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Consecrated Pragmatism

The Mechanistic Blueprint in *Working as One Body*, the Report of the Archbishops' Commission on the Organisation of the Church of England

The Archbishops' Commission on the Organisation of the Church of England, chaired by the Bishop of Durham, Michael Turnbull, has proposed in its report, *Working as One Body*, a series of radical proposals to streamline and make more effective the central workings of the Church. Martyn Percy, in a wide-ranging critique, sees the proposals as fatally flawed in a number of ways. Power will be too concentrated, the thinking is unhelpfully 'managerialist', the blueprint for the Church is mechanistic. His greatest concern of all is that these proposals, if implemented, would herald the break-up of the Church of England as the established Church of the land in favour of an associational congregationalism.

ONE OF THE OLDEST JOKES about the Church of England goes like this. 'How many Anglicans does it take to change a light-bulb?' Answer: five – one to put in the new one and four to admire the old one. Typically, the joke is used to lampoon almost any institution beholden to its past and is almost infinitely adaptable. For Anglicans however, there is an irony in the quip: admiration of the past is an important and necessary feature of their ecclesiology and theology. Without tradition, structure, history and liturgy, the Church of England would not be. Its rootedness in the past is part of its fabric and value. Consequently, anything that transforms the past or dispenses with it is bound to raise questions about identity for the Church of England. This is the main issue to be addressed in this paper. Part one of the paper addresses itself to a critique of the Turnbull Report; part two begins to tease out some alternative visions. I should also make it clear that this paper is in no way an argument for maintaining the *status quo*. At least one of the benefits the Turnbull Report has brought is the throwing of the spotlight on structural reform, which many (including me) agree is necessary.

Working as One Body [1] is the outcome of the Archbishops' Commission on the organisation of the Church of England.[2] The Commission was headed by Michael

1 Church House Publishing, London 1995.

2 I gratefully acknowledge the Very Revd Colin Slee in encouraging a critique, and also the help of Dr Anthony Bash, the Revd Prof. John Bowker, the Revd Prof. Daniel Hardy and Prof. Richard Roberts for their comments on an earlier draft.

Turnbull, Bishop of Durham, and is intended to offer a 'blueprint' for ordering the governing and consultative bodies of the Church of England. The report is, in its own words, 'a more comprehensive review of the national institutions of the Church than has ever before been undertaken... if implemented, it would radically change the ways in which the Church of England operates... [redefining] Episcopal leadership and synodical governance'.

The proposals include swallowing up a variety of long-established committees that have very particular social and ecclesial tasks (e.g., the boards of social responsibility, education, etc), and 'streamlining' their breadth and diversity under one Board of Mission, presided over by one Chairman.[3] The Chairman would be a member of a new National Council which consisted of some Bishops and leading managers from business and government.[4] The report was 'noted' by the General Synod in November 1995, and is due to be debated and promulgated in 1996. At present, it does not look as though the people and parishes of the Church of England will get much (if any) opportunity to debate the report. Understandably, there is some concern about this in Synod and beyond.

A brief critique

So, what are the principal problems with a report like this? First, the way ecclesial power is handled as the basis for the report is at serious fault. *Working As One Body* proposes the concentration of ecclesial power in the hands of the Bishops (or just a few of them?) and a small bourgeois power elite (p 47ff). Whilst this might make the church 'sharper' it may also make it narrower, since the guiding philosophy seems to be 'let the managers manage'. There is an irony here for Anglicans: it is not quite congregational enough in its polity to 'let the people manage the people', because it is an Episcopal church. At the same time however, it is not Episcopal enough to devolve power to just a few: the *via media* rules. Thus, one of the major problems for *Working as One Body* is that it posits power in the hands of an élite class: 'the thinkers', or those with certain kinds of managerial skills. This has been successfully argued against by a number of Anglican theologians as being contrary to the true Anglican ethos, besides being an abuse of power.[5]

Second, the vision for episcopacy can be said, in some sense, to be distorted. *Working as One Body* is littered with phrases such as 'the Bishop-in-Synod', 'leadership' and 'authority'. There are serious problems with the way the Episcopate is treated here. For example, by using Hooker in a selective manner, *Working as One Body* conflates 'Bishop' with the (biblical) metaphor 'Head' of the body, which is Christ. But Hooker uses 'head' mainly to describe the supreme Governor of the Church of England (namely the King or Queen), which he then deliberately conflates

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3 I do mean 'Chairman' here. The report lacks any finesse in the direction of political correctness.

