

Jeremy Morris, *A People's Church: A History of the Church of England* (London: Profile Books, 2022), pp. xv + 464. ISBN 978 1 78125 249 9, e-ISBN 978 1 78283 053 5.

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A history of the Church of England as a people's Church sounded new and interesting. Over the past fifty years much work has been done on religion in early modern and modern England and Wales at the local level, questioning previous orthodoxies about the Church of England. Jeremy Morris himself has published in this area, in his doctoral work on Croydon in the later nineteenth century and on the high church revival in the Church of England. This accessible and largely non-technical account of the Church of England (which until 1920 included Wales) provides 20 twenty-page chronological and thematic chapters based on judicious evaluations of recent scholarship in these areas. It is not a mere survey: there are numerous fresh insights and interpretations.

In his preface Dr Morris helpfully points out that prior to the late nineteenth century, or perhaps later, religion was no optional feature of life: it was so bound into people's culture and values that it provided the overarching framework within which people lived their lives and interpreted the world. Religion was woven in and through people's lives forming their 'common sense'. He points out that the Church of England was the Church for English (and until 1920 Welsh) people, and for British overseas territories, and that its context has helped to shape and form its ideas and practices, which have changed over time.

He begins with Henry VIII's Act of Supremacy, and points out the king claimed no novelty and that systems and personnel remained in place. Like German and Scandinavian royal reformations it was rather conservative. The complexities of the Reformation period are well handled, although Thomas Cromwell's part is not much mentioned, compared with Cranmer's. However, Elizabeth didn't need to imprison many of Mary's bishops, to achieve a Protestant settlement (p. 51) for, as Diarmaid MacCulloch has pointed out, providentially, a pandemic removed most of them. People's memories are short and sixteenth-century generations were also short so Reformation changes settled in fairly quickly and Cranmer's Prayer Book, modestly revised in 1559, was conservative, compared with really reformed liturgies in Scotland and elsewhere, providing traditional daily prayers, an ordered lectionary and psalter, saints' days, and liturgies for rites of passage. However, some people thought reform had not gone far enough, and others thought it had gone too far.

There were, as since the days of St Paul, tensions in the Church's life. Elizabeth held it together, as Dr Morris points out, mostly by inaction and longevity and James I by pragmatism. 'Puritanism' and 'Laudianism' were themselves broad spectrums of opinion, but Charles I, unwisely seeking to impose the strictest 'Laudian' model, alienated 'people' who, after several generations of moderately reformed ways, did not like such innovations. Nor did they like the Commonwealth's really reformed religious regime. It helped people to appreciate the Prayer Book, as Judith Maltby and others have shown. Old church ways were rapidly reinstated after 1660 along with the king and bishops, and the lay, elected, House of Commons strictly

enforced conformity, firmly excluding those unwilling to accept it, so establishing a dissenting tradition apart from the Church. Nor did the people like James II's unsubtle attempt to re-Catholicise the Church of England. They mostly supported William of Orange's invading army to ally themselves with mostly Protestant nations against Catholic and absolutist France. Anti-Catholicism had become part of English people's religion.

The focus of the final eleven chapters drifts somewhat from 'a People's Church'. After an excursion into cathedrals, which in the twenty-first century have, somewhat improbably, become 'destinations' for people of all sorts, the later chapters are a more conventional history about bishops and clergy, theological disputes and church parties, and attempts to render efficient the people of God in the face of recurring episcopal anxieties about the people's suspected drift into godlessness. It is well done and full of interesting insights, but doesn't really make the case for 'a People's Church'.

That's a pity, for much evidence has become available in the past fifty years about English and Welsh people's engagement with their established Church in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Bishops' visitation returns have been edited and published for dioceses the length and breadth of the land and numerous local and regional studies exist as theses, articles or books. These show lay people of all sorts and conditions went to church, although perhaps not every Sunday, listened to, made notes on, and bought and read sermons in huge numbers, and had daily prayers at home. They paid rates to maintain churches and paid tithes to maintain clergy, perhaps with a bit of grumbling, philanthropically cared about the spiritual and material well-being of poor people, and used church courts to settle disputes, especially in relation to defamation, marital and testamentary disputes.

