 75). In placing the concept of utility and the state at the forefront of analysis of early modern thought, older questions concerning law and the relations between Church and State that continued to shape political ideas, not least constitutionalism, have been largely ignored.

It is clear from these essays that Figgist history and Figgis's 'pluralist' political theory converged in defending a concept of freedom that recognised the autonomous nature of groups such as Churches against what he judged to be the odious doctrine of state sovereignty; this conceived groups as mere 'fictions'. Much hinged on a questioning attitude to the authority of the state, as rooted in claims to absolutism (pp. 136–7). Figgis's conception of authority is explored by Paul Avis in a chapter on Figgis's ecclesiology and its roots in the constitutionalist movement of the early modern Church. This is developed further in a chapter by Andrew Grosso on Figgis's interest in Nietzsche: in emphasising the importance of conscience to authority, Figgis rejected Nietzsche's conception of individual conscience as the arbiter of authority as well as the state's conception of authority as existing in abstraction from individual conscience. In contrast, for Figgis conscience and authority were indissolubly linked (p. 167).

Quite how this would work in practice is unclear, especially given the power struggle in the Church of England between organised 'parties' at the time Figgis was writing and his strong sympathies with the English Church Union, the leading pressure group for Anglo-Catholics; he did not address the difficulties of defining the limits of authority and conscience in non-partisan terms. However, his conception of authority underlines the premium he attached to freedom and constitutionalism; also, his heightened sense of the social nature of human beings, immersed in small societies that made little room for liberal thought.

This was the theme of one of his best known works, *Churches and the modern state* (1913). He was prepared to abandon the Church's claim to authority within the state over matters such as marriage and divorce in return for the state's recognition of its authority over its members in these and other areas of social and moral life. Curiously, he felt that the question of Establishment was irrelevant to this issue if the state recognised the Church's autonomy and capacity for self-development. His readiness to relinquish the Church's national responsibilities struck some contemporaries as a gift to its heathen rivals; in a subtle essay in this volume that echoes this sceptical line, Ephraim Radner questions Figgis's conception of the family as a corporation like others, able to resist the complex pressures of the political process.

Radner's critique raises questions as to whether Figgis's vision of the state as a mediating body between autonomous associations can accommodate a conception of the common good. Two other contributors take different positions on this issue.

Elaine Graham, using Habermas's conception of the 'postsecular' age, finds support in his work for the role which faith-based organisations can play in shaping public discourse. In contrast, William Cavanaugh follows Rowan Williams's interpretation of Figgis as excluding any common values in society, thus ruling out a model of society based on principles of 'subsidiarity', in which authority is delegated downwards to subordinate powers: this conflicts with Figgis's conception of the inherent life of groups. Williams's advocacy in 2008 of a plurality of legal systems as a way of accommodating faith-based values in multicultural societies reflects the logic of Figgis's position on religion in relation to the wider nation. This is reinforced in Williams's foreword to the volume in which he affirms Figgis's belief that Establishment does not in itself signify any 'given natural affinities between the Christian and Catholic faith, on the one hand, and the prevailing mores of the English nation, on the other' (p. ix).

This was much disputed in Figgis's time: one of his staunchest critics, Herbert Hensley Henson, maintained vehemently that the Church of England was national or it was nothing, and that the nation was unknowable in the absence of the Church. Some such acceptance informed the Church's agreement on the baptismal vote, rather than the more exclusive confirmational vote for which those associated with Figgis pressed following the report of the Archbishops' Commission on Church and State (1916). The conflict in the Church on this issue is not touched on in the volume, although Jeremy Morris acknowledges Figgis's rejection of the Hookerian ideal of the Church in an essay which explores his affinities with Burke; Avis notes the strength of Creighton's convictions regarding establishment, in contrast to Figgis; and Stephen Spencer underlines Figgis's support for William Temple's Life and Liberty movement, which he claims – with some over-simplification – resulted in the passage of the Enabling Act of 1919.

All the contributors concerned with his contemporary relevance take the loss of the national perspective on the Church that Figgis represents as a given. There is greater interest in his influence on 'Blue Labour', for example, and in his relation to a tradition of Anglican social theology that can be recruited against the 'atomizing pressure of neo-liberal ideology and the violent reactions of a resurgent populism [that] have grown stronger and more threatening in many parts of the world' (p. 173). The lack of critical engagement with Figgis the prophet and controversialist is perhaps the main weakness of the book. Peter Sedgwick's characterisations of him as 'extraordinary', 'ground-breaking' and 'deeply brilliant' in these respects are not always convincing. His status as a 'public intellectual', as asserted by Sedgwick, is also questionable. The evidence rests mainly on Figgis's influence on Harold Laski and G. D. H. Cole, and their 'quite extraordinary' influence in turn on Marc Stears more recently. However, beyond church and some university circles, Figgis had little direct impact on public debate. In Henson's view, he failed to engage his American audiences. This is not to minimise his achievement, but to make a plea for perspective.

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