4 However, one wonders quite how the Secretary of State for Education and Employment will respond to letters from the established Church headed 'Mission': is that really how the thousands of church schools in England primarily perceive themselves?

5 See for example R. Roberts, 'Lord, Bondsman and Churchman: Power, Integrity and Identity', in *On Being the Church: Essays on the Christian Community*, eds D. Hardy & C. Gunton, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1989.

with Christ.[6] Students of late sixteenth and seventeenth century history will recall that the monarchs enjoyed the privilege of governing by 'divine right' and overruling an elected and representative Parliament when they saw fit, which partly led to the English Revolution of the 1640s. The report's use of 'head' could lead to a form of 'divine right' being established in the contemporary episcopate in a similar way to the Stuart monarchs. This may not be the intention of *Working as One Body*, but it is the likely result. In terms of ecclesiology, one would begin to see a kind of papal authority being invested in the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the authority of the Curia being invested in the National Council.

Related to this second point, and underlining my basic theological and ecclesiological concerns, I also have some general sociological questions about the proposed nature of the new ecclesial polity. Sociologically speaking, and following writers such as Weber and Sohm, it does seem that *Working as One Body* might unintentionally invest too much in the *charism* of the individual Bishop. Concentrating power in the hands of a few requires a degree of charisma if the power is to be held responsibly (or authoritatively) and shared dynamically. If this does not happen, severe routinisation of charisma and over-management of people and resources can lead to fissure. Or, it can render the ecclesial community permanently cautious and conservative.

Third, there are some wider ecclesial perspectives that need deeper consideration. Almost since its inception, Anglicanism has worked with a 'quadrilateral pattern' in its moral reasoning and for arriving at provisional theological truth claims.[7] The fourfold relationship between scripture, tradition, reason and experience (or culture) is sacred to the ecology of Anglican identity. *Working as One Body* would disturb the delicate balance of this ecology by adding a fifth dimension – namely enhanced episcopal authority – *or*, it would place the Bishops over the quadrilateral as its presiders. Ironically, either of these positions could allow the Church to become hostage to congregational or ultra-catholic forces. It is a path that potentially leads to a capitulation to conservatism.

Added to this, and following Hooker, primacy must be mutual and consensual. The erosion of clergy and laity rights implicit in *Working as One Body* – Bishops or Council as 'head', the rest the subservient body – transforms the Church of England into an Episcopalian denomination. If you like, the Church of England now becomes a church in England. If this vision becomes reality, English Anglicans risk marginalisation and the loss of their (often unarticulated) socio-ecclesial horizons. More serious however, is what the combination of marginalisation under the governance of a small power elite might bring. Schism is certainly one option, over a range of theological, moral or personal issues, which in turn could lead to the break-up of the National Church Service (p 105).[8]

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6 See R. Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed A. McGrade, CUP, Cambridge 1989, pp 158-176, 161-175.

7 See *The Anglican Tradition*, eds G. Evans & J. Wright, SPCK, London 1991, pp 343, 355, 387, 450. Of course, the actual Quadrilateral is Scripture, Creeds, Sacraments and the Historic Ministry.

8 See my paper 'Falling Out of Love: Recent Anglican Schisms Compared' in a forthcoming issue of *The Journal of Contemporary Religion*.

One of the issues that the Report seems to miss is Hooker's broader vision of the 'body of Christ', which extended beyond the gathered congregation. The 'commonwealth' model was his preferred mode of socially describing the mystical nature of the church.[9] *Working as One Body* works with a limited notion of 'body', and a distorted notion of how the parts of the body or commonwealth relate to each other. Who defines the 'head', and in what sense is that part of the body superior to the others? Thus, there is an inversion of Paul's vision in 1 Corinthians 12 in the report as a whole, which is very curious, given its title. Indeed, we can go further here and ask why 'body' and 'head' occur as the choice metaphors to describe the church in the report? There are many other images and metaphors in the NT to choose from (bride, vine, etc.). The notion of a 'body' always invites deferment to a 'head' in contemporary thinking, since we are used to imagining our personal 'centre' as somehow being cognitive – in the mind. Thus, a hegemony *naturally* arises when this image is overplayed or used exclusively: perhaps other metaphors might counteract this?