In the nineteenth-century's diverse religious market-place people, especially the poor, as Dr Morris notes, went to church in large numbers, or, if worn down by work, sent their children to Sunday schools or National schools. The Church as he points out, held its own, and rich laypeople contributed vast sums to build and endow churches and schools and to fund overseas missions. Church people continued to initiate a high proportion of philanthropic initiatives. Nor, as Dr Morris makes clear, did this disappear in the twentieth century, as the evidence of chaplains in both world wars makes clear. More might have been said of the Church's engagement with technological developments throughout the whole period, especially printing producing literature for all levels of society, notably, for example, that low-key evangelistic tool, the parish magazine, reaching most households in many parishes. Lay people energetically raised funds to build new churches in suburban developments in the 1920s and 30s, and also continued to raise money for rebuilding churches and building new churches in the 1940s and subsequently.

The sharp decline in church attendance after 1960 is noted, but these statistics are a blunt instrument for registering religious allegiance and the Church's penetration of public life and charitable activities. Since 1970, funding clergy has almost entirely moved from inherited endowment income to voluntary lay contributions. Grossed up across parishes and dioceses such congregational giving is almost certainly the most successful voluntary fund-raising project in England. For the first time since the abolition of compulsory church rates in 1868, the Church receives very large

sums of public money from Historic England and the National Heritage Lottery Fund to maintain cathedrals and parish churches.

The Anglican Communion, arising from laypeople trading and settling overseas, is barely mentioned, nor are the large numbers of urban congregations that form mini-Anglican Communion. Good though this book is, an even better case could be made for the Church of England as a diverse *People's Church*. So far as any religious body is a 'people's Church' it is the Church of England, with its continuing local strength sadly disregarded, as Dr Morris notes by those tempted by a 'powerful centralised polity'.

W.M. Jacob  
London, UK

Paul Avis, *Theological Foundations of the Christian Church. I. Jesus and the Church: The Foundation of the Church in the New Testament and Modern Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2021), pp. xiv + 235. ISBN 9780567697493.

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*Jesus and the Church*, the first of a projected two-volume work, develops ideas that Paul Avis has worked on for almost 40 years. It aims to do two things. First, it offers a constructive overview of biblical language about the church. Second, it surveys Protestant, Catholic, and Anglican answers to the question, 'Is the church what Jesus meant to happen?' (p. 15). Each of these goals occupies roughly one half of the volume. Avis is unapologetically foundationalist in his approach. Although recognizing that, in the wake of post-structuralism, foundationalist appeals are generally derided, Avis counters that biblical imagery and the larger history of Christian hymnody render 'foundation' an inescapable ecclesiological concept.

The first half of the book is excellent. These five chapters offer much helpful introductory material for thinking about the Church. Drawing upon his earlier scholarship on metaphor, Avis compellingly defends asking whether and how Jesus is rightly described as foundational. Insofar as the history of Christian thought begins with Scripture, and insofar as the public reading of Scripture is liturgically central to all churches, the third and fourth chapters are worthy of especial note. The former explicates the English vocabulary for church, the relationship of Greek to English, and shifts in meaning through translation. The latter ranges across New Testament images of Christ and the Church, concluding that the Church is fundamentally corporate.

The second half of the book contains three chapters that respectively analyse Protestant, Catholic, and Anglican theologians from roughly the last 100 years. The goal is to look at the current state of ecclesiological thought. Here Avis is less consistent. Some authors receive more sustained analysis than others, but it is not clear why. For example, in the chapter on Protestantism, Avis covers Schleiermacher in 8 pages, von Harnack in 4, and Barth in 16. Why? The same inconsistency is found in the chapters on Catholic and Anglican theologians.