Another issue that the report appears to miss is that management and efficiency are not at the 'heart' of leadership as portrayed in the NT. Instead, service and sacrifice are presented as 'models', mirroring the *kenosis* of Christ on the Cross (Phil. 2:5ff). The 'head' or 'manager' of the early disciples was the one who, according to the fourth evangelist, took a towel and washed his disciples feet (John 13:1-11). The Son of Man who came 'to serve' (*diakonesai*, Mark 10:45) is the one who calls Christians to do likewise. In terms of leadership and a hegemony of power, Jesus rebukes his disciples thus: 'it shall not be so amongst you' (Mark 10:43). What, in effect, seems to be the problem here is the use of biblical language and metaphors, yet in contexts and with meanings which have been detached from those in the NT's own self-understanding. 'Bishop', 'body', 'head', 'power' and 'authority' are indeed all words that occur in the NT, yet mostly in the context of service and suffering. Not so in the report, where the words have been linked with management and efficiency.

In short, *Working as One Body* attempts to offer a 'mechanistic' blueprint – 'the rationalisation of congregational process and the animation of social will to achieve results' that lacks a 'symbolic', 'organic' or 'contextual' vision.[10] The first three chapters do not actually inform the report, and in spite of their periodic genuflection to a symbolic and organic blueprint, they are surpassingly weak in their ecclesiology. The irony of *Working as One Body* is that its bold vision necessitates a restriction of ecclesial horizons in the interests of concentrating and managing resources. The report is right to deconstruct the history of Synod (pp 61ff), and question the working arrangements for Boards, Dioceses and Deaneries: but the basis of the document still feels aggressively dialectical, failing to comprehend the mystical, dispersed nature of Christ's body on earth. Thus, although a rationalising document, it is not a document of *faith*: this is no *Lumen Gentium*, but a bourgeois-management-

9 Hooker, *Laws*, pp 129ff.

10 See J. Hopewell, *Congregation*, SCM, London 1987, for a *severe* critique of mechanistic approaches to ecclesiology. A sharper sociological critique of the dynamic I am describing can be found in George Ritzer's *The McDonaldization of Society* (revised edn), Sage Publishing, London 1996.

led bid for the centralisation and control of power. In effect, we are looking at a document that is pure ideology, with a theological *gloss*.[11] Laity, parish clergy and those beyond the 'body' (but who are served by it) ought to be deeply concerned about the implications of the report if it is implemented.

In *Working as One Body*, we are possibly witnessing the first steps in disestablishment, the actual break-up of the National Church Service, and a collapse into systems of ecclesial management that borrow their ethos from a culture of privatisation, local (and often non-accountable) 'Trusts' and a small, supreme central authority that can govern at whim or will.[12] Politically, this model has already been imposed on local government, the health service and in education, but it is a debatable point as to who gains from these reforms.[13] The report is justly concerned about financial costs and managerial effectiveness; but the counter-costs in terms of ethos should also be weighed – more may be lost than gained. If there is to be a new kind of 'head', the price should be fully costed in terms of human resources, not just financial expediency.

I have described the report as a 'mechanistic blueprint' because its focus is 'programme effectiveness'. James Hopewell in his excellent analysis of different types of ecclesiology based on structural critiques of narrative, points out that mechanistic approaches to the church occur when contextual visions are lost.[14] Typically, a contextual ecclesiology is concerned with how it relates to its environs. It sees the church and world as a woven fabric that shares a variety of strands, yet also has an obligation to somehow stand apart from society, yet not in a way that removes it from its deep and implicit social interconnections. Closely allied to this vision is the organic perspective, which is also concerned with 'style, grace and social cohesion'. Hopewell notes that these liberal-incarnate visions have given way to mechanistic and image-led (symbolic) ecclesiological blueprints. This is partly due to the specialisation and particularity encouraged by postmodernism, but also because many religious responses to pluralism and secularisation are in fact quite pragmatic. (Indeed, as we have already noted, few are *genuinely* theological; most are ideological, with theology added for legitimisation.) Of course, it is necessary to consecrate this pragmatism so the church can adopt it, but this often amounts to little more than the sacralisation of marketing, management or communicative techniques. Critically, the supporting philosophy of the agency or tool being used is left unaddressed.

In spite of these major reservations, it is important to stress that there is a need for some reform. The governance of the Church of England is far from perfect, and some sort of rationalising is certainly required: the question is, what kind? There

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11 For a discussion of the difference between an ideology with a theological *gloss*, as opposed to a proper, constructive theology, see my *Farmington Paper* (Harris Manchester College, Oxford 1997), 'Is There a Modern Charismatic Theology?'

12 See my 'The Churchgoers Charter', *Signs of the Times*, January 1993, pp 5-8. Indeed, the Synod has been warned about the link between the Turnbull Report and 'disestablishment... by stealth'. Michael Alison MP, *The Independent*, 14/02/96, p 6.

13 For a discussion of the ambiguities of privatising utilities in the public domain, see Will Hutton, *The State We're In*, Vintage, London 1995, pp 217ff.

14 Hopewell, *Congregation*, pp 19ff.

have been some signs recently that other critics of *Working as One Body* are hoping to adopt, adapt and improve the report. Chairs of Diocesan houses have been meeting regularly, and have registered concerns about 'a stampede towards legislation', and asked for space to consider the 'roots of our discomfort'.[15] The *Framework for Legislation* [16] has attempted to deal with some of the objections, but substantial problems about faith and vision remain.[17] What *model* of management is being proposed, and what are its underlying political and social assumptions? How can we be sure that a heavy hegemony will not develop, driven by a mechanistic (even capitalist) vision of individuals and the church? If sharpness and efficiency are the desiderata of the report, what will be lost in achieving that goal? How is the report a document that inspires faith? In what sense is the ecclesiological vision faithful to Anglican tradition, true to the gospel and boldly leading society?

Some alternative visions

First, it is vital that the church considers the advantages and disadvantages of restructuring. Whilst restructuring may be *necessary*, swallowing the current organisational assumptions that are present in society may be unhelpful. Taking the 'Turnbull tablet' will not actually get the Church of England 'sorted', let alone 'high': the remedy is not the curative it seems, since the underlying symptoms and side-effects the report presents are left unaddressed. For example, the Church of England has experienced a (recent) shift in transforming its sense of mission from something relatively benign into something far more pro-active. What was once an ecclesial habit is now the focus of a decade. There are some advantages in this, yet in defining itself more sharply as a body to cope with plurality and postmodern culture, it has created a gap between itself and society. The function of this is to maintain distinctiveness, but it also risks alienation: social or established religion can quickly move from being public religion to private belief.[18] Correspondingly, the Church loses its sense of being a national service in exchange for a body that offers service, but as an option alongside other things or products. This is not a new situation at the end of modernity and with the advent of postmodernity. Sociologists of religion such as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann have been describing and analysing 'the privatisation of religion' for over thirty years. Berger, in particular, is alive to the 'demonopolisation' that is occurring: the pluralistic situation creates a market situation, in which religions compete. The modernist response to this is ecumenicity – reducing competing units through amalgamation

15 *Church Times*, 09/02/96, p 3.

16 *General Synod Paper* (GS 1188), February 1996.

17 Indeed, the assumption of General Synod Paper GS 1188 (*Framework*) is that the Turnbull Report will still be a *controlling* document. Noting that the lack of accountability was a problem in the original Report, Alan McLintock, Chairman of the Board of Finance and member of the Turnbull Commission still says 'what we must go for is *control* and ordered change' *Church Times*, 16/02/96.

18 The problem lies in the exaltation of the individual over the corporate as a 'market'. The most accessible discussion of this dynamic is Robert Bellah's (ed.) *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1985 (2nd edn: 1996). Following Alasdair McIntyre (*After Virtue*, Duckworth, London 1981), Bellah makes helpful distinctions between expressive, ontological and utilitarian individualism, which each hold public religion to ransom for private gain in slightly different ways.

and cutting resources, dividing up the market between the larger units that remain, and engaging in a form of ecclesial cartelization.[19] It probably has as much to do with a loss of nerve and identity, as it is to do with a desire to reform. Frequently, many people resent the shift, because they detect the distance that has been created between themselves and what was once *their* church, health service or public utility. It is the logical end of all mechanistic blueprints.

Second, it follows that the perceptions of its employees might also change. *Working as One Body*, because it lacks an organic dimension to its interpretation of embodiment, effectively creates a machinery in which decisions and people are *processed* in the interests of efficiency. The lack of humane, alternative-symbolic and mystical visions of the church plays into the hands of capitalist philosophies and rhetoric that has done so much to dehumanise our society.[20] In terms of mission, phrases such as 'audit', 'action-plan', 'effectiveness' (again!), 'strategy' 'target' and 'accountability' riddle discussions about evangelism. The assumption is that the Church of England is engaged in some sort of evangelistic accountancy, always looking to numbers, being geared up to be sent out to the world, as though it wasn't there already there. In England at least, and certainly in the Church of England, we affirm that all belong to the body unless they choose not to do so. We are baptised to be different, but to stay where we are: we are not the church that has something to offer, but simply the offering church. The price to pay for this is a profound lack of definition, a blurring of boundaries between church and world, which risks losing the public attention as much as it has rights in gaining it. This may seem a tangential point in respect of the report, but it is actually quite central. The 'body' of *Working as One Body* assumes a cultural and moral gap between the established church and the world. By definition, an established church has no right to create or assume such a gap; rather, it is constantly attempting to obviate it, knitting together heaven and earth, sacred and profane.

Further dangers lie in wait at exactly this point. A smaller 'service' is more easily dominated by a single group of people, rationales or agenda. It is interesting to note that the notion of the location of 'governing power' seems to have shifted from theologians to Bishops, and then finally to the National Council. 'Governing power' it seems, lies wherever the main theological resourcing for the Church of England is coming from. Of course, this radically robs the *plebs Dei* of their right to power, since power is constantly concentrated, never dispersed. This is neither faithful to Hooker nor Scripture: the body is to be a body of *real* power, not the main agent of the head.[21] This is so for good theological reasons: the incarnation of Christ, like the church, is primarily a risk of embodiment and a negation of power

19 Peter Berger, 'A Market Model for the Analysis of Ecumenicity', *Social Research*, 1963, p 87.

20 Hutton, *The State We're In*, 1996. As Hutton notes, this often just compels employees to compete with each other rather than working together (pp 27ff): the rhetoric divides, then conquers.

21 J. Bowker, *Licensed Insanities: Religion and Belief in God in the Contemporary World*, DLT, London 1987, p 142. Bowker writes: 'The systematic nature of systems is undoubtedly open to abuse and exploitation. All too easily the system becomes the end in itself, instead of the means towards an End which lies beyond itself. The responsibility of all Christians, in any generation, is to transform – or allow God to transform through them – the dry bones of the system into a living presence which in turn touches, heals, restores, sustains many lives far beyond its own.'

– it only acquires its authority through that action. Any attempt to concentrate or conflate power in the agency (e.g., head) inevitably marginalises Christ and society, leading to a form of introspective congregationalism.[22] A good analogy would be this. After generations of faithful service, I take my trusted Morris Minor into the garage for its annual MOT. Alas, I am told the repairs and restoration needed to maintain the vehicle now outweighs its value, and the garage owner then attempts to sell me a motor scooter in its place. 'It's cheaper to run', he says, 'and you won't be bothered by giving other people lifts any more'. That is the issue: to renew and restore, or to replace? And what do you lose by choosing the latter?

Third, and in response to the two points above, it therefore follows that there needs to be some evaluation about how the church might turn these agenda around: how does religion *make* society, instead of simply copying it. Scholars such as Charles Davis have attempted to sustain the contextual and organic approaches of 'political theology' in the 1960s which have now largely fallen into disfavour.[23] Davis is suspicious of the postmodern exaltation of the local, defined and different: he sees this as anti-universalist, and therefore a retreat from Truth. In place of this he proposes a universalism of love (socialism or sociality as a moral and religious ideal) as the rationale for the church in relation to society – loving reasoning in praxis. Perhaps the best way to illustrate the implications of this for *Working as One Body* is to highlight the basic differences between a shareholding and a stakeholding society.[24] The shareholding society, as many will now be aware, has proved to be profoundly disappointing: it has failed to deliver on its promise to give people a say in their public utilities and a share for all in its success. People know that after the launch (sell-off), new uniforms, 'corporate' logos and first dividends, comes 'streamlining': redundancies, suddenly no longer being able to supply all the public (only those who can pay) and massively concentrated power (with salaries to match) in the hands of a very few quickly follow. The rationalising process turns what was once a service (possibly weak, but at least *definitively* comprehensive) into a business.[25] By contrast, a stakeholding society follows the lead of Davis and others, by giving *everyone* a stake in the economy, not just those with capital, expertise or advantage. Significantly, employees have a say in what

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22 See my *Words, Wonders and Powers: Understanding Contemporary Christian Fundamentalism and Revivalism*, SPCK, London 1996, p 155: 'The creative way forward in solving the dilemma of identity is to ensure that all churches attend properly to their borders and margins. All too often churches live as though they are central to salvation, making Christ peripheral; the agent displaces the source at the centre of itself... we are not called to be places of concentrated power, but to be open, incarnate communities that risk weakness, and even death.'

23 C. Davis, *Religion and the Making of Society: Essays in Social Theology*, CUP, Cambridge 1994. The point is that an established sociality promotes differing opinion, whereas individualism ultimately becomes conformity.

24 For a fuller discussion, see Hutton, *The State We're In*, ch. 12.

25 I am not suggesting that the report is an anti-service document *per se*. As Hopewell notes, 'mechanists are not opposed to the intentions of service... but they argue that unless basic structures are sound and dynamic, any sort of parish *goal* is in jeopardy... the primary need of churches today is the rationalisation of the congregational process and the animation of social will to achieve *results*'. (*Congregation*, p 26 – italics mine).

their organisation stands for; there is order and mutuality, with power deliberately dispersed.

Here, as has been noted before, *Working as One Body* fails to be inclusive and progressive: the wider sense of participation and belonging which the church should bring is dominated by the managerial class. A stakeholding society does not place effectiveness before people, treating them as resources, products or units. It recognises that institutions often exist for the wider good of all society, not just itself. In short, the church works for one body (society), but it is not necessarily the case that it works as one identifiable homogenous unit. An incarnate, ambiguous and susceptible body that risks failure may be able to serve society far better than a sharply defined community that is rationalised, strong and sharp.[26]

Next, an ecclesiological vision of the church which fails to take seriously the Pauline model of Christian leadership at the very least runs the risk of failing to hear the gospel. Paul had his moments of authoritarianism and bullying,[27] but also knew that secular notions of power and authority simply embodied what we might call 'the management-speak' of his day. The scandal of the cross meant that human actions and institutions were to be remodelled and even perhaps made independent of human skill and advantageous attributes. A true mediation of Christ's resurrection power in Christian ministry could only be by an inculcation of Christ's obedience, weakness, suffering and humility. The point the report misses is that it is not the structure which matters, but the extent to which ecclesial leadership models and mediates the scandal of the cross, and then adopts the pattern of Christ's own ministry.

Finally, and related to the point above, the church needs to live *as* a fully transcendent and fully engaged social ethic, not just function as a unit that *has* one. If the call of the church is partly about being possessed by the Truth rather than assuming that it possesses it to hand on, this raises real questions over which managerial vision owns *Working as One Body*. George Ritzer invites us to reflect on the franchising processes in society that are turning individualised bodies into homogenised corporations on a par with beefburger chains. The complaint, as before, is that the 'market driven economy' with its accompanying managerial strategy is profoundly dehumanising. I am not suggesting that the Turnbull Report will turn the Church of England into a sort of 'God-U-Like' franchise. Yet the erosion of individuality and rights that its implementation could lead to is disturbing.

Here we face an irony. On the one hand, hoping for a form of corporateness in the church, and on the other hand, arguing against the vision outlined in *Working as One Body*. The light between the Turnbull Report and myself lies in concepts of service, notions of 'body' and how difference and weakness are to be valued. In other words, what I have earlier termed the necessary 'directional plurality' of Anglicanism. If the church lives as social ethic, some of our greatest evangelists and leaders will not be managers, but made of the same material that formed the group around Jesus known as 'the disciples'. They will be workers, labourers, those

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26 See my 'How to Win Congregations and Influence Them' in *Contours of Christian Education*, ed. J. Astley & D. Day, Mayhew-McCrimmon, London 1992.

27 See, for example, G. Shaw, *The Cost of Authority*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1982.

used to being the voiceless, or the disempowered by society. If the church believes itself to be one body, it will use all its members in assisting in the task of self-definition under the power of the Holy Spirit, not just those it is accustomed to using as consultants.[28]

Summary

Some final points in concluding. *Working as One Body* is struggling with at least two possible futures for the Church of England in a time of pluralism, postmodernity and financial constraint. It is beginning to own its place as the institution that represents the God whom many believe in yet choose not to belong to. Consequently, Christianity retains its dominant social profile, whilst at the same time losing its depth and breadth of articulation.[29] One response to this is to retreat and consolidate into an *associational* pattern, where questions of effectiveness constantly arise. As I have already said, the problem with this vision is that it assumes a gap between the church and England that is not necessarily there. Another response is to rehabilitate the *communal* vision that is both parochial and universal rather than congregational, and is deeply concerned about the context of religion as much as its content. This would expensive and time-consuming, but may have the advantage of being more expansive in the long-run. If the church took seriously its obligation to address all needs, it might find that its body was not so small, and that its boundaries were not so obvious. Furthermore, that it was needed by society, because it offers a hopeful vision of community in a competitive and fragmented world, as the social form of the Truth.[30] The poet R. S. Thomas puts this much better than any theologian can:

> It's a long way off but inside it
> There are quite different things going on:
> Festivals at which the poor man
> Is king and the consumptive is
> Healed; mirrors in which the blind look
> At themselves and love looks at them
> Back; and industry is for mending
> The bent bones and minds fractured
> By life. It's a long way off, but to get
> There takes no time and admission
> Is free... [31]

What is ultimately so unsatisfactory about *Working as One Body* is that the approach it takes to itself, the body of Christ, and to individuals, amounts to little more than 'consecrated pragmatism'. I say 'consecrated', because the Report is an episcopally-

28 See G. Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*, Sage, London 1996. On the church as body, see S. Hauerwas 'What Would it Mean for the Church to be Christ's Body? A Question without a Clear Answer.', SST paper, 1992, and Anthony Dyson, 'The Body of Christ has AIDS', SST paper, also 1992.

29 See G. Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing Without Belonging*, Clarendon, Oxford 1995.

30 Politically and spiritually, this is well-expressed in Christopher Bryant's *Possible Dreams: A Personal History of the British Christian Socialists*, Hodder & Stoughton, London 1996. See also Donald Reeves, *Down to Earth: A New Vision for the Church*, Mowbray, London 1996, chs. 2a, 3 & 9.

31 R. S. Thomas, 'The Kingdom', *Later Poems*, Macmillan, London 1983, p 35.

driven agenda: more and more power is slowly but surely being concentrated in the office of Bishop. A shapely pyramid of power is developing, and it is clear what sits atop. Paradoxically, perhaps, this impetus seems to be coming from the evangelical prelates, who allegedly have a high doctrine of the *plebs Dei* and the priesthood of all believers. Yet it is amongst this group of Bishops that most anxiety and action is expressed about their own leadership and authority. Consequently, 'directional plurality' is slowly being lost to the forces of imposed unity: the age of the informal Anglican *imprimatur* has arrived. Thus, clergy or diocesan conferences are now becoming known as 'Bishop's conferences'. In one diocese, budgeting for sabbaticals for clergy is minimal due to lack of funds. Yet instead of a properly structured system for allocating what time and funds there are, the Bishop holds the power by 'rewarding initiatives' from clergy who approach him with interesting proposals for study. As for 'pragmatism', the term has a sliding scale of definitions. At its most basic, it simply means being 'skilled in affairs'; but at its more developed, it can mean 'interfering, meddling, opinionated, dictatorial and dogmatic'.[32]

The creation of a *kyriearchy*, backed by a theologically-resourced ideology, is a highly problematic development for the Church of England, and it represents, potentially, a defining moment in its identity. It could signal a retreat from being the church for all, to becoming an episcopal denomination that serves loyal and faithful members. In an era of (postmodern) constitutional reform, this may be inevitable, but let us hope that the church will at least begin to ponder the costs and future implications of this. Furthermore, let us hope for a more profound view of society, individuals and the church, that begins with a theology and an appropriate sociality, and not some borrowed, transient ideology.[33] Ultimately, you cannot derive a satisfactory ecclesiology from a secular ideology, any more than you can conjure up a satisfactory doctrine of the church from one emphasis on a branch of missiology. First and foremost, you have to begin with God, not a managerial pragmatism painted over with a theological gloss.

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32 *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (on Historical Principles), vol 2.*, OUP, Oxford 1984, p 1646.

33 We should note that David Nicholls (*Deity and Domination*, Routledge, London/New York 1989), shortly before his sad and untimely death, was alive to many of these issues. His own unpublished critique of *Working as One Body* was to have been humorously entitled *Turnbullshit* (*The Independent*, Obituary, 18/06/96, p 